

## 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 (January 4):

Reporter: On COVID, figures are at an eight-month high. Will this affect plans to reopen the border? And experts have said they are really struggling to find out and trace people who have been at the restaurant in question. Will the "LeaveHomeSafe" app be upgraded as they've suggested? And second, last week, and on several other occasions, you denied there was a chilling effect over press freedom concerns. With Citizen News citing vague laws and staff safety as their reason to close, do you accept that, you know, this is a perfect example of the chilling effect? And third, you just mentioned meeting the HKJA (Hong Kong Journalists Association). Would you be willing to meet them again to discuss some of these concerns? Thanks.

Chief Executive: First of all, the spread of the Omicron variant into Hong Kong community is worrying because of the high transmissibility of this variant. That's why we have taken all the measures that we have put in place as a result of two years of experience in fighting COVID-19. But inevitably, with a local infection of Omicron, although the several cases now confirmed could all be traced back to an imported case according to the analysis, that will certainly have an impact on the ongoing discussions with the Mainland authorities on resuming some normal travel. I would not deny that that has an impact, which means that we will have to wait another while before we could put in place this very sought-after resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland.

The second point is about the tracing. I heard some experts were still commenting on the effectiveness of Hong Kong's tracing system, but I would say that actually, Hong Kong's contact tracing system was pretty effective. If you imagine, with a restaurant with 64 tables involving 207 customers, within a few days we managed to trace 201 and managed to put them into a quarantine centre for 21 days. That was a major achievement by the contact tracing office. By the way, the contact tracing office already involves a lot of disciplinary colleagues. I heard one person saying that, "Why don't you call the Police?" The Police and other disciplinary colleagues have already been deployed to the contact tracing office for quite some time. I think that we have been very effective and the "LeaveHomeSafe" app has broken the record of giving notification to more than 30 000 people who may have patronised this restaurant and other places and hence they have come forward for their compulsory testing in the last few days.

But other than commending the efforts of my own colleagues, I would really want to take this occasion to express my deepest appreciation to the people of Hong Kong. Hong Kong would not have come that far in controlling

COVID-19 without the full co-operation of our people. This high discipline of wearing a mask, this willingness to comply with the RTD, that is the restriction-testing declaration, or the CTN, the compulsory testing notice, and being put in quarantine for 21 days through no fault of their own, I really want to thank the people of Hong Kong and they deserve to be recognised by all of us in fighting this epidemic.

Now, about press freedom, there have been a lot of criticisms, especially from the Western media, about the closure of these two online media organisations. I could not, on behalf of these two organisations and their responsible people, explain what they mean by a "chilling effect". But I certainly would strongly refute any allegation that this is related to the implementation of the National Security Law. If implementation of the National Security Law would undermine press freedom, then we would not be seeing any press freedom in the Western world. You name me which Western country does not have national security law. They have national security legislation far more draconian than the Hong Kong National Security Law, which is very well defined – it covers offences clearly defined and we already have three convicted cases in court. All these rules and basis have been clearly laid out, so I would really dispute that allegation. Similarly, this morning when I read news saying that because of the closure of an online media organisation, press freedom in Hong Kong faces extinction, or Hong Kong's free press faces collapse, I just could not accept that sort of allegations.

Nothing is more important than the rule of law in Hong Kong, and journalists and media organisations, like all of us, have to respect and comply with the law. If they are fearful of not being able to comply with the law, then they have to make up their mind and take the necessary decisions. Thank you.

Reporter: Will you meet the JA?

Chief Executive: I have no plan to meet it. I was referring to the meeting when I took office. I just want to say that when I took office, I've been as liberal as possible in engaging people from different parts of the political spectrum. But what has happened? Nobody could anticipate that actually Hong Kong was under that sort of very severe challenges with a lot of people advocating independence, colluding with foreign forces and undermining the power of the state as well as the Hong Kong SAR Government.

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