

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 with the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, and Director of Immigration, Mr Erick Tsang today (March 3):

Reporter: Madam Chief Executive, three questions, question number one, do you think the Government owes the Hong Kong people who have been stranded in Hubei for more than a month an apology because of your delay to evacuate them until now when other countries have already done so much earlier? Question number two, despite the widespread concerns over the use of force by the Police during the protest, the Police will still be given a rather substantial boost in manpower in the next financial year. Why do you think it is the right time to do so when people's concerns have not been addressed and when will the review committee you promised going to be set up? Question number three, about the report to Beijing in which you apparently said you hope the Government's handling of the epidemic can turn public opinion and eventually can help the pro-government camp in the LegCo election, so how can we expect the election in September will be a fair one when the Government favours one particular camp? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you. Three questions. First question, we do not feel that we have delayed the return of Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei. As you are aware, even up to this point, Hubei Province, particularly the city of Wuhan, is still under a very challenging situation in terms of the infections and the outbreak, in terms of cases confirmed. As far as I understand, even up to this moment, there are still very clear restrictions on exit arrangements as well as transport arrangements leaving Hubei Province. As I said in the introductory remarks that as soon as the conditions are ready for us to help Hong Kong residents to come back to Hong Kong, we have immediately made the arrangements to do so with the support of the Hubei Provincial Government. I hope we will all realise that the whole of Hubei Province is still struggling and doing all their best in containing this coronavirus, but at the same time they have set aside manpower and other resources to help us to undertake this very major operation to bring our Hong Kong people back.

As far as the second question is concerned, every year, every department will have to prepare their estimates of expenditure for the next financial year, and every department will put forth their requirements in terms of funding, in terms of manpower in the estimates, and those requirements were very carefully scrutinised by the senior echelons in the Government, particularly on the financial side. The Police requirements have gone through that process, a very vigorous process, and are considered justified given the present circumstances. I hope that people will understand that law and order remains very important in Hong Kong and we should be assured that we have

that capacity to ensure Hong Kong remains a safe city.

As far as the question on the internal report, it has always been our established policy and practice that we will not comment or respond to any speculations about internal communication or correspondence between the Hong Kong SAR Government and the Central People's Government. This time is no exception. I would not be providing any response to that except to assure the community that in the last one and a half month or so, in fighting this virus, every decision made by the Hong Kong SAR Government is based on science and justification, especially with the very pertinent advice tendered by the four experts on the expert advisory panel that I have set up at the very beginning of this process. The ultimate objective is to contain the spread of this virus in Hong Kong so that we could protect not only the health of the people of Hong Kong but also the economic and social situation in Hong Kong.

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: As regards to your first question, I would like to supplement that, in the case of Hong Kong, we have to consider that there are now more than 3,800 Hong Kong people seeking assistance who are staying in Hubei and in more than 30 cities. On the first day of receiving these requests, we have already started the contingency planning for transferring these people back to Hong Kong. But we have to consider the right moment to do so. We have to take into account the epidemic situation in the Mainland and the situation in Hong Kong. We also have to consider carefully the public health risk in transferring a large group of people from one place to another. Of course at the same time, we have to make sure that we have sufficient quarantine facilities in Hong Kong so that we could take care of the 14 day- compulsory quarantine requirement. Last but not the least, also a very important one, is that we have to assess very carefully the impact on our hospital system because we may expect, or we cannot rule out the possibility that some of these people returning to Hong Kong might become confirmed cases. So we have to monitor the situation very carefully. Once the moment is right, we start to implement the operation.

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