

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (September 20):

Reporter: (Professor) Yuen Kwok-yung said COVID-19 has become endemic, and COVID rules should be relaxed to return to normal. What do you think about this and is the Government considering to scrap hotel quarantine? And Hong Kong may record its second worst deficits at more than \$100 billion. Is this alarming and what will the Government do to maintain Hong Kong's fiscal stability? And also international events like Hong Kong Marathon is called off and dragon boat race is moved to Thailand due to COVID rules, so what will the Government do to allow room for these sports events to go ahead? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The Government's position is very clear, as I've explained earlier, is that while we will do our best to control the epidemic, we aim to have the maximum connection with the international world and also to reduce the inconvenience to people who arrive at Hong Kong. That is a very clear goal. And I am maintaining that goal in one direction, and I am trying all our best to ensure that we don't roll back any measures that we're doing. The direction is clear and we are ensuring that we don't roll back. That's number one.

The second thing is, we want to ensure that as we progress to allow more activities, we do it in an orderly way, so that when people go through the process, they feel comfortable with the process. We will reduce the inconvenience as much as we can because every step will involve deployment of resources to ensure we put into the right amount of people and the right amount of support so as to ensure that things don't get disordered. We will be actively monitoring the situation so that we will do this as quickly as possible. I'm conscious of the fact that while we need to control the spread of the COVID, we also need to ensure that there will be maximum activities in society and economic activities for society to carry on. I'm also conscious of the need to maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness by ensuring that we have a good connectivity. So you can see we are doing everything in that direction, and we will be announcing the measures once we've made decision about what we're going to do.

Regarding the big events that everyone of us has been very interested in such as the marathon (Hong Kong Marathon) and also the dragon boat event, of course, we will be doing all our best so that we will be having all these events to happen in Hong Kong because this is what everybody wants to see, and it will create a lot of economic gains for Hong Kong as well. We will be trying our best to talk to the organisers of all these activities. Our position is very clear. We are very supportive, and we want both sides to

work towards the goal of making it happen. So we will have to openly and directly talk to each other, so as to try (to find) a good solution for Hong Kong, because it is in the organisers' interest and Hong Kong Government's interest and the community's interest for these things to happen. So I want that common will to be developed for the good of Hong Kong. And the Government will work towards the goal, regardless of what the challenges can be.

As regards the economic situation, we know that the threats to the economy do exist and there are a lot of reasons for it, including the interest rate hike and also the supply chain being disrupted in a lot of areas and because of COVID as well. So what we have been doing is ensuring that the right injection is being made into stimulating the economy. The next phase of the consumption voucher will soon be rolled out in October. That, we hope, will add to the consumption element in society so as to generate some economic activities, and also some relief measures have been introduced by the Government to help SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), etc.

But there are also some positive figures such as the employment rate has dropped, if you look at the figures. So we should continue to have confidence in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong, despite COVID, our strengths remain, such as our good infrastructure, our low taxation system, and also the resilience of society. We have a very strong workforce and we have a lot of competitive advantages such as being the third (largest) financial centre and the common law system which ensures that a lot of the systems and things that we do are very compatible with international rules and norms. We should be confident of ourselves while we work together.

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