

Transcript of remarks of press conference on anti-epidemic measures (with photo/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on anti-epidemic measures this morning (March 31). Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: Firstly, we'd like to ask about the flight bans being lifted tomorrow. A lot of people are obviously excited about this. So is there going to be enough manpower to take arrivals from the international airport to the designated quarantine hotels? Previously, even before the flight bans, people wait hours or even up to a day to be sent for their on-arrival test to be approved and they can be escorted to their accommodation. And can you give us a figure on how many flights are expected to come in from the nine countries tomorrow, and is that a figure that is a lot or do you gauge that as not significant at the moment? And also can you relay if you are worried or not that the recent resignation of overseas judges will affect Hong Kong's judicial independence reputation?

Chief Executive: Thank you for the two questions. First, tomorrow (April 1) will be the first day that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will lift the place-specific flight suspension in respect of nine countries. I haven't got the latest figures but the figures that I was given yesterday indicated that there should be over 20 flights with over 2 000 passengers coming back to Hong Kong. That is disregarding the transit passengers, because on these flights we could have transit passengers. Arrival passengers landing in Hong Kong should be about 2 000. But as I said, the figures could be changing every moment. We have taken it very seriously to make sure that the whole process of people, Hong Kong residents, arriving and then taking their "test-and-hold" PCR test (polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test) at the airport, and then being transported to their designated quarantine hotels is a smooth process. That's why an inter-departmental meeting was held yesterday, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, to make sure that we have the capacity, the staff and the testing contractor who will be geared up to look after the several thousand passengers arriving, and also the transportation, because we have to arrange designated transportation. I can tell you that we have made full preparation for their return, and I hope that they will all have a pleasant trip back to Hong Kong.

I should just mention that the anti-epidemic bags that we are packing yesterday, today and tomorrow would also be made available to these Hong Kong residents coming back, probably at the hotels, so that they could also do the rapid antigen tests. If they have negative test results on Day 6 and Day 7 after obtaining a PCR negative test result on Day 5, they could be discharged from their designated quarantine hotels.

About the resignation of the two UK judges who have been serving on the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region since 2017 and 2021 respectively, I, together with the Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, have expressed regret on their resignations, because non-permanent judges from common law jurisdictions are playing a very valuable and useful role to Hong Kong and it's a vote of confidence in the judicial independence of Hong Kong. It is something to be regretted that they have decided that they have to leave. But what I find very disturbing, and I could not accept, is the association of the judges' resignations with either the implementation of the National Security Law or the practice of individual rights and freedoms in Hong Kong.

The rule of law has remained as robust as ever in the past 25 years after the reunification. The National Security Law is a very essential and legitimate piece of legislation to restore law and order in Hong Kong after what we have gone through in the latter part of 2019, with a spate of unprecedented riots all over the territory. Every country has a national security law. Our National Security Law is much narrower in scope, and it's very clear on the four types of offences. Our National Security Law is perhaps one of the few worldwide that allow non-Chinese national judges to adjudicate. In most jurisdictions, if you want to sit on a case concerning that country's national security, the basic requirement is the judge has to be a national of that country. But in our case, because of the provisions in the Basic Law, we do have a lot of non-Chinese national judges sitting not only on the Court of Final Appeal but at various levels of the Judiciary. The NSL, the Hong Kong National Security Law, does not prohibit overseas judges or expatriate judges to adjudicate on cases concerning the National Security Law. So, now to use that excuse as a reason of no longer sending judges, serving judges, to sit on the Court of Final Appeal is totally untenable.

There is also a misperception that judges, overseas judges, sitting on the Court of Final Appeal is a legitimate endorsement of the Government. That is never the case. I would suggest you go back to all the documents we issued about the appointment of CFA judges. They are much valued in helping Hong Kong to safeguard judicial independence. They are not lending us any legitimacy. "Us" means the administration. To suggest on this occasion that they could no longer sit on the Court of Final Appeal because to do so would appear to endorse the administration is a very fallacious argument, and I can only draw the conclusion that there must be quite a lot of politics behind it. In fact, in the last 15, 16 hours, all the commentators in Hong Kong, including very distinguished Senior Counsels, have all suspected that this is a sort of political manipulation. I do not want to repeat what happened in London on March 30, that is yesterday, with the UK parliamentarians debating on this issue; with the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, justice secretary, Lord Chancellor all speaking with the same wavelength; and then the two judges – two very fine and distinguished judges – tendering their resignations.

Having said all these, I remain very confident, because your question is whether I was worried. I was not worried. I remain very confident that we

still have very fine judges in the Judiciary, both local and overseas, serving at the various levels of the Judiciary. Each one of them will serve with devotion in accordance with the judicial oath that they have taken. Hong Kong will continue to benefit significantly from an independent judiciary which adjudicates without fear or favour. I'm sure that we will continue to see fine judges being appointed at the various levels of the Judiciary. Thank you.

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

