

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 (January 5):

Reporter: Question number one, for how long will the Government refuse the Hong Kong residents who are stuck in UK from returning home which they are fully entitled to, according to the Basic Law, especially as you have said that the measures to prevent imported cases are now watertight? And question number two, the Transport Department has offered a new service to car owners that will alert them if someone makes a search on their vehicles. Do you agree this sort of action from the Government is not very media friendly and will this sort of tip-off service be extended to other public services like land and company searches? And why can't the media be exempted from this if the purpose is for news gathering? The final question is regarding recently the state media and also some local media have attacked a High Court judge for granting bail to Jimmy Lai, with some critics saying this sort of attacks actually put pressure on the Judiciary ahead of an appeal hearing. Can you tell us why the Government didn't issue a statement to hit back at these sort of comments? Is it because they are from the state media? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. First is I have just emphasised the importance of having watertight measures in ensuring that Hong Kong will not import confirmed cases from all over the world because the COVID-19 situation is still very severe in many parts of the world. The United Kingdom and South Africa now are two of the high-risk places because of this new variant in the virus, and so for a while, many places – it's not just Hong Kong – have suspended flights from the United Kingdom because of this worry. You cannot blame those places including Hong Kong because the then-situation was very severe when we were told that this virus was 70 per cent more infectious, when we were told by the relevant minister in the United Kingdom government that it was almost out of control. If it was almost out of control in the United Kingdom and the receiving places like Hong Kong – we do have a lot of returnees from the United Kingdom accounting for about one third of arrivals at Hong Kong International Airport – if we did nothing, you imagine, it would be putting our city at great risk. So we have to take this measure, which was very difficult, because it involves Hong Kong residents and many of them are students or parents who have gone to visit the students and they need to come back. The Immigration Department have received about 190 requests for assistance. The Government will seriously look into the situation and see whether we could make some adjustments later on, but as far as I'm aware even the major airline flying between Hong Kong and London has suspended their flights until some time this month so we will together review the situation.

The second question is about Transport Department or about these so-called public registers where members of public could apply to inspect by paying a fee in most circumstances. We have to understand the purpose of allowing members of public to inspect these personal data held by the Government when that particular person came up to apply for something, whether it is a car license or they do a land transaction or they register a company so they have these personal data with us. As a government body we have to be responsible in ensuring the privacy of these persons, especially after what we have seen in the past one to two years that many people, when inspecting these public registers, got hold of the personal data and did all sorts of intimidation, doxxing that would harm the people. The administrative measure taken by the Transport Department is no more than just to alert the person that somebody has checked your personal data. That's it. I really don't see how this will undermine the work of the media and hence I do not see why media should be exempted from the administrative procedure that the Transport Department has put in place. Now I can tell you that other departments which possess public registers are reviewing along the same line, that whether they need to put in administrative measures taking into account the legal provisions as well as the nature of the registers that they are holding.

Myself and the Secretary for Justice have time and again made public statements that we should respect the Judiciary, we should uphold judicial independence, we should not criticise judges for their decisions without any grounds or facts, that is, pure allegations. Similarly we condemn any such personal attacks on the judges. But if there are people who want to express a view based on their understanding of the law and the facts and the evidence, then this is what the media always advocate – this is a freedom of speech. I really would not see how these comments would put pressure on the Judiciary. I understand the departing Chief Justice may be holding a press conference later today. I'm sure if you ask him he will say the same. Every judge has taken a judicial oath and they would not be intimidated or undermined by these comments in their impartiality in adjudicating cases on the basis of the facts and the evidence before them, so there is no worry of that sort of situation.

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