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SAILING THE OLD WAY ON MAJORCA: SEE PAGE TWO

PART OF EUROPEAN UNION SCHEME

Spain to receive 31 million doses of British COVID-19 vaccine

● Spain would receive 31.6 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine currently being developed by Britain's pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca between December and June if it is ready, Health Minister Salvador Illa said yesterday.

The supply of the potential vaccine makes part of a European Union scheme, Illa told a news conference following the weekly cabinet meeting. Illa also said tough restrictive measures to bring a surge of coronavirus infections under control will be imposed in Madrid for three weeks after the state of emergency in the region expires on Oct. 23.

Rents to be cut for businesses in Catalonia

● The Spanish region of Catalonia ordered yesterday that rents be cut by half for businesses such as bars and restaurants that have been told to close due to the pandemic, if no prior agreement has been reached between tenants and landlords.

The decree, approved by the regional government, seeks to help businesses, including bingo halls, casinos and beauty salons, which have been shut across the region since Friday for at least 15 days amid a surge in coronavirus cases.

Catalonia is, after Madrid, the second-worst hit region in COVID-hotspot Spain.

The decree states that if in one month tenants have not reached an agreement with landlords to reduce their monthly rent, it will automatically be lowered by 50% from the day the tenant notified his or her desire to negotiate, Catalan government spokeswoman Meritxell Budo told reporters.

The discount would apply only for as long as the business is obliged to stay closed due to the health crisis.

"The goal is to avoid the closure of businesses, the loss of jobs, and legal battles," Budo said, adding that the government did not rule out eventually helping landlords affected by the rent cuts. Businesses that remain open but were forced to reduce their allowed occupancy will have their rents cut by the same percentage that they had to curb their capacity, such as 50% for gyms and 70% for shops. The regional government also approved 40 million euros (\$47.22 million) in grants to businesses forced to shut, as well as guarantees of 20 million euros.



SPAIN CONSIDERS CURFEWS TO FIGHT NEW CORONAVIRUS WAVE

The Spanish government is considering new restrictions, including possible curfews, in hard-hit regions like Madrid in a bid to tackle a new wave of coronavirus contagion, Health Minister Salvador Illa said yesterday.

The country, which has Western Europe's highest case load, is likely to surpass one million infections this week and several regions have toughened their coronavirus restrictions in the past few days. Between Friday and Monday, Spain added nearly 38,000 cases, bringing the cumulative total to 974,449. The death toll jumped by 217 to 33,992.

Imposing a curfew in Madrid - one of Europe's hotspots of the pandemic - and possibly beyond would require invoking a state of emergency, Illa told reporters. Any such measure lasting more than two weeks would require the support of some opposition parties, she added.

But that could prove challenging in Spain's deeply polarised parliament. Towards the end of Spain's first state

of emergency lockdowns from March to June, the opposition opposed any further extensions and has recently been against extending a government-ordered partial lockdown in Madrid.

The Madrid region's top health official, Enrique Ruiz Escudero, told Spanish news agency Europa Press earlier authorities were evaluating whether a curfew was needed but they did not have the power to enforce it and would have to ask the central government.

"A curfew would mean...that at some hours there's no mobility, like France has done for example," he said.

France last week ordered a curfew in Paris and eight other cities from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The Socialist-led coalition government declared a two-week state of

emergency on Oct.9 to impose a partial lockdown in and around Madrid, meaning people can leave their homes but must remain within the city.

Following weeks of disagreement between regional and national authorities over what policies to adopt, minister Illa said the government would not seek an extension of its decree after it expires on Friday.

However, he said yet unspecified tough restrictions would have to be imposed in Madrid for three weeks in any case. Ruiz Escudero has also said that the region was preparing to test sewage water for COVID-19 to estimate the prevalence of the virus among the city's population.

"It would be like testing thousands of people at once," he said.

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