

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session after reporting to President Xi Jinping (with photos/videos)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session in Beijing after reporting to President Xi Jinping on work on December 18:

Reporter: Hello Mr Lee. Two questions. We all know that Hong Kong is facing a budget deficit of more than 100 billion Hong Kong dollars, and coupled with the weak local consumption and property downturns. How do you persuade and convince Beijing and also Hong Kong people that Hong Kong could pursue a brighter future as President Xi hopes for? And the second question is, as Jimmy Lai's case began today, the US, the UK, the EU and the UN all expressed concerns about the case. Anything the Hong Kong Government could do to allay their concerns, that could undermine investors or business interest in coming over to Hong Kong? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Hong Kong, like any other cities in the world, is facing the same economic challenges, high interest rate risk and geopolitical tension. We are part of the world, so we are facing the same risk and same crisis, but we are also lucky that under the "one country, two systems", we have many opportunities that other cities may not enjoy. First of all, Hong Kong is the only city in the world that enjoys both our country's advantages and also international advantages. We also, as Hong Kong itself, have a lot of strengths which are our DNA, and we have been building a bigger economy of Hong Kong by strengthening our competitiveness, which includes attracting more talent, attracting more strategic enterprises to station and start working in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is also developing new markets, emerging markets, and we are focusing on regional co-operation. What it means is that we have advantages because of being a special administrative region of our country, and our country has a lot of opportunities that we can make good use of. We must make good use of these opportunities, that include the National 14th Five-Year Plan which gives us the "eight centres" positioning. We also have the GBA (Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) which is an opportunity for Hong Kong to contribute to and also benefit from. We also participate in the Belt and Road Initiative which gives us opportunities. We have very good professional services, including architects, lawyers, surveyors, bankers and financiers.

So far, our measures to attract talent and enterprises have been bring good results. We have been able to meet our two-year target in one year, in other words, with one year's target of attracting 35 000 talent, we actually have some 70 000 talent already arrived in Hong Kong within one year. We have already attracted 30 major enterprises which are going to invest 30 billion Hong Kong dollars in the coming future and they will be creating 10 000 jobs. What it means is that, yes we face challenges, but we also have opportunities

and advantages that no other cities can enjoy. We will capitalise on our strengths, make good use of the opportunities and also will be creating a safe and stable environment for Hong Kong to start and build our economic development, and we are expanding our network by going out of Hong Kong to different parts of the world. That is how we will create a bigger cake for the overall Hong Kong. We should be thinking of both opportunities and threats, but should be confident of what we can do and have confidence in Hong Kong people who have been able to strive through different challenges.

In regard to the current trial in Hong Kong, I think Hong Kong has a long tradition of the rule of law, and Hong Kong courts always adjudicate cases fairly and impartially. Nobody should attempt to interfere with the court process. Nobody should try to interfere with court adjudicating cases based on evidence and facts, and nobody should try to do anything to exert pressure simply because of their political motive or political gain and try to influence outcomes of court cases or attempt to pervert the course of justice. Cases should be adjudicated on the basis of evidence and facts. I have full confidence in our courts adjudicating cases fairly and impartially.

Reporter: How has the Central Government responded to you finishing the security legislation of the Article 23 of the Basic Law by 2024? How would your administration deal with the potential pressure from either the undercurrent within the Hong Kong society or what's been called the foreign interfering forces?

Chief Executive: I have said in my Policy Address which was recently announced that I have set a deadline for Article 23 to be enacted locally within 2024. It is our constitutional duty. It is an obligation we have not been fulfilling for over 20-odd years since 1997, since the promulgation of the Basic Law. I think Hong Kong people, as a result of the pain, the hardship and the destruction of Hong Kong they experienced, they are convinced that an effective law to protect national security is important. I think that consensus has been built because Hong Kong people who lived through the dark time and the pain and difficulties in 2019 will be fully convinced that they don't want to repeat that tragic and horrific experience. They want an effective law to protect national security.

The Government of course will have to explain thoroughly and clearly to people in Hong Kong, and also to the international community, that Hong Kong is no different from any cities and jurisdictions in the world, that will need law to protect its national security, so we are no different. When people try to break into our houses, we only want to have good locks. We just want to do that. So if we don't go out and you don't break into my house, then everything will be fine. But when somebody tries to break into my house, that is only natural that I should ensure the locks are effective. That is exactly what Basic Law Article 23 wants Hong Kong to do, and that is what I want Hong Kong to do as well under my constitutional duty.

I have been asking the responsible bureaux and departments to examine and make reference to laws of other jurisdictions, because if those laws exist in other countries' statute books, that means they are effective and

acceptable to be used to protect the respective country's national security. So we will be making reference to those jurisdictions, particularly the common law jurisdictions, for those (laws) we think are applicable to Hong Kong, then we may make reference to them. Some we don't think are applicable, of course, we may or may not use them. But I think the eventual law that is enacted will be very similar to the national security laws of most jurisdictions and that they will be complying with international standards that protect human rights. The two international standards that protect human rights are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These two covenants, as applied to Hong Kong, will apply to Hong Kong, and is applying to Hong Kong under the Basic Law. Since the promulgation of the Basic Law, the 160 articles have not changed at all. Not a single word. All these international standards that protect human rights will apply to and will be applicable in all cases that involve national security or otherwise, because when courts adjudicate cases, they have to make reference to these two international covenants as they are applied to Hong Kong. So we are conforming with international standards to protect human rights, and that is something I will be telling people about.

Reporter: About the new arrangements this time, because you have met with President Xi, the Premier and some more leaders. Do you think that means the Central Government is paying more attention to Hong Kong affairs? And how will you and the Government correspond with this? Thank you.

Chief Executive: President Xi, together with three standing members of the Politburo Standing Committee, met with me. This reflects their high regard of Hong Kong and how they place Hong Kong people close to their hearts. The Chief Executive has a duty to make report to the Central Government annually in accordance with the Constitution and the Basic Law. I am very dutiful to comply with the arrangement, so as to ensure that the system for the Chief Executive to report to the Central People's Government is conducted as the Central Government wishes in accordance with the Constitution and the Basic Law.

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



