

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 (March 30):

Reporter: Analysts said that under Beijing's plan which includes vetting committee and higher nomination thresholds could eliminate the diversity in Hong Kong's politics. Will you be leading the promotion campaign as some media reports suggest, and what would you say to residents who felt that the reform was a retrogression in democracy and was no longer interested in voting anymore? Second, when will the BioNTech vaccination be resumed and what is the progress with Fosun at this moment? What more incentive that the Government would offer to citizens to have enough confidence on these two vaccines? And third, RTHK used to be one of the few broadcasters in Hong Kong which produce high quality, intellectual talk shows and documentaries. Do you think that its new Director was over-killing, as different kinds of shows were being suspended one after the other? Would it be in Hong Kong residents' disadvantage as these quality TV shows are being censored? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. First of all, as you are all aware, the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) is meeting yesterday and today at its 27th meeting and one of the main subjects being deliberated on is the improvements to the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in accordance with the Decision made by the National People's Congress earlier in the month. I'm not in a position to disclose any details before the NPCSC has decided on the amendments to Annex I and Annex II, except to stress that the purpose of the improvements to the electoral system is to make sure that Hong Kong's electoral system is in line with the very important principle of "One Country, Two Systems", and to ensure that it is "patriots administering Hong Kong" so that we could be assured of Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. Without the details it is very difficult to answer your other very specific questions, but I can perhaps give you an advance notice that assuming the NPCSC will announce its decision later today, I will hold a press conference to explain the Decision's content, to announce the follow-up work by the Hong Kong SAR Government, and to answer any other queries that you may have. When I said that I and the Hong Kong SAR Government fully welcome and support the Decision as well as the amendments to be made by the NPCSC, we are committed to do a few things. One is we have a duty to explain to the people of Hong Kong why these improvements are needed. Second, we have to complete within a very tight timetable the local legislation to put into effect the amended version of Annex I and Annex II, and finally is we have to actually conduct the three sets of elections in the next 12 months. There's a lot of work to be done and I'm prepared to explain in more details later on.

The second question about vaccination, as far as the BioNTech vaccine, I

believe the Secretary for Food and Health has already explained at her media standup yesterday that the initial or preliminary investigation by the manufacturer does not indicate any problem in the quality or the efficacy of the vaccine; it's about the packaging and perhaps the transportation. We very much hope to have the final report as soon as possible and the alternative, either in terms of supply or certification, to enable us to resume the vaccination of BioNTech, especially for those people who have already taken the first dose to complete the second dose vaccination. You have to wait for the details to be announced.

As far as more incentives, I believe the Secretary has also given some indication yesterday. As I said on this occasion last week, the best incentive is to protect yourself and to protect your family members by taking this vaccine. If people want to see the more tangible effects, or the tangible benefits of taking the vaccine, the Secretary has outlined several things. One is, at the moment, the Government does mandate the taking of a COVID-19 test at regular intervals for certain groups of people. For example, the care staff at the residential elderly homes, the staff of restaurants that want to open for dining in the evening, and also if schools want to resume 100 per cent half-day face-to-face classes, then the teachers and the staff have to take this COVID-19 test on a regular basis. The first tangible incentive is if somebody is fully vaccinated, which means that he or she has taken the two doses of whichever vaccine, and then wait for a period of two weeks, then this having been vaccinated will be a good substitute for the regular COVID-19 test. I have already heard the catering sector representatives saying in public that this is a good enough incentive because going for COVID-19 tests once every 14 days is still quite troublesome for the staff and also for the restaurant operators. This is one illustration of the incentive.

The second incentive is for visitation. I feel very sorry for family members who have not been able to visit their elderly in the elderly homes or their relatives in hospitals. With vaccination by the visitors going in to visit their family members in the elderly homes and the hospitals, this will also be a very tangible benefit if they have been fully vaccinated and on top of that upon admission into the hospitals or the elderly homes, if they are willing to take another rapid test, the antigen test, then we will facilitate visitation, which to many people is very very important after a long period of 14 months.

The third incentive is in travelling. Several countries have already been talking about they will give facilitation and reduce quarantine arrangement for people who have been vaccinated. Again, this is a very tangible incentive as I'm sure many Hong Kong people are longing for travelling to places that they love to go previously. These are all the incentives that we are considering and will put in place when the vaccination has taken place. I must make another appeal here, that is, people should come forward to receive the vaccination. We have now already expanded the priority groups to anybody aged 30 and over, and that is quite an exceptional treatment compared to other places. Other places are still injecting the jab for people who are 50 and above, or the high-risk groups or the health care

personnel but we have this extensive Government Vaccination Programme in place because we have sufficient supply; we have good infrastructure; we have enough staff to serve the people. Please come forward and take the vaccine so that we together could build up a herd immunity in Hong Kong and for Hong Kong to go back to normal as soon as possible.

The final question about RTHK. Yes, RTHK is a public broadcaster, over the years it has produced programmes which we all love, but RTHK is also a government department. Whether as a government department or a public broadcaster, RTHK has to follow rules, regulations and guidelines. Particularly in RTHK they have signed a Charter, not only with the Government but also with the Broadcasting Authority. Within the Charter they have several rules to follow. It is for us all, including the Director of Broadcasting, to make sure that rules and regulations in the Charter are being followed. The Director of Broadcasting is not just a department head. He has also been given the mandate, the position and the responsibility as the Editor-in-chief. In other words, whatever programmes that come out of RTHK that are not fulfilling, or breaching those rules and regulations or even breaching the law, then the Director of Broadcasting has to be held responsible. That's why he has to be very cautious and I have to recognise what he has done. Since taking office he has been very conscientious and doing exactly what I expect from the Editor-in-chief of RTHK.

Reporter: Would you make vaccination compulsory to participate in air travel bubbles with Singapore, Mainland China and other country? The second question is on electoral reform. Many foreign governments and residents are concerned this will stop any opposition candidates from running. What do you say to those residents who want to vote for pro-democracy candidates but are concerned no one will be allowed to run? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The first question about vaccination and travelling. Of course, vaccination will facilitate the resumption of travel to a certain extent, but I'm sure you realise that when we talk about travelling, it's a bilateral thing. Our people have vaccinated, whether the other side would then make life easier for our people to travel to their own country is a matter for them. What I have asked my colleagues, particularly the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, to revive, to discuss, is what sort of arrangements we could put in place to facilitate bilateral travelling, particularly with Singapore, because as early as last October, November, we did have a very good scheme called the Air Travel Bubble between Hong Kong and Singapore but unfortunately we then had a fourth wave from the second half of November, and that has been suspended. Now that our cases have come down to a very low level, and we start to roll out the Government Vaccination Programme, I think it is very good timing to resume the discussion so that people from both places could start to travel again.

Whether we would make it mandatory depends on the discussion. If the other side says that you have to make sure that travellers from Hong Kong coming to our place, like Singapore, have to be fully vaccinated, then we will have to tell the people, if you want to benefit from this air travel bubble, you have to be vaccinated. If they don't have that requirement, then

we will not make it mandatory. But standing here, I always appeal to Hong Kong people to come forward to receive vaccination because of the benefits to protect themselves, their family members, and community at large.

On electoral reform, as I said, I'm not in a position to talk about details, but I can respond to your question about whether certain types of people with certain political beliefs are still able to run for election – the answer is yes. The whole arrangement to improve the electoral system of the Hong Kong SAR is to ensure that it's "patriots administering Hong Kong" – they have to fulfil a requirement, which actually is in our electoral laws that they have to bear allegiance to the Hong Kong SAR and also to uphold the Basic Law. This is the purpose of this electoral reform. For people who hold different political beliefs, who are more inclined towards more democracy, or who are more conservative, who belong to the left or belong to the right, as long as they meet this very fundamental and basic requirement, I don't see why they could not run for election. That is not only what I say. It has been mentioned by the senior officials in the Central People's Government that this system is not looking for homogeneous candidates. You could have different political stances – as long as you are serving the people of Hong Kong, you are not going to breach national security, then of course you could compete in elections in accordance with the electoral legislation.

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