

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (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 (August 31):

Reporter: The first question, there have been more people saying that Hong Kong's border with the Mainland won't reopen until after the winter Olympics, could you verify if this could be a possibility? If so, how can Hong Kong's economy survive without reopening to the international world? The second question, what's your take on the legal status of the alliance behind the June 4 vigil? How do you see the criticisms over the crackdown of the civic society? The third question, you just mentioned about Cheng Chung-tai's case, but the Government gave no reasons or clues on why he was disqualified. So how could you give assurance to parties or other politicians in joining the upcoming elections while they are not clear about the red line? Thanks.

Chief Executive: Of the three questions, first, I would not comment on any rumour or speculation, but it doesn't make sense for an authority to stipulate when or how the border will be opened. When I said border will be opened, that's a short cut to addressing the problem, because Hong Kong's border with the Mainland has never been closed. Since January last year, we managed to maintain at least the Shenzhen Bay land border crossing and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, and of course, the airport. I would not comment on that sort of speculation, but my response is, it doesn't make sense for us to predetermine situation – whether we will be able to achieve that sort of quarantine-free travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, because it much depends on the COVID-19 situation. The utmost priority of Hong Kong now is to control the COVID-19 situation. Since more or less we have managed to achieve and attain zero local confirmed cases in the last couple of weeks, now the most important defence is to prevent importation of cases as far as possible, and also through other stringent testing and quarantine measures to prevent the infected cases from going into the community. When that has been built up, then that is the time that we could start to have some quarantine-free travel in a very gradual and orderly manner.

About reassuring business, the international business, if you have read my last report, the 19th report on how the Hong Kong SAR Government tackles COVID-19, which was released last Friday, every time I sent an English version to the business community, whether they are Consuls-General or members of the international business community. I said therein that, yes, international businesses want travel, they want to travel to the Mainland, they want to travel back to their home countries and all over the world, but the most important advantage of Hong Kong is being the gateway into Mainland China because that's a huge market. Many companies have chosen Hong Kong because of that very unique positioning of accessing the Mainland market.

They have told me repeatedly that they wanted to go to the Mainland to inspect their business, to talk to investors and consumers. I explained to them that if that is our joint priority, then we should support and embrace the border control measures as far as overseas arrivals are concerned, because the more you relax on the overseas arrivals, the lesser you will have the chance to go to the Mainland. It's a very simple explanation of the situation. I promise them that we would try to make our measures more humanistic whenever possible, but to relax altogether the restrictions on arrivals is not a wise move for Hong Kong.

The second issue is about the actions taken by the police under the National Security Law. The National Security Law has a very important article, which is Article 43, which enables the police force to take extra measures. There are altogether six extra measures under Article 43. As I have said many, many times, the National Security Law is not a piece of "toothless" law. It is to be fully implemented and used whenever necessary to safeguard national security and to stamp out any activities that will endanger national security. I am confident that the police is using this power properly, based on the evidence that they have, to ask for the information. I would not agree with you in describing these law enforcement activities as a crackdown of the civic society. We respect civic society. Hong Kong has a large number of NGOs, think tanks and research agencies who are shouldering their civic responsibility in trying to improve Hong Kong's situation. But there are associations, whether they are registered or not registered, that exist to undermine Hong Kong's security, let alone to advocate independence or collude with external forces to harm Hong Kong and the country. That is not something that we should condone. These are proper law enforcement activities taken by the law enforcement authorities, in this case, the Hong Kong Police Force.

About the disqualification of a person who was supposed to be an ex-officio member of the Election Committee, this is provided for in the local legislation, which was enacted in May this year to implement the amendments to Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law passed by the National People's Congress Standing Committee. You should take comfort that there is only one such case. In that particular case, the CERC, the Candidate Eligibility Review Committee, has sought the advice of the national security committee which I chair. Based on the findings of the police force, we have provided a view to the CERC and the CERC has taken that on board and decided that that particular person could not meet the statutory requirements laid down in law, so he is disqualified. According to the law, no information concerning the National Security Law could be disclosed. That was the legal position. But, in another context, in another piece of law, we have laid down very clearly what we mean by "not fulfilling the statutory requirements for a public official", the negative list and the positive list, in the course of interacting with a particular person about his qualification. There is a process – this is to fulfil the natural justice – to show him the documents that we have, the evidence that we have collected, and give him a chance. All these processes have been faithfully followed in the case, but we could not disclose it.

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