The government was seen racing against time to institute Merca Maxilla under "community quarantine" as soon as possible so that officials could set rules to restrict the movement of people but allow goods to continue to flow into the national capital to prevent a spread of the virus that causes the pneumonia-like disease COVID-19, Cabinet officials said on Friday.

President Duterte declared a lockdown on the metropolis—chiefly by prohibiting domestic travel to and from the National Capital Region for 30 days until April 14—after the members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, agreed to balance public health and economic considerations, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said.

He said Friday that officials held a "long debate, discussion, from morning till night" on Thursday with the Finance and Industry, leading up to the cabinet meeting on Friday that finally announced the "community quarantine." The president later called it a lockdown.

"It was a very difficult decision," Lopez said. "In consideration of public health, it should have been more strict. But in consideration of economic activities, we balanced the two things out.

No super drastic measure

The government, "dreading the "viral" essence, noted the negative experiences of countries which failed to act quickly," Lopez said.

"If we don't do something drastic—this is not even a super drastic measure—it might spread more. (The president) heard that one possible output is the exponential spread of COVID-19," he said.

The government opted not to implement a total lockdown similar to what was imposed in Wuhan City, the origin of China’s Hubei province, the epicenter of the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the acute respiratory disease, Lopez said.

The Health Department reported on Friday that at least 40 of the 64 confirmed COVID-19 cases were from Metro Manila, including the five who have died. The administration’s economic team initially objected to the community quarantine, Lopez said.

"But then when we realized the wisdom of it and that President Duterte made the right decision, we want it with minimal disruptions as much as possible," he said.

The community quarantine imposed on Metro Manila will be observed as midnight on Friday, the President dijo. Lopez said the lockdown in and out of Metro Manila would be among those exempted from the lockdown or "lockdown.

Restrictions on the free flow of goods going in and out of Metro Manila were to be discussed by the supply chains, Lopez told reporters in a VIBER message on Thursday night.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) assured comercios on Friday that there would be enough supply of basic food items in Metro Manila during the 30-day quarantine.

No interference

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said his agency was finalizing a plan to ensure that the transport of agricultural commodities and the supply of goods to the metropolis would continue "with full intercession.

But said the delivery of food, including rice, meat, eggs, wheat, vegetable and sugar, would continue despite the lockdown, from the capital.

"Let me mention that it was categorically mentioned by the President that the movement of goods and services would not be impeded," he said.

Individuals and agricultural produce in Metro Manila must only present their identification cards to the authorities and they would be subject to temperature checks before they are allowed through entry and exit points.

Lopez said the lockdown would be in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

"It does not inspire enough confidence from the people who are working on the streets, particularly from the majority poor. That is how the Mahanian lawmakers said in a statement.

"For example, what will be the government’s plan for our low-income workers and employees who are not businesses but are the ones who have to make a living. That means not only have paid workers but also individuals who are doing business on the streets," he said.

"What about the millions of informal settlers in the metropolis? Those are the majority of the people who survive on a day-to-day basis, for whom stocking up on food supply for even a week is an impossible task. They are the most hungry," he added. —WITH REPORTS FROM REYNALDO CARINO, RJ ABAD AND VINCENT GABREZ.