

Transcript of remarks by CS at media session

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau; and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, met the media today (January 30). Following is the transcript of remarks from the media session:

Reporter: A lot of people are very desperate to get a face mask these days and will the Government consider following the example of Singapore or Macao to actually distribute those masks to the general public? And also, secondly, will the Government reconsider the option of closing the border or really barring Mainland people from entering Hong Kong? And also some pro-establishment lawmakers have been suggesting that maybe the Government can actually stop Mainlanders who have those valid individual visit permits from coming in. Will the Government consider doing that as well?

Chief Secretary for Administration: Now, on the question of whether the Government will hand out masks to the Hong Kong community, I think the whole question hinges on the supply, local supply. And if we can tackle the supply at source, I think the problem will be solved basically, you know. That's why we have been leaving no stone unturned in the last few weeks, trying to play the role of a facilitator. For example, most of the importers actually aren't from the Mainland. They are Hong Kong-based companies but they are operating, manufacturing on the Mainland. That's why we are facilitating by contacting the relevant ministries of our country, customs and so on to ensure that the masks can arrive Hong Kong on time and also in adequate amount.

Because of the apparent shortage on the Mainland also, you can imagine the situation is very tense at the moment. It's also a global situation, a global problem now. It's not just a problem for Hong Kong or China. In fact it's a global issue. Even the WHO recognises that the shortage of masks hits many, many countries in the world. That's why, in the last week or so, we've managed to facilitate 8 million pieces of masks to come to Hong Kong – some arrived yesterday, some arriving today, some arriving tomorrow. So I'm sure that in the next few days more masks will be available on the market. Secondly, 24 million pieces of masks are ready for shipment, about to be manufactured. In fact, everything is ready. Green light is given on the Mainland, so we expect 24 million pieces of masks coming to Hong Kong in the not too distant future. So I think it's a question of market forces, supply and demand.

The other question, I'm afraid I will focus today on the issue of masks. The steering committee led by the Chief Executive is meeting right now. It will continue to meet tomorrow, the fifth time, underlining the importance we attach to this issue facing us in Hong Kong. She will chair a press conference tomorrow to answer questions other than masks, so you can leave

the question until tomorrow. OK? Thank you.

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