

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (March 23). Also joining were the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Thank you, Mrs Lam. On the new border control measures, can you explain why you are doing this now? Why couldn't it have been done when you issued the red travel alerts earlier? And secondly, we've seen the pro-establishment and the pro-democracy camps call for this full border closure just today. Are you bowing to political pressure by agreeing to do this? And finally, on changing the requirements for selling of alcohol, that could have a huge impact on people working in that industry. Will the Government offer any sort of guarantees in terms of jobs and salaries, and how would that be enforced?

Chief Executive: Thank you for the two questions. First of all, there are several regimes that we could resort to in ensuring the objective of reducing people flow either from overseas countries or from the Mainland. One is of course what you have mentioned, the travel alert, the red travel alert, but that's outbound. That's warning Hong Kong people not to go to these places.

The second measure is the quarantine measure. That is for inbound travellers, arrivals, we imposed certain quarantine arrangements which will have a deterrent effect. I have told you two experiences. On February 8, when we imposed this 14-day quarantine arrangement on arrivals from Mainland, we have seen a 90 per cent drop in arrivals, whether it's Hong Kong residents or non-Hong Kong residents. And then on March 19 when we introduced this 14-day quarantine arrangement at the airport, we saw a drastic drop in other visitors, but the Hong Kong residents returning had not seen a similar decrease because a lot of Hong Kong people are rushing back because of the flu situation in the overseas countries.

The third measure is immigration policy. Under the Immigration Ordinance, we could impose requirements disallowing people to come to Hong Kong for various reasons. What I have mentioned today is using the immigration policy, that from Wednesday onwards we will disallow non-Hong Kong residents coming from overseas countries arriving at the Hong Kong International Airport to enter Hong Kong. You have to understand we have different regimes. And in the last two months in leading this fight against the virus, I have time and again emphasised we are basing our decisions on science, on facts and figures, on evidence, and also have the expert advice of the four professors on the expert advisory panel. Politics or pressure are not something that come into the formula because it would be very risky to base public health decisions just because certain people have demanded for it. The difference between Saturday and today, one is of course the changing

circumstances, which make people even more worried about these imported cases coming into Hong Kong. Secondly, we have to understand the impact of the measure imposed on March 19 and identify who are the people that despite a 14-day quarantine, they were still coming into Hong Kong so that when we deny entry, we know exactly who are the people to be affected and whether there are alternative ways to cater for the interests of these people. There is this category which I'll share with you. I explained on Saturday that amongst the five to six hundred arrivals still coming into Hong Kong after the 14-day quarantine requirement, there was a large number of Macao residents, because you understand that we are an aviation hub and a lot of Macao residents overseas have to come in through the Hong Kong International Airport and they want to go back to Macao. The Macao Government wants to welcome them back to Macao even if they are coming back from a highly infectious place because these are their people. So we have an agreement with or understanding with the Macao Government that they will ask these Macao residents overseas to register with the Macao Government. We will have the name list of these Macao residents, so upon arrival we'll allow them to come in and then immediately – they will not stay in Hong Kong – the Macao Government will send a coach to take them back to Macao via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

While I said that from Wednesday onwards we will deny entry of non-Hong Kong residents, this special arrangement with Macao will continue because as far as we could gather from Macao, there are over 1 000 Macao residents still waiting to come back to Macao. This is why I have to explain that sometimes certain decisions of the Government will give rise to certain consequences, so it's much more prudent to understand the consequences of our policy decision and try to reduce the adverse consequences that will affect people or cause people hardship to a minimum.

Reporter: And about the bars, Mrs Lam?

Chief Executive: It's not just the bars. I'm afraid that many sectors, many enterprises, are being severely hit by this coronavirus. Despite the fact that the Government has rolled out a \$30 billion package under the Anti-epidemic Fund, and another \$120 billion under the recent Budget initiatives, I understand that there is this demand or aspiration for more support from the Government. And on this occasion, when bars – actually it's not just bars, it's all the restaurants and bars that have a liquor licence – will not be allowed to sell or supply liquor, certainly their business will be affected. We will certainly consider what further measures we should put in place to help these establishments.

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