

## LCQ3: Polling arrangements for the Legislative Council General Election

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Helena Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (June 17):

Question:

Regarding the Regulation under which persons arriving at Hong Kong from overseas shall be subject to 14-day compulsory quarantine, the Government has extended its expiry date to September 18 this year, straddling the polling date set for the 2020 Legislative Council General Election (i.e. September 6). The Government has indicated that it will consider allowing electors under compulsory quarantine to go out temporarily to cast their votes. However, some Hong Kong people who are currently outside Hong Kong and intend to make a special trip to return to Hong Kong to cast their votes have indicated that the said arrangement is still unsound as they have to, owing to personal circumstances, leave Hong Kong shortly after casting their votes, and will be unable to stay in Hong Kong to complete the quarantine procedure. Regarding the polling arrangements for the Election, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has finalised the arrangements for those persons who are under compulsory quarantine and for those coronavirus disease 2019 patients who are receiving medical treatments to cast their votes on the polling day; if so, of the details;
- (2) whether it will exempt those electors who have made a special trip to return to Hong Kong to cast their votes from the 14-day compulsory quarantine requirement; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will set up a polling station inside the Restricted Area of the Hong Kong International Airport to facilitate those electors outside Hong Kong who make a special trip to return to Hong Kong or transit via Hong Kong to cast their votes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the Food and Health Bureau, our consolidated reply to Dr the Hon Helena Wong's question is as follows:

The Chief Executive has published in the gazette on June 12 that the 2020 Legislative Council (LegCo) General Election will be held on September 6, 2020. The nomination period of the LegCo General Election is set from July 18 to July 31 this year.

We note that although the situation of COVID-19 outbreak in Hong Kong and the number of confirmed cases have slightly stabilised in the past month or so, the situation still remains volatile, with local cluster cases reported again recently. At the same time, the global situation remains severe. As at June 16, 218 countries/territories/areas reported a total of around 7.86 million COVID-19 cases. Since late March, about 70 000 to 130 000 new cases have been reported daily around the world. As regards the Mainland, despite significant improvements in the situation, individual provinces/cities still reported certain number of imported and local cases in the past few weeks.

The above situation reflects that the epidemic is yet to be over whether in Hong Kong or places outside Hong Kong. Considering that COVID-19 epidemic is not expected to fade away in the near future, we will closely keep in touch with the Food and Health Bureau and the Centre for Health Protection to carefully monitor the development of the outbreak in assessing the impact of the epidemic on the LegCo General Election from now until the polling date, and formulate various plans in view of the different possibilities concerning the development of the epidemic in a timely manner. The Registration and Electoral Office all along does not set up polling stations in hospitals, but will explore whether special arrangements could be made for electors under compulsory quarantine to go out temporarily to cast their votes in a safely manner.

The voting rights of citizens are protected by the Basic Law. When formulating measures that are related to the prevention of COVID-19 in the election, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will endeavour to strike a balance among factors like public health protection, social acceptance, electors facilitation, etc. The HKSAR Government has earlier published in the gazette to amend the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) by extending their validity. We shall closely monitor movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implement compulsory quarantine measures, as well as development of the epidemic situation in the Mainland and overseas, in order to decide the plan to be adopted to facilitate electors to vote. We will finalise the details and announce them to the public in due course.

Regarding the setting up of a polling station inside the Hong Kong International Airport, in accordance with Section 30 of the Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedure) (Legislative Council) Regulation (Cap. 541D), the Chief Electoral Officer must allocate to each elector and authorised representative a polling station or polling stations to cast the vote or votes he or she is entitled to cast at an election. The Chief Electoral Officer must also allocate to a geographical constituency (GC) elector a GC polling station that is, as far as practicable, close to his or her registered residential address to cast the vote for the GC. To this end, the Registration and Electoral Office must prepare an extract of the Register of Electors for each polling station for staff at the polling station to

verify the electors' eligibility to vote before issuance of ballot papers. Taking into account that there are difficulties in ascertaining the information and number of electors who will return to Hong Kong or transit via Hong Kong on the polling day, the Registration and Electoral Office considers that it will be difficult to prepare the said extract of Register of Electors prior to the polling day. At this stage, the Registration and Electoral Office considers that the proposal to establish a polling station in the Restricted Area of Hong Kong International Airport may not be feasible, but it will continue to explore if the relevant technical difficulties can be overcome, or adopt other practicable ways to enable voters returning from abroad to vote.

Besides, in order to ensure electors' safety and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the polling stations and counting stations, we plan to implement the following proposed safety measures:

- (1) All polling staff are required to wear a mask and those showing signs of fever will not be allowed to discharge electoral duties;
- (2) Before entering the polling stations, electors, candidates and agents are required to put on their own masks properly and rub their hands by using alcohol based handrub placed at the entrance of the polling stations;
- (3) Installation of infrared thermographic camera at polling stations as far as possible to screen out electors showing signs of fever and provision of handheld electronic thermometers to polling stations where it is not feasible to install such camera;
- (4) Upon arrival at the polling station, temperatures of electors, candidates and agents will be taken. Candidates and agents showing signs of fever are advised not to enter the polling station; and
- (5) Providing disinfecting sprays or wipes for polling staff to disinfect polling tables, tick chops, paperboards, etc. regularly.

The Government will continue to make proactive preparations and arrangements to ensure that the LegCo General Election in September will be conducted in a fair, open and honest manner whilst meeting the public health and safety requirements.

Thank you President.