

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 (December 8):

Reporter: A few questions. You said that you admitted that in handling the Kwai Shing West Estate outbreak and the Government could have been doing it better. Do you think the Government is acting a bit too slow this time? Secondly, about all the stepped-up measures, are you confident that the Government can prevent a further outbreak now that Christmas is approaching and many students studying overseas will come back to Hong Kong? And thirdly, about the ex-lawmaker Ted Hui's case, you may have heard that his bank accounts have been frozen, de-frozen and then frozen again, and some critics said that these actions actually lack legal basis and HSBC has been also criticised as a government tool. Do you think this will affect Hong Kong's reputation as an international financial centre or undermine people's confidence in our banking system if people's bank accounts are really frozen arbitrarily? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. First of all about the Kwai Shing Estate incident, I have already acknowledged that this fell into the situation that I have described about maybe a couple of weeks ago. I said that the compulsory testing in order to be effective and to contain a spread of the virus into the community is to seal off that particular area for the compulsory testing to take place and preferably to be completed before the residents or the employees in that particular premises are allowed to go out into the community. I think if we could do better if we could speed up the making of a particular piece of legislation, which we will do today in the Executive Council, then my colleagues in the public health authority will have better legal basis to tackle that situation. That is the thing that we could have done better but I hope you realise that first, we are in a very hectic situation since this wave hit us in the latter part of November and secondly, in a city like Hong Kong, even in the public health emergency, we attach a lot of importance to the rule of law, so every act of the public health authorities has to be based on the legal provision. That's why my public health colleagues were very cautious that they could only act to prevent or stop people from leaving that particular block in the public housing estate when they have the power. When they don't have the power, then people will be a bit hesitant to act.

You asked a question whether after all these measures, we could prevent another outbreak, I simply could not give you this guarantee. I doubt if any government leader could give that sort of guarantee. Actually right now many places that have been able to contain the virus quite effectively are now

being hit by a new wave, especially countries and places in this region. I will only say that we will stay very vigilant. We will adjust our strategy. We will introduce and adopt more stringent measures in order to contain – I use the word “contain” – to contain the spread of the virus into society and gives rise to all sort of economic and social difficulties. The strategy has to start from preventing any imported cases because if we could not prevent the importation of cases, then we’ll continue to be in a very difficult cycle of dealing with the outbreak. But according to the scientists, the incubation period is not absolute. While we said that 14 days is the normal period, so if we could isolate and quarantine every arrival for a period of 14 days, that would be good enough. Yes, but still, there will be cases that could have been missed because for certain individuals, the incubation period might be longer. It’s beyond 14 days. We did have a few cases discovered in Hong Kong that have symptoms or were confirmed after a 14-day quarantine period. And that’s why the additional measure that I’m announcing this morning is we will require those arrivals to do another test on the 19th day to make sure that this is better, but still there’s no absolute guarantee. Ultimately, any absolute guarantee requires not only the Government, not only the scientists or my public health colleagues, but the community at large. They have to abide by the regulations and the rules. They have to follow our advice. Now the advice is to stay home as far as possible. The new penalty, the fixed penalty of \$5,000 will take effect tomorrow (should be December 11), but we really don’t want to do it through the penalty side. We want to do it through civic-mindedness that everyone wants to help to contain this virus, so we don’t need to send a lot of enforcement people down to the streets and to dish out these penalty tickets. But if we do need this as a deterrent, we will not shy away from raising the fine again, if need be, beyond the \$5,000 in order to have that deterrent effect.

You mentioned a particular case of somebody who has jumped bail or now we’ll call that this is an “absconder”. I don’t want to go into the details of a case but I would just ask the public to understand what sort of person we are dealing with now. This is somebody who had lied to the courts of Hong Kong in order to seek a way to leave Hong Kong while under bail. So I ask this question, is this individual a trustworthy individual that you should take his words on face value and accuse the Hong Kong financial institutions for doing things which are not in accordance with the law? If there is any damage to Hong Kong’s financial institutions, the culprit is this individual. But I can assure you that Hong Kong’s monetary and financial systems are as robust as ever and the Police will fully investigate each case, and the case will be independently considered by the prosecution authority, that is the Department of Justice, and will be tried independently in the Hong Kong courts. All this will be for the people to say, but for the time being, I would really urge that there are so many rumours, speculations and wrong information or even lies on the social media coming from some individuals’ Facebook, so people have to be extremely careful about taking these statements on the face value.

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