

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (February 15):

Reporter: Three questions. Does the Government have plans to impose district-based lockdowns and if so, how confident is the Government that it could be done smoothly given the number of hiccups that we've seen in the past weeks, when the Government introduced lockdowns to residential buildings? And, given all the measures you've just said, including designating public housing estates as quarantine and isolation facilities, and also the plan to build more facilities, do you have the time frame? And also, how many quarantine isolation facilities is the Government aiming for, and how many people does the Government intend to have them hold, how many people? Last but not least, do you maintain the assessment you made last week that the CE (Chief Executive) Election will not be postponed? Is it among the issues you've discussed with Beijing? And pardon me for repeating the question week after week, do you still intend to run for the race? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, there have been all sorts of discussions and advocacy about lockdown. In the last two years of the whole world fighting this COVID-19 pandemic, different governments have adopted different measures, and city lockdown has also been adopted by some governments, but they differ in the way that this lockdown was applied. As far as Hong Kong is concerned, we need to find our own way out of this epidemic, and so far, our measures to contain the spread of a disease remain a legitimate and valid one. The problem we are facing is, given the magnitude, pace and severity of this fifth wave, it has outgrown our capacity. The immediate response of the Hong Kong SAR Government, now with the support of the Central People's Government, is to enhance the capacities at various parts of this anti-epidemic effort, and we are doing this. I would have to say it very clearly that we have no plans for any widespread city lockdown as you have seen in some of the other places.

But a district-based restriction has been adopted for many, many months now. Since the latest wave from the end of December last year, the Government has already conducted over 100 such operations which we call the RTD, the "restriction-testing declaration". We prohibit people from leaving their buildings until everybody has been tested and the results have been disclosed. If their results are negative, then they can go out; if the result is positive, the Centre for Health Protection will follow up the case. These operations have proven to be effective in terms of identifying a large number of infected cases, and when necessary, in order to ensure the comprehensiveness of the coverage of the RTD, we have to extend the duration of the RTD. We have been doing one day, three days, five days and even seven days RTD. If you refer to those as a district-based lockdown, this is a very

focused district-based lockdown in order to identify as early as possible the infected cases. But let me stress it again, we have no plans whatsoever to impose a complete, wholesale lockdown of the Hong Kong city.

The second point about timeframe. Of course, we would like to see everything to be conducted as quickly as possible, because at the moment we are already facing backlogs, both in testing and the laboratory for confirmation in transferring preliminary positive cases to community isolation facilities, and in admitting the more serious cases to hospitals. For every measure to enhance our capacity, we would like to do it as quickly as possible. But from the figures that I have just quoted to you insofar as the conversion of the newly built public rental housing is concerned, we are talking about slightly more than 3 000 units. As I said, one unit sometimes could accommodate the whole family if unfortunately, members of a family are all confirmed preliminary positive.

In terms of hotel rooms, we know there are over 80 000 hotel rooms in Hong Kong, but not all of them are suitable. We are looking for a wholesale block – a hotel which is occupying a whole building with a certain number of rooms, because if it is too small, the operation will become very difficult. My target is to get them to agree to a plan – it's not an individual negotiation, which has been the modus operandi previously – we approach individual hotels one by one and discuss the terms and conditions with them one by one. That is not efficient anymore. We will do a wholesale plan and require them to sign on the plan so as to deliver a few thousands, up to 10 000 rooms within a very short period. I do not want to use my power but I do have power under Cap. 599 to make a regulation to ask for their co-operation. But I don't want to do that, I want to go down a co-operation model in order to find more hotel rooms for the community isolation purposes.

At this moment, the plan for the Chief Executive Election remains the same. That is, the nomination period will start on February 20 and the voting day will be on March 27. As I just said, one of the things I need to clarify is because of the severity and the speed of this latest wave of the epidemic, we have to continuously review the situation, adjust the measures and seek additional help, so I could not preclude any possibilities at this moment. As far as myself is concerned, as usual, I'm not going to answer that question. My sole mission now is to lead the Hong Kong SAR Government and to appeal to the public for support to fight this battle out.

Thank you.

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