

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting this morning (February 4):

Reporter: Hello, Mrs Lam. You have announced the further closure of borders yesterday but it was criticised as coming too late. What took you so long? Were you worried about upsetting Beijing or hurting the feelings of Chinese people? Or you did not want to appear as bowing to pressure amidst the threats of a strike? Are you putting politics ahead of public health? And second question, in your opening remarks you seem to be blaming the medical sector for doing the strike. So, but even the calls of the medical sector and pro-Beijing parties are calling you to minimise the flow of people across the border. Can't the Government do more to close – the complete closure of the borders? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, the situation of the coronavirus infection is evolving, so our public health strategy is to ensure that we could speedily respond to the changing situation and implement as quickly as possible the necessary response measures. Since January 25, four announcements of various measures have been made in line with that strategy. I certainly would not agree with the allegation that we are not addressing this public health concern adequately and certainly I don't agree with the allegation that we are putting politics above public health. This is a public health situation and we are assisted by our experts in both external and in-house to tackle this very important situation. But let me make a further appeal: any public health emergency situation could only be tackled effectively by the whole community. Everybody has to do his or her part in order to fight this infection. But of course the Government has primary responsibility.

As far as the strike that has taken place in the public hospitals under the Hospital Authority, I was just laying out the implications and the consequences according to a report by the Hospital Authority. The consequences yesterday were quite serious. Important services, critical operations have been affected, whether it is in the Neonatal ICUs, in the isolation wards or patients awaiting certain cancer treatments, all these have been affected. So I'm appealing to those who are taking part in this action that let's put the interests of the patients and the entire public health system above all other things.

Having said that, there is actually a high degree of consistency between what they are asking and what the Government is doing. It's all pointing to, as you have rightly described, minimising the people flow. All the measures that we have adopted in the last 10 days or so are focusing on this one single objective. We want to minimise, reduce very significantly, the cross-border passenger traffic so as to reduce the chances of infection, and we

will continue to do that.

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