

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 today (February 2):

Reporter: Zero cases have been found in the six recent quick lockdowns the Government imposed in the past few days. So how would you evaluate the effectiveness of such measures given that there have been no cases found? And how would you respond to experts' suggestions that an ambush-style lockdown may not be really able to contain the spread of the virus because there are still many people who may still be in the incubation period? And what would you say to the residents who have been affected by the measures and what would you do to help them, especially for these people who may have suffered from financial losses during the lockdown? And will the Government consider replacing the Mainland vaccine Sinovac with other vaccines given that the company still has not provided sufficient clinical data about the vaccine? And how confident are you that Hong Kong will still be able to get its first batch of vaccines by the end of this month and also roll out the vaccination programme as scheduled? And there's a media report saying that you had a one-on-one meeting with the Chief Justice last week, just days ahead of Jimmy Lai's bail hearing yesterday. Could you confirm whether you had such a meeting with the Chief Justice and if so did you talk to him about the case? And how would you respond to concerns that it may not be appropriate for you to meet the Chief Justice privately? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all as I have said many times, in terms of public health, a lot of the work done is preventive. In fact, to have zero transmission and zero infection is the best-ever public health achievement that could be made by every authority. The purpose of doing compulsory tests and this "restriction-testing declaration" is with that objective in mind, that we want to achieve zero case for the whole community. It's not just one building or one district. We will continue to do this type of compulsory testing in order to identify any remaining silent transmission cases in community. To have achieved zero case, that is all residents being tested within that period were negative, is also a good sign as while you look at it you may be worried from the public health or the building hygiene point of view about a particular area. Having gone through this test, at least the residents are much more assured that they are not living in a highly infectious area. This is something that we will continue to do, but as I have explained we are choosing these areas or buildings for this sort of "restriction-testing declaration" based on a series of factors. It is not an ad hoc or arbitrary decision as such. The number of confirmed cases in that building or district is only one of the factors.

This is of course not the only instrument or measure that the Hong Kong SAR Government is adopting in order to contain the latest wave. We have been

doing a lot of things and I would refer you to read my latest monthly report on the Government's efforts in fighting COVID-19, because that was a 12-month report so I used that occasion to do a little bit of summary of the things that we are doing. It's an eight-pronged approach covering preventing the spread of virus from imported cases to beefing up our capacity in testing, quarantine, isolation and so on. We need the public's support. I hope that the media will help us to encourage residents to participate in compulsory testing and to co-operate with the Government. Although we have not yet found any positive case in some of the latest RTD ("restriction-testing declaration"), we were at the same time worried that many of the units apparently have not responded to our door knocking. Whether there were individuals in that particular unit who refused to come out to do this compulsory testing is one of the things that will affect the effectiveness of the operation.

We try to minimise as far as possible the impact on the residents. Having done the first operation which lasted for over two days, I have given a mandate that they should aim to minimise the disruption or inconvenience to affected residents to 12 hours. So the recent operations that you have seen started from 7pm, when people went back to their home after work, and it should be finished by 7am, as far as the so-called lockdown is concerned. Within that 12-hour period, the residents should have done their compulsory test, received the SMS indicating that they are negative, they are wearing a wristband and they could leave by 7am back to work, go to school and so on. I hope residents will appreciate that we are already considerably reducing the impact on them. But as I said, this is a matter of joint efforts. It's not just the Government but the community at large has to join hands in order to contain the spread of the virus.

About vaccines, we have been very transparent with the community about the progress made in the procurement and authorisation of vaccines. Three different types of vaccines have been purchased under the advance purchase agreement, and one of them, the Fosun/BioNTech has been authorised. The latest is this authorised vaccine will come by the end of this month. Of course we will make sure that it will come but as you have read the news in the European Union (EU), there have been all sorts of things happening in the EU, and this vaccine is manufactured in Germany, so we have to watch the situation very carefully. Since we have a contract to buy, I hope that all the other organisations will respect this contractual relationship and allow the BioNTech vaccine to come to Hong Kong by the end of this month. The vaccination programme will be able to start almost immediately because we have got almost everything ready in terms of the number of community vaccination centres and the staffing and so on. On the arrival of the vaccines and the rollout of the vaccination programme, we will try to condense the lead time in between.

About the other two vaccines, let's put aside AstraZeneca because that vaccine has never promised to come early. They will come in the latter half of this year, and we could not blame them because there's huge demand for AstraZeneca in Europe. The third is this vaccine manufactured in the Mainland, the Sinovac. We have been liaising very closely with the

manufacturer. The latest is we will be given the data so that the experts could consider the data and recommend for the Secretary for Food and Health to authorise this vaccine for use. I have also appealed to the Central People's Government if there is anything that the Central Government could help us in ensuring the early arrival of Sinovac. The response given back to me is they will help, the Central People's Government will help. But for the time being this is the sort of contractual purchase agreement between the Hong Kong SAR Government and Sinovac manufacturer.

The final point is, I have to categorically make this statement: as the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR, I am obliged to uphold the independence of the Judiciary. That is a duty imposed on me as the Chief Executive under the Basic Law, because I am not just the head of the Hong Kong SAR Government, I am the one in charge of the entire Hong Kong SAR. The independence of the Judiciary, the efficiency of the Judiciary and the smooth operation of the Judiciary are matters of concern to the Chief Executive. I need to meet with the Chief Justice, who is the head of the Judiciary, to discuss those matters within our respective jurisdiction. I think the Judiciary has also issued a response along that line, that the CJ, whether the current CJ or the former CJ, did meet with me from time to time when they have issues to raise, for example about staffing, about resources, about new court buildings, and about the appointment of judges because I am the authority to appoint judges, and in some of the local legislation, there's a requirement for the Chief Justice to nominate and for the CE to consult. If we don't meet, how do we do that? This is only normal and I would advise against any reading into that sort of legitimate and proper meetings between the CE and the CJ as intervention into judicial independence. That is totally unacceptable and would not be done by any Chief Executive and as a result none of my meetings with the former CJ or the current CJ touched upon cases. This is not the subject of our conversation at all.

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