

CE's statement on the incident involving officials' attendance at banquet

Regarding the incident involving the attendance of a number of officials at a banquet in the evening on January 3, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, after giving an account of the incident to public at a media session yesterday (January 6) evening, made the following statement today (January 7) having regard to the latest development of the relevant case as reported by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP):

I learnt from the CHP today (January 7) afternoon that the banquet may involve another preliminary positive case and that the person tested preliminarily positive took part in the banquet from 6pm to 8pm. If the case is confirmed eventually, all participants of the banquet will be classified as close contacts and are required to be sent to the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre for quarantine. In other words, the eight officials, who were not required to be subject to quarantine given the attendance at the banquet after 9.30pm in relation to the first confirmed case, will be classified as close contacts who need to be subject to quarantine.

Having regard to the latest development and the report by several more officials who had attended the banquet, in addition to the three officials who attended the banquet after 9.30pm and were sent to the quarantine centre (the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui; the Director of Immigration, Mr Au Ka-wang; and the Political Assistant to the Secretary for Development, Mr Allen Fung), 10 more officials will be arranged to be sent to the quarantine centre, while pending confirmation by the CHP in due course on the status of the new infection case.

I have instructed all officials being subject to quarantine that they should not continue to discharge their duties and that they are required to take their own vacation leave for quarantine. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has made appropriate arrangements to ensure that the daily operation would not be affected, including the arrangement for the Deputy Commissioner / Head of Operations of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), Mr Ricky Yau, to be the Acting Commissioner of the ICAC; the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Management), Mr Kwok Yam-shu, to be the Acting Commissioner of Police; the Deputy Director of Immigration, Mr Benson Kwok, to be the Acting Director of Immigration. Taking into consideration that both the Directors of Bureau and the Under Secretaries of the Home Affairs Bureau and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau need to undergo quarantine, the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, will take up the post of the Secretary for Home Affairs concurrently; and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, will take up the post of the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury concurrently. All the above-mentioned posting arrangements will last until the completion of the quarantine of the relevant officials.

As to whether the attendance of 13 officials at the banquet constitutes any breach of discipline, I have instructed the Director of the Chief Executive's Office, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, and Mr Nip to make detailed investigations. Mr Chan will handle the investigation of 10 Politically Appointed Officials and the ICAC Commissioner, Mr Simon Peh, while Mr Nip will handle the investigation of two heads of department who are civil servants. The investigation will cover the detailed circumstances of the attendance of each official at the banquet, including the time of arrival, duration of stay and their behaviours there. The investigation and enforcement action by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), covering such aspects as whether the attendee used the LeaveHomeSafe app and wore a mask, will also be taken as reference.

As regards enforcement actions against the restaurant and customers, I have requested the FEHD to investigate according to the law as soon as possible and inform the public of the investigation results timely.

I have to reiterate that concerted efforts of the whole society is needed to fight the virus and that Government officials should lead by example, abide by the rules, stay vigilant and refrain from taking part in high-risk activities. After the completion of the above-mentioned investigations, I will take appropriate actions against the relevant officials.