

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (September 29):

Reporter: Thank you. I have three questions. Firstly about the arrangement that you said you are looking to let Hong Kong people staying on the Mainland come back to Hong Kong without 14 days of quarantine. You said it's now in the final stage, is it a mutually agreed arrangement with the Mainland and when do you expect this to come into effect and will this be an arrangement with quota? And secondly about RTHK's reporter Nabela Qoser, so could you comment, because do you think it is a fair or common practice to investigate her case twice? Does the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, or his bureau, has any role in this? And are you concerned that this incident might be viewed as an act of suppressing press freedom? And lastly about the demonstration that's planned for the National Day which has been banned, police said if participants registered in advance, they would consider the march proposal because they would be able to trace the source if there's a COVID outbreak. Because this arrangement is not needed for other activities, so why do you think the registration is needed for people going on march and will Hong Kong people need to give their real names when they want to protest or demonstrate on the street? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Regarding your three questions, if I may, I will provide a more generic response. The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is the head of the Hong Kong SAR and the head of the executive Government and shoulder a lot of responsibilities. But one would not expect the Chief Executive to get herself or himself involved in the daily, routine, operational matters, especially when there are proper authorities to deal with those matters. For matters relating to the management of the civil service, it is a HR issue, a human resources issue that will be handled by the management of every department. RTHK is a public broadcaster, but it is also a government department. Like all the other government departments, the departmental management has to manage its staff in accordance with the rules and regulations of the civil service. I really have no comment on this particular incident. Similarly, for how to prescribe and regulate demonstrations in Hong Kong, the Police is capable of dealing with this application and on top of that, there is an appeal mechanism that operates independently. So again it is not possible, not feasible and not desirable for the Chief Executive to answer all your detailed questions, let alone to give a view on whether such operational matters have been handled properly.

On the first issue, this is an anti-epidemic measure. In the last nine

months I have been personally dealing with these issues as Chairman of the emergency response steering committee, though normally it should also fall under a border control or immigration passenger flow issue, but on this special occasion, because this is so closely related to our anti-epidemic strategy, I have a personal interest and I have been very hands-on on those matters. I said that in order to revive the economy and also to meet public aspirations after a very long period of eight, nine months, it is time for us to take a very pragmatic approach to allow people flow, whether between Hong Kong and Mainland, Hong Kong and Macao, and Hong Kong and other overseas places. This also has to take account of the public health situation, or I would say that public health concern is our primary concern because we have seen that if we are hit by an epidemic, the economy will suffer tremendously. Having regard to the Mainland situation – I'm sure you know that Mainland has put this virus under very good control, there has not been a local confirmed case for a very long period, the only cases now registered every day are imported cases – there is this scientific basis for us to relax the border controls between Hong Kong and Mainland. Given the volume involved and also the Hong Kong situation where we still have some risks, we should do it in a gradual and orderly manner. In dealing with a gradual and orderly manner, then naturally there is an expectation that Hong Kong residents now residing in the Mainland should be given earlier priority to return to Hong Kong without being subject to the 14-day mandatory quarantine arrangement, provided that they can show a negative test of COVID-19.

What I mentioned just now that we are in advanced internal discussions is to find a way to facilitate such Hong Kong residents coming back. Whether this needs a mutual agreement with the Guangdong authorities, whether there will be a quota and how many control points we will allow this arrangement- because at the moment we only have the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Shenzhen Bay Control Point- all these will be sorted out in our internal discussions before we promulgate them for the public to know. But I can tell you that this is something that we are working very diligently on because I know that there is very strong desire amongst some of the Hong Kong people who want to be able to come back to see a doctor, to meet with relatives and to do other personal things that they have not been able to do for a very long time.

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