

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 (October 27):

Reporter: During your trip to Beijing, will you discuss with the Mainland authorities about your plan to extend voting rights to Hongkongers in the Mainland because the scholars warn about the risk of vote-rigging and possible manipulation? How would you respond to these concerns? Are you going to proceed without any possible public consultation exercise? And the second question is, over the weekend there was a global campaign joined by over 30 countries to demand for the release of the 12 Hongkongers being detained in the Mainland. Has the Government taken any further actions for the plight of the 12? And my last question, it's about the issue in The University of Hong Kong (HKU), because one of the Mainland professors named to take up the leading role at HKU, but he was listed as a Chinese Communist Party member on Tsinghua's website. So as the HKU's Chancellor, will you clarify his background? Do you think it's appropriate to appoint a Chinese Communist Party member to take up a top role in a top local University? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. On question one, as I have said on two occasions at least, my trip to Beijing this time is solely on the economic side. That is, in light of the economic situation, which is very serious in Hong Kong, we need more support measures from the Mainland of China, especially in light of the overall direction that Hong Kong should move to better integrate with the Mainland of China, especially in the Greater Bay Area. At the moment there is no plan to talk about other subjects including the one that you have mentioned.

As far as the deliberation on the voting issue, this is not something entirely novel. It has been discussed in society and in the Legislative Council's relevant panel for many times as confirmed by one of the Legco members in a recent article or a letter she wrote. The public opinion on this issue has been very clear, but the point is, like many other things, especially those with a Mainland dimension, it is extremely difficult to get a consensus on such matters. The Government is now revisiting this issue. I understand we have a previous view, but we are now revisiting the issue especially as demonstrated by COVID-19, that sometimes, despite the proximity, it is just not possible to cross the border to do some legitimate things, whether in voting, in business, in visiting relatives. At the moment we are revisiting the issue and when we have a clear view, we will tell society which proposal that we will pursue.

There have been a lot of so-called "global campaigns" against Hong Kong

since June last year. This is not something that will catch us by surprise because, very unfortunately, Hong Kong has been caught in an international sort of "campaign", or tension, particularly vis-a-vis China. The clear thing as we have said many times in rebutting accusations from overseas politicians, the situation of the 12 fugitives is this one: they have been suspected of committing serious crimes in Hong Kong. Instead of staying behind and accepting legal responsibility by going through the legal system, which is an independent judiciary, they have chosen to flee Hong Kong. In the course of fleeing Hong Kong, they entered another jurisdiction and as a result of that they have committed another crime, so the first thing is they have to face up to the consequences of that offence in that particular jurisdiction, that is the Mainland jurisdiction. Thereafter, we will have arrangements to bring them back to face their criminal liabilities in Hong Kong. How overseas campaigners or the activists presented the situation is something we would not like to see. That's why I said that we will be very conscientious and very robust in refuting any of those accusations.

About HKU, yes I'm the Chancellor of HKU as well as other universities but I'm sure you will appreciate that as the Chief Executive and the Chancellor, I will refrain from interfering with the universities' matters and respect the institutional autonomy of Hong Kong universities. Hong Kong is very fortunate to have well-renowned universities, with four or five of them amongst the top 100. This is the strength that we will preserve in order to take an active role in the Greater Bay Area, and I'm sure that each university will recruit and appoint the best academia to fulfil that mission and in the appointment, I believe, the university authority will look at the attributes of meritocracy. That is, the academic achievement of the candidates and the competency of the candidates. I don't think they or anyone should adopt attributes other than these in assessing the suitability of individual candidates. Thank you.

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