

Pfizer halts delivery of vaccines to Israel after bill goes unpaid

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Israeli Prime Minister Minister Benjamin Netanyahu receives the second dose of the COVID vaccine. (Photo: © Miriam Elster/Pool via REUTERS)

New York, April 6 (RHC)-- Calling Israel a "banana republic," Pfizer has frozen further deliveries of the Covid-19 vaccine until it gets paid for the last 2.5 million doses, Israeli media reported. The blow comes amid political infighting in Tel Aviv.

Some 700,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine were expected in Israel on Sunday, after Passover ended, but were delayed until further notice on grounds that the previous shipment hadn't been paid for, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Pfizer executives reportedly called Israel a "banana republic" and said they couldn't understand how something like this could happen in an organized country, a correspondent for Galatz, the Israeli army radio, said Monday on 'Good Morning Israel.'

Pfizer's only official comment was that its original contract with Israel for an unspecified number of doses, signed in November 2020, had expired and that they were working to "update the agreement" and "supply additional vaccines to the country." "While this work continues, shipments may be adjusted," Pfizer added in a statement.

Israel has reportedly bought 15 million doses of the vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech, as well as 12 million more of the Moderna and AstraZeneca jabs. The country has spent 2.6 billion shekels (\$788 million), with another 2.5 billion shekels (\$758 million) reserved for further purchases, a health ministry representative told legislators last month.

The figures, disclosed for the first time at the request from Knesset Finance Committee chairman Moshe Gafni, showed that Israel had paid a price per dose "much higher" than previously believed.

The Israeli health ministry sought approval to get 30 million more doses, but the meeting they requested for last Monday was canceled due to a conflict between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition partner Benny Gantz, Israeli media reported.

According to the Jerusalem Post, Gantz called the meeting off because Netanyahu refused to confirm Gantz as justice minister, leaving him in acting capacity after his term expired on April 1st. However, Gantz's office said that the purchase of the 2.5 million Pfizer vaccines had already been approved and that the payment delay was the fault of Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, a member of Netanyahu's Likud party. The health ministry has not commented on the situation.

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