

HKSAR Government makes concerted and all-out efforts against current wave of epidemic

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, following her announcement of the overall anti-epidemic action plan of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) on February 22, held a special Heads of Departments meeting via video conferencing on February 23 to give clear instructions to all Government departments that they be required to work as a team to make all-out efforts to fight the current fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. More than 100 officials, including Permanent Secretaries and heads of departments, attended the meeting and undertook to mobilise their staff members to participate in various anti-epidemic operations.

Mrs Lam briefed the attendees on bureaux and departments' key roles to play under the action plan. She was encouraged by the high esprit de corps displayed by them. Officials who spoke said they would deploy their existing manpower, and as applicable also recruit retired members of the civil service, to augment their respective anti-epidemic teams to discharge the assigned duties earnestly.

Mrs Lam said, "A huge amount of manpower is required for three anti-epidemic tasks, namely the management of an increasing number of Community Isolation Facility (CIF) to accommodate infection cases with mild or no symptoms, enforcing more 'restriction-testing declaration (RTD)' operations on targeted buildings having regard to their risks, and the launch of the Compulsory Universal Testing (CUT) Scheme next month. Their smooth operations call for strengthened manpower support, whether commanders or frontline staff. Furthermore, I have assigned various Bureau Secretaries to take charge of specific tasks and all departments are required to fully co-operate with them."

A case in point is the CIF Hotel Scheme led by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung. Good progress has been made, with 11 CIF hotels having commenced operation to provide some 3 800 rooms and over 30 hotels under active conversion into CIFs. The Government would like to express its gratitude for the over 80 per cent of the hotels opting for a full-service mode with their own staff deployed, which has in turn enabled the Government to free up its manpower for other tasks.

On the construction of community isolation and treatment facilities led by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, the HKSAR Government would like to express its gratitude for the co-ordination and support of the Central Authorities, enabling major progress achieved over the past week. Following the earlier announcement about a site adjacent to the Lok Ma Chau Loop close to Shenzhen and another six pieces of land, the Government has successfully identified two more locations, namely the site next to Ma Sik Road, Fanling lent by a private developer and the site on the south-eastern

part of the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. The HKSAR Government is grateful to the developers for lending their private land for free. The various above-mentioned sites are expected to provide about 50 000 beds. The HKSAR Government is grateful to the Central Authorities for acceding to its request and promptly commissioning Mainland contractors with rich experience and strong mobilisation capability as the designated contractors, which will take forward the various projects at full steam with the full support of the HKSAR Government.

There has been an obvious increase in cases yielding preliminary positive results in the recent RTD operations triggered by sewage surveillance. Cases in point are the RTD operations initiated on February 23 afternoon in On Tai Estate, Kwun Tong, Lai Tsui Court, Cheung Sha Wan and Tin Ping Estate, Sheung Shui, in which a total of more than 300 residents have tested preliminary positive. The Government has arranged for sending them to CIFs for isolation. Hundreds of civil service colleagues, and Police officers for maintaining order, are involved in each RTD operation. Mrs Lam appealed for the participation of more departments in the work at the meeting on February 23.

Mrs Lam added, "We are planning at full steam the CUT Scheme to pin down infection cases more thoroughly in the community at large. The Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, is responsible for the CUT Scheme and working out its details. It is expected that a large number of personnel from various bureaux and departments will be required to plan and implement the whole scheme.

In addition, Mrs Lam requested that the Permanent Secretaries and heads of departments pay heed to certain areas of work to ensure the Government's orderly operation during the anti-epidemic fight, including: taking all necessary precautionary measures to safeguard the health of staff; drawing up contingency plans; making prompt decisions given the rapidly changing epidemic development; reminding their colleagues involved in provision of services to the public to be more patient and compassionate in the daily work; and standing ready to work with other bureaux and departments to accomplish missions.

"At this critical time, all bureaux and departments, regardless of their purview, shall continue to work in concert to take up and undertake their assigned operations and tasks, bringing into full play the whole-of-government spirit to fight the epidemic," stressed Mrs Lam. "Together with the staunch support of the Central Authorities and close collaboration among all sectors of society, we should have every confidence in winning this fight early."