

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session today (April 22):

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam, I have three questions. Since the unrest in last June broke out, what took you so long to re-shuffle the cabinet? Is there a difficulty in convincing the Central People's Government? Will there also be a change in the Executive Council, as well as whether you can confirm that the terms of the Secretary for Justice and Secretary for Security will serve the entire term? My second question concerns with the breaking of the past practices because for Mr Patrick Nip, he left the civil service to join as a political appointee in the beginning of this administration, is there somehow a political mission or task for him to handle the civil servants because there are some criticisms about, say, political neutrality of some of the civil service unions and those who support the pro-democracy movement. Is this some of the task for him to become the Chief Secretary as once many has speculated? My final question concerned was Mr Tsang. Of course, there are people who come from different backgrounds but he seems to be the first one to be tasked with the very important ministerial positions as the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Secretary. Can you explain to the public perception on why are you appointing someone who put the plate with President Xi's portrait in his office? Is it because of his ties and being trusted by Beijing, by the Central People's Government, that's why he earns this position? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you very much for the four questions. I am afraid that several of the questions are based on presumptions. First of all, you presumed that as a result of last June's social unrest, there was a need for re-shuffling of the political team. I never have that sort of plan and that's why it was not correct to say that it has taken so long because the exercise of trying to change a number of Principal Official positions did not start from that date. It has to do with what I have just outlined that Hong Kong is in a very difficult situation now, apart from the pandemic, we are going into a major economic recession with high unemployment and so on. We really need to start immediately to plan for Hong Kong's economic recovery, especially in the several sectors which we attach importance to, and that is Hong Kong's financial services, Hong Kong's innovation and technology, Hong Kong's professional services and creative industries and the many opportunities that will be available to Hong Kong under the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The second question is about the Executive Council. Unlike Principal Officials, Executive Council Members are appointed by the Chief Executive. They are my most senior advisers. They will continue to be my senior advisers. Your, sort of, part two question is asking me to guarantee or to confirm the term of individual members of the team or even individual members

of the Executive Council. This is something that I would not do. I have learned from the lesson that never say never. Hong Kong is facing some very unprecedented situations and the best way for the Chief Executive is to monitor the situation closely and to make the best decisions for Hong Kong as and when necessary.

The third question is a question that I was expecting because I have been meeting all my Permanent Secretaries this morning and tried to explain and assure them that although Patrick Nip has left the civil service in 2017, there should be no doubt that he was a very senior experienced civil servant, having served in the civil service capacity for over three decades before he accepted my invitation three years back to resign from the civil service and join the political team. In terms of the spirit of the design of the political accountability system, which is to try to find somebody who is very familiar with the civil service, who knows the core values and integrity of the civil service in order to discharge his role and functions, I'm very confident, and I hope my senior civil servants are likewise very confident that Patrick will be able to do a very good job. There should be no worry about the so-called "other political missions" given to Patrick or his own aspirations. Every Principal Official in his or her present position only has one mission, and that is to serve faithfully the interests of Hong Kong and to ensure the comprehensive and accurate implementation of 'One Country, Two Systems' in Hong Kong.

Finally about Erick, in this term of Government, I have been advocating innovation; that is, not doing things in exactly the same way, otherwise it becomes inertia, we just follow the tradition and keep on doing things the same way. So there will be occasions of, "Oh, this thing has never been done, Chief Executive." So you are right, your observation is correct. Erick is, perhaps, the first head of a disciplinary service who has taken up this position or in fact any Principal Official position except the Secretary for Security and the Commissioner of ICAC and my own director in the Chief Executive's Office. But my short answer is there's always a first to everything. If we find the right person, then we should not be inhibited by this convention and not to go for the best option. With his very extensive experience in managing a very big department called Immigration Department, and the department is not just a disciplinary service department, but is serving the people of Hong Kong day in and day out. You look at all these immigration issues, registration of persons, issue of travel documents and change of ID card for the whole population; these are very people-oriented activities and the director had done very well in all these aspects and he has also very extensive experience in Mainland Affairs. So even from that very objective perspective, I think he is a very suitable candidate.

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