

SCED speaks on HK-Singapore Air Travel Bubble and quarantine exemption of overseas film personnel

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, on the Hong Kong-Singapore Air Travel Bubble and the quarantine exemption of overseas film personnel at a media session after attending an event today (August 20):

Reporter: Hong Kong has decided to scrap the travel bubble plan. Are there any chances at all for Hong Kong to have travel bubbles with any countries, given that most places have given up the "zero-COVID" policy already? And many people think that it is unfair for the Hollywood star Nicole Kidman to be exempted from quarantine. Is it a preferential treatment only for the rich and the powerful, or simply because she is too busy?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: The first question is about the Air Travel Bubble. It has all along been a bilateral discussion with good faith and a lot of goodwill between the Hong Kong and Singapore Governments. Given the similarity of our background, economically and socially, and the rather stable containment of COVID that we have both achieved, there is every intention for us to establish this bilateral channel. But we have also set for ourselves very stringent requirements. For instance, we have imposed quite a lot of control measures, such as pre-boarding PCR tests and upon arrival, full vaccination before departure and various other control measures. We have also agreed on certain yardsticks at that time, such as using seven-day moving average of unlinked local cases as a reference point. But in the last two months, Singapore has in fact adopted a different strategy, as they said. In so doing, the rationale or thinking behind their overall COVID containment policy might have certain adjustments. Therefore, certain criteria which we have agreed on before may not necessarily be fulfilled easily. As a result, we have to put a pause to this bilateral arrangement, but having said that, we have a rather stable situation and close to zero community case outbreak in Hong Kong. The Singapore Government also recognises these positive developments and therefore will unilaterally allow visitors from Hong Kong to Singapore to have quarantine-free arrangements. We are glad to see that. As I mentioned just now, we will continue to make our best endeavour to see if there are any ways and means to resume normal travel as much as we could. Having said that, we must maintain a balance between the resumption of normality and the containment of COVID. Hong Kong is steadfastly holding on a vigilant strategy in tackling COVID and we will try to maintain that as far as possible.

Regarding the other subject, I have explained that my bureau and the office of the Create Hong Kong do facilitate local and foreign film makers and producers to do their film shooting or production in Hong Kong. This has been the case in the past, and we also help them in this difficult time where

travelling might be a bit difficult. It is a production team doing a major TV series (here) in the coming weeks and months. We notice that there are certain requirements for a limited number of their production team members to have certain leeway in fulfilling the control measures. Therefore, we have helped them and successfully sought approval under Cap. 599E to have certain exemptions made. These arrangements are not allowing anybody to be set free, but rather there are a number of conditions attached, including but not limited to, full vaccination before departure, tests upon arrival, confirmation of negative COVID results, a designated place of stay and sharing of itinerary prior to the trip. Not to mention that they must use dedicated transport instead of public transport. All these measures are meant to contain the risks in a manageable manner. As before, we often strike a balance between facilitation and epidemic control. Under Cap. 599E, power is given to the Government to grant such exemptions. We are looking at every single case and circumstance, particularly whether that would achieve the results of allowing certain economic or social activities to be proceeded without compromising the control of COVID.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)