

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 and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (November 3):

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam, three questions. The first one is, apart from Singapore, is the SAR Government discussing plans of launching travel bubbles with other countries such as Japan, where the Government just lowered travel restrictions for travellers from China, Macao and Hong Kong? The second question will be, regarding your upcoming visit to Beijing, as you have cited the visit to be a reason for postponing the Policy Address and you wish to consult the Central Government before including certain measures that are beneficial to Hong Kong in the Policy Address, which are the measures that you consider to be beneficial to Hong Kong in the present moment, other than being a dual engine with Shenzhen to serve the Greater Bay Area? And the third question is about the eight democrats arrested for contravening the LegCo (Legislative Council) (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance when some of them only chanted slogans inside the meeting room. Are lawmakers not immune from legal action in respect of their statements at meetings of the Council as Basic Law Article 77 stated? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you very much for those three questions. The first question is about travel bubbles. As the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, has briefed the media several times, the Hong Kong SAR Government has been approaching quite a number of countries – it's not just Singapore. But when we start to discuss the details, both sides will require a comparable epidemic situation. Both sides have to be comparable in terms of the number of cases, the infection risks and also the infection control strategy. Against those factors, Hong Kong and Singapore are now very comparable, we are very pleased to have relatively smooth discussions with the Singaporean Government on starting this air travel bubble. We are aiming at the latter part of this month to commence this travel bubble with Singapore. You are right – I noticed that Japan has lowered the entry barriers vis-à-vis China, including Hong Kong and Macao, but that only refers to lifting the denial of entry. In other words, we could enter but still subject to the epidemic control measures including quarantine. It will need a bit of time, I suspect, for us to start similar discussions and negotiations with the Japan Government, like Singapore. I realise that many Hong Kong people love to travel to Japan, so we will try our best to continue our discussions with the Japanese consulate in Hong Kong.

My Beijing visit is primarily about how the Central Government could give Hong Kong more support in reviving the economy, because our economy has been hard hit by COVID-19. Although the Q3 figures have given us a glimpse of

hope, because the contraction of the economy has narrowed and on a quarter-to-quarter basis, we have actually seen an increase, but still, looking ahead, we are very worried that this sort of economic downturn will continue. I'm going to Beijing to meet with the relevant ministries and commissions to talk about the things that we have been doing in integrating into the Mainland economy and what more the Central Government could support us in order to help us to grow that particular sector, for example financial services, aviation and the various innovation and technology initiatives.

Since the visit has yet to take place and the discussions have yet to reach a consensus, I'm not in a position to tell you which are the support measures that will be secured and included in the 2020 Policy Address. But I cannot keep on delaying my Policy Address because this is an annual occasion for the Chief Executive to explain to the public what we could expect in the coming year. My target is still to deliver it within the month of November, and likely on November 25. For the moment, I don't see any major hurdle to that because once the trip has taken place, whether I'm going to get a lot of those support measures or not, it is still time to release the Policy Address for people to know where things stand.

Within those measures, you mentioned about the Greater Bay Area and also about Shenzhen. These are two very important areas for Hong Kong. That's why we still have quite a number of support measures under the Greater Bay Area that we would like to confirm as soon as possible and have those implemented as soon as possible. As for Shenzhen, the two cities joining hands will be a new engine of growth for the entire Greater Bay Area. I noticed that Shenzhen has been given 27 reform measures and the first batch of 40 delegated authorities, so I suspect all these details could be discussed between myself and the Shenzhen leaders and then we can take them forward.

Finally, about the arrests of several LegCo members that have taken place. Since these cases have gone into the judicial process, it is not appropriate for me to comment on those cases. I just want to make three points of principle. The first is Hong Kong is very proud of our rule of law, and the rule of law is a cornerstone of Hong Kong's success and the rule of law is underscored by our very strong fundamentals, particularly the independence of the judiciary. This is point number one. Every one of us has to respect the rule of law and refrain from criticising the judges, their rulings without any basis. The second point I want to make is prosecution decisions are entirely within the Department of Justice and they will make up their mind on whether to prosecute without any interference, whether it is political interference or personal interference. Prosecutors are highly professional colleagues, and they will make their decisions based on the law – that is, what the law says – and also the evidence put in front of them as well as their own Prosecution Code. And finally, I hope you will agree and that's also enshrined in the Basic Law that everyone is equal before the law. Nobody, including the Chief Executive, is above the law. If there is the legal provision, there is sufficient evidence to illustrate, to demonstrate, that certain individuals, including LegCo members, have breached the law including this piece of law called Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance, then there is a case to answer. If you want to

understand more about this piece of legislation and its application, in fact there is a court case, I think it's from Leung Kwok-hung several years ago, and it has gone to the court and the Court of Appeal has already handed down a judgment and a ruling on that case, which confirms that it's not because there is something called powers and privileges that members of the Legislative Council could do whatever they like in the Legislative Council Chamber. Thank you very much.

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