

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 (July 11):

Reporter: The first question is, as you mentioned in Hong Kong Economic Journal forum yesterday, the Government received more than 100 000 applications from different talent schemes. How many applicants have been approved and arrived Hong Kong? And what are the mainstream industries that the talents belong to? And the second question, the Chinese Government starts to ban marine import from 10 prefectures (of Japan). Will the Hong Kong Government follow Chinese government policy? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I announced yesterday the situation regarding applications for admission into Hong Kong through our talent schemes. I'm very glad to inform everybody that within six months, there have been already over 100 000 applications. Based on the previous record, roughly about, I think, 60 per cent of the applications will be approved, and this trend continues. We will be doing an analysis later as to the different areas of talent that these applicants will fall into. It will be an exercise, but what is important is we look at the overall shortage of talent that Hong Kong is now facing.

I have repeatedly said that we have lost over 200 000 in the past three years of people who have moved out of Hong Kong, even though we have also people moving in. Also, even if that is a very natural phenomenon in Hong Kong's history as an international city, as a free port, that people move in and out, it is an actual fact that we are having shortages in different areas, particularly talented people. So the purpose of inviting talent to come to Hong Kong is, first of all, to fulfil the shortage. The second thing is to make us stronger. It's not just making up the number. It's also making up a strong team in Hong Kong for us to be very competitive, because every city, every country is fighting for talent. Some of the cities and countries are actually launching some very attractive talent admission schemes. I'm very glad that we received very good support for our talent admission schemes. We will continue to do so as to see how we can maintain that momentum, and also how we will be attracting talent to particularly fit Hong Kong's requirement because we are very determined to develop Hong Kong in eight areas, which are the traditional strengths and the emerging strengths of Hong Kong. We'll continue to look at the figures. When we have more information, we will inform the public.

Regarding the Japanese Government's intention of pouring into the sea water that may be contaminated with radioactive elements as a result of the previous nuclear plant accident, I will take this matter very seriously. In regard to food safety and public health issue, I will be serious and be willing to err on the side of caution, because the action of pouring into the seas such a large quantity of contaminated water 24 hours a day, continuously non-stop for a long period, which may last for over 30 years, is so

unprecedented that the risks are very unknown in other areas. I must ensure that food safety is protected in Hong Kong. I must ensure that members of the public will be reassured that food is safe in Hong Kong. That reassurance is also important.

I can tell you that the action we will take, if the exercise really starts, is that we'll be banning a large number of prefectures' sea products beyond, of course, the present scale. At present we are banning the sea products of one prefecture, plus doing thorough radioactive checks of the food products of four other prefectures. We will definitely go beyond that. I have already tasked the Secretary for Environment and Ecology to form and lead a multi-department team to design our action plan and to design our implementation. The Chief Secretary for Administration, of course, will supervise and co-ordinate. What is important in regard to food safety is that for an unprecedented exercise like this, when no expert can guarantee us that there will be no harm to food safety, that there will be no risk of citizens having consumed products that may face risks of contamination that their health will not be affected, particularly when the risk to consumption of radioactive food will only be realised after several years when a person's health condition becomes seriously infected. This is an issue that I have to take seriously, because it affects the present population, and will also affect the next generation, our children. We will be taking decisive action, and we will announce the details.

I note the catering industry will be affected, but I'm sure that they will understand that we're forced to make a decision because of this unprecedented exercise. I'm sure that they will know food safety is important, and they will know that the public's confidence in food safety is so important that it will affect the whole catering sector, if we don't handle it in a way that citizens will feel safe. We'll be formulating the action plan, and the Secretary for Environment and Ecology will make an announcement as early as possible once the action plan is formulated.

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