

Transcript of CE's press conference on "The Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address" (with photos/video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the press conference on "The Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address" at Central Government Offices, Tamar, today (November 25):

Reporter: Two questions. Firstly about the teachers. So you said the Government will enhance the quality of teachers through measures in respect of entry to the profession. What sort of measures are you talking about and does that mean there will be political screening for people who want to become a teacher? And secondly about the possible city-wide COVID testing, under what circumstances will the Government roll out a new round and when will the testing be made compulsory? Will a lockdown be imposed during the process, and how can Hong Kong manage on its own when you said the Government would not ask for help from the Mainland?

Chief Executive: Of the two questions, first let me just repeat that I attach utmost importance to education and education in Hong Kong. In the past three years or so we have devoted huge resources, and they are permanent resources because I don't want the teachers to be under a lot of anxiety and worries about the positions in schools and the teaching ratios and so on. But it is time for us to take a very serious look at the various aspects of our education system, and the point you mentioned about the quality of teachers is one of the very important components because how students learn from their school much depends on the quality, the commitment, the dedication and the professionalism of our teaching staff. When we said that we will enhance the quality of teachers, first we would expect the education institutes to do their part because teachers are trained in universities, and so we expect the teaching institutions to do their part in preparing graduates to come in to the teaching profession. And then we expect the school sponsoring bodies and the school management committees of the schools in recruiting and appointing teachers. They have to look not only for academic excellence; they have to look at the character of these teachers. And the third is in-service training. Whether the teacher is a fresh teacher, a teacher upon promotion or a teacher undergoing some specialty training, the Education Bureau will take on a role to arrange and to support all these training programmes for teachers. We also have a role in the discipline of teachers because the education authority is the registration authority of all teachers in Hong Kong. There is no involvement whatsoever of political screening, but of course as a teacher, which more or less comes into what we call a public service, we expect the teachers to uphold the Basic Law and Support the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

As far as COVID-19 testing, I have explained yesterday about the regime that we are going to adopt in rolling out more COVID-19 testing. One is when

we have a cluster then we need to do very vigorous testing in order to find out and identify all those confirmed cases because they may be asymptomatic, so they will not be seeing a doctor yet. In the first instance we should try to find them out and isolate them and then treat them and prevent them from spreading the virus in the community. In future and including at the moment this dancing hall cluster, they will be subject to mandatory testing. In other words, if they don't come forward with a test result within a period of time, then they will be offending the regulation. In future we will adopt the same approach in mandatory testing for these high-risk clusters. The second type of testing is for target groups. For people in professions who are high-risk in contacting the virus, because they are working in airport or working in air cargo, for example; people in positions which will make other people very vulnerable if they are infected, for example, the elderly homes, the container terminals and the slaughterhouse and so on; and other frontline staff in the Government and as well as in the retail industry, we will advise them and arrange for them to undertake voluntary testing, but under a very targeted manner. The third approach is perhaps what you are asking. That is people have no symptom whatsoever and they have not come into contact with a confirmed case but they are worried about their own situation. We are also happy to provide a free-of-charge test for them, which is now available in 47 general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority and we will make the distribution network much wider after arranging the bottles to be distributed at over 100 post offices and perhaps in time to come in the MTR stations.

That's the testing regime that the Hong Kong SAR Government is adopting right now. What the Policy Address said is we did not rule out that, because the pandemic situation is changing very rapidly in future we may have to do a wider sort of universal testing like what we have done previously. But at the moment we don't have that plan yet because that would not be very effective, especially under the present circumstances when we have other priority groups that we need to tackle.

You also questioned about lockdown. In recent days I notice there are a lot of people advocating – it's just like a slogan, advocating – that we should have mandatory universal testing of everyone in Hong Kong. Now, we have to ask ourselves, one, is it based on science? Is it based on evidence that it is a good arrangement? And then we have to look at the practicality of doing so. And then we have to look at, in order for it to have the effect of finding out everyone that is infected in Hong Kong, we need to lock down. So if I go through a test today, there's no point if I'm allowed to go out, to go to work, to go to a restaurant. Arrangements have to be put in place to lock me down at home for a long period when everybody, the 7 million people, have gone through the tests. You can imagine that would require locking down the whole city, no in, no out. Airport will have to be closed. The land borders will have to be suspended and then a stay home mandatory order for everyone, until everybody has been cleared and the infected being found out and that would at least take four to eight weeks. Last time we did it in two weeks, hundreds of laboratory technicians in over a hundred centres, testing 1.7 million people. We're going to test 7 million, assuming that we are doubly effective, that will still be four weeks instead of two weeks. Can Hong Kong survive with a city lockdown of four weeks? Can you as an individual tolerate a stay-home mandatory order for four weeks? Can we as a

government find ways to feed you, being locked down at home for four weeks? Do we have that system? Do we have that capacity? Do we have that law-abiding compliant population to follow that requirement? I think these are very pertinent questions that everyone who advocate universal mandatory testing should try to answer. Thank you.

Reporter: Hello Mrs Lam. Following is a question for the external voting, is it the case that Beijing is reluctant to have the polling station being set up in major Mainland cities so that you didn't mention anything about it in the Policy Address? You just now said that you won't proceed with it. Was it you won't proceed with it if there are obstacles that the Government cannot overcome at the end? So, do you mean there are legality issues or logistics ones? The second question is, could you please give more details on the Mainland vaccines you have mentioned in the Policy Address? When will they be ready? And, how do you ensure the public confidence over the safety of Mainland doses? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the two questions. First of all, in the Policy Address I mentioned that although the LegCo elections have been deferred for one year, we have received quite a lot of views about improvements to the electoral arrangements, like special queue for elderly people, like using electronic means to dish out the ballot papers, and so on, including a desire especially by Hong Kong people now living, working and studying in the Mainland to be able to cast their vote on the voting day. All these are now being considered by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau. Of course, in the course of considering these proposals to come up with a piece of legislation, we have to address the issues that you have highlighted, that is the legal, the logistics and so on. For every government initiative, we want to proceed with consensus. But unfortunately, in every place, particularly in Hong Kong, it's quite a luxury to ask for a complete consensus. There will be differences in opinion given Hong Kong's diversity, for example, if you ask me, I would say the Lantau Tomorrow Vision is wonderful for Hong Kong. I have outlined the six advantages and the economic benefits of Lantau Tomorrow Vision, still there is a lot of objection, but we still proceed. I wouldn't agree that whenever there are obstacles, I would not proceed, because that would mean a very lame duck SAR Government, if whenever there are obstacles, one would not proceed. Similarly, for the voting in Mainland, we are considering the various factors. There is no CPG (Central People's Government) angle, let me make it very clear, this is a Hong Kong issue. But when we have decided to implement, then we need some support and advice from the Central Government, on whether it is possible in a Mainland city to set up polling stations and so on. Allowing Hong Kong permanent residents who are registered voters to cast their vote is an idea of the HKSAR Government based on the aspirations of Hong Kong people living, working in the Mainland, conveyed to us over the years.

As far as the Mainland vaccine, I have no detailed information to provide. What I have got from the Central Government is, if there comes a day that despite the efforts made by the HK SAR Government in vaccine procurement, that you still face problem – if you read very carefully the actual articulation- then the Central Government has promised to help us by

earmarking a certain proportion of vaccine either developed or produced- it's not entirely developed, it could be developed elsewhere but produced- in the Mainland for us to use. The ultimate objective is to ensure and safeguard the health of the Hong Kong people. At the moment, I have no more to disclose about the vaccines now being produced and developed in the Mainland of China.

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

