

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 (April 26):

Reporter: Did you see the recent commentaries from People's Daily and other state media on sticking to "zero COVID" and warning against further easing the border control measures or social distancing? Will you consider further lowering the flight ban, flight hold or easing the social distancing restrictions given there is no rebound of infections following the Easter holiday? And second, you have repeatedly said that Hong Kong's press freedom is not under threat, but yesterday the FCC (Foreign Correspondents' Club) becomes the latest body to have withdrawn from a human rights press award and a former university scholar known for outspokenness in the press has also left the city. Given the uncertainties, how can it be said that Hong Kong's press freedom is still thriving? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, I have repeatedly said, during the last two years of fighting the epidemic, that the situation has to be continuously reviewed, and the right decisions have to be made trying to strike a balance between the public health considerations, the socio-economic development needs and the people's tolerance and acceptance level. So with that in mind, the Government has to continuously adjust its policy measures, and that's exactly what we have done. It is gratifying to know that after more than three months since the fifth wave of COVID-19 hit us, and hit us hard in Hong Kong, we are on the path to returning or resuming normal activities.

As far as social distancing measures are concerned, we will continue to press ahead with the three stages of relaxation that I announced on March 21, unless there is a sudden surge in COVID-19 infection cases. But that looks quite unlikely based on our observations and the experts' advice because of the high level of hybrid immunity that Hong Kong has achieved. We have effectively and successfully rolled out the first stage and I noticed that many Hong Kong people, many restaurant operators, are very happy with this first-stage relaxation. The second stage is intended to take place about a month from the first phase, maybe the second half of May. This is the plan at the moment.

As far as border controls are concerned, these are still very important measures in order to reduce the importation of infected cases into Hong Kong, especially when many places are already removing the restrictions and social distancing measures, etc. We still have this policy to prevent and reduce a large number of imported cases into Hong Kong. But again, using my analogy of striving to strike the balance between the three factors, we have made certain adjustments and announced them last Friday to take effect, mostly on May 1. For the time being, we don't have any plans to further relax the

border controls, the flight ban or the flight suspension measures that we have put in place.

Press freedom is one of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Basic Law. In the last 25 years since reunification, all these human rights and freedoms have been safeguarded and upheld in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. But from time to time, there will be some concerns and worries arising from isolated incidents. I would say that the two examples you have given are those isolated incidents, which might have given people that impression, especially people who tended to misunderstand the constitutional safeguards for press freedom, that is one has to observe the law in exercising freedom. I have no particular comment on those two incidents that you have quoted, because the first incident is an award event, which was organised by a private organisation. If that same organisation decided not to hold that event, a government official cannot comment on it. The answer has to be given by that particular organisation. The second incident is about people leaving Hong Kong whether for good or for a short while. This is in exercise of individual freedom to enter and to exit Hong Kong. Again, it is a right enshrined in the Basic Law.

Thank you.

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