

Stymied vaccine deal linked to China

Written by Taipei Times

Thursday, 18 February 2021 07:46 -



Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung speaks during a radio interview in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

Taiwan was close to signing a contract to secure 5 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's BNT162b2 COVID-19 vaccine last year, Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) said yesterday, but the deal was halted at the last minute, with some speculating that it was due to Chinese interference.

Chen, who also heads the Central Epidemic Command Center, in December last year announced that Taiwan had secured nearly 15 million COVID-19 vaccine doses — including about 10 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and about 4.76 million doses from the global COVAX program — and that a contract to buy about 5 million doses from another company was about to be signed.

The center has not commented on rumors that a contract to purchase BNT162b2 vaccines was obstructed by Pfizer-BioNTech's Chinese partner, Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical Group (復星藥業), which had obtained the right to market and distribute the BNT162b2 vaccine in Taiwan and China, including Macau and Hong Kong.

In an interview with Hit FM radio host Clara Chou (周曉瑋), Chen yesterday for the first time confirmed that Taiwan was close to signing the contract with Pfizer-BioNTech, but the deal was halted at the last minute.

“We had been negotiating directly with BioNTech at the time ... and we had even prepared the news release” to announce the deal, he said.

“However, maybe someone does not want Taiwan to be too happy, so it [the contract signing] was halted,” he said.

Stymied vaccine deal linked to China

Written by Taipei Times

Thursday, 18 February 2021 07:46 -

He had to bite his tongue several times not to announce the deal at the center's news conferences, because the deal had not yet been signed and he was afraid that an external force would intervene if he announced it too soon, Chen said.

Asked if Shanghai Fosun might have obstructed the deal, he said that many factors could have led to the result.

BioNTech said that there were "different internal opinions" and concerns over "global vaccine distribution," he said, adding that the center would have to take even more care in such negotiations.

An analyst said that Beijing has previously used the pandemic to pressure Taiwan.

"China's continued weaponization and politicization of people's health — which should be apolitical — should not come as a surprise, especially given everything that has been going on with the WHO," Jessica Drun, a Taiwan-China expert at the Project 2049 think tank, wrote on Twitter.

Chen said that he had been hesitant to answer questions about COVID-19 vaccine procurement in the past few months, because he had been worried that such a situation might arise, as the nation has faced many last-minute difficulties before attending World Health Assembly technical briefings or other international events.

He felt wronged when people criticized the center for not disclosing its progress in securing COVID-19 vaccines, but he was unable to reveal more details, Chen said, adding that he could only promise that it would release news as soon as a contract had been signed.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2021/02/18](#)