

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 (April 7). Also joining were the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, and the Head of the Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office, Ms Doris Ho. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: Due to the flight ban mechanism, more routes have been banned since April 1. Earlier this week over 70 per cent of flights scheduled to land on a single day were cancelled. This in effect has erased Hong Kong's easing of travel restrictions and made it very challenging for Hong Kong residents to return to the city. Yesterday, the Director General of the International Air Transport Association said that Hong Kong is essentially off the map now. So will the Government review the flight ban mechanism again, including the strict criteria of three positive cases per flight? Or will a review need to wait until after the implementation of social distancing easing later this month? What is your response to business groups who say that the travel easing so far has not amounted to very much? And on John Lee entering the CE (Chief Executive) race, I know you don't want to comment on his candidacy, but what do you think the next Chief Executive's priority should be? Should it be restoring Hong Kong's reputation as an international financial centre or focusing on the security situation? And, finally, after you publicly announced on Monday that you would not seek a second term as CE, Beijing still has yet to publicly respond. Have they communicated with you directly, and do you see the lack of their public response as a sign that they're dissatisfied with your performance in office? Do you personally have any regrets about your time as Chief Executive? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, there is no doubt that Hong Kong is a very important aviation hub. And actually, in the 14th Five-Year Plan, through my strong request, the status as an international aviation hub was written into the 14th Five-Year Plan as one of the areas that the Central People's Government will strongly support Hong Kong. Previously it only mentioned transportation, but in the 14th Five-Year Plan we managed to get two specific references. One is to transportation, including maritime and other things; the other is to an international aviation hub in anticipation of the completion of the Three-runway System. During my term, I've been doing all I could to support the development of the airport as well as the Airport City.

The fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic has really hit us hard, and up till now we are still adhering to the policies of preventing the importation of infected cases and at the same time, through social distancing measures, to reduce or avoid the spread of local infections. But that doesn't mean we will not continuously review the situation and make the necessary adjustments. I made the announcement on March 21 to lift the place-specific

flight suspension in respect of nine countries, which had been imposed since January, and it is not right to say that this travel easing has no impact, because according to my data, since April 1, on average a thousand or over a thousand Hong Kong residents have returned. Prior to that it was a daily average of 200. Many Hong Kong residents have made use of this lifting of the place-specific flight suspension and returned to Hong Kong. And so far I have to thank the Airport Authority, the airlines and all my colleagues to make this whole process as efficient and smooth as possible for these returnees, right from landing at the airport to the "test-and-hold" PCR (polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid) tests and then designated transport taking them to their designated quarantine hotels, and allowing them to leave after Day 6 and Day 7 with the RAT (rapid antigen test) negative test results. What we now discover since April 1 is, probably because of the very relaxed approach adopted in many places, some of the flights have brought back more than three or more cases upon arrival. One has to ask, if the requirement for pre-boarding is a PCR negative test result, is it really because of the circumstances that the negative test result of a person has turned positive after 10 or 15 hours upon arrival? We have to understand what has happened leading to these route-specific flight suspensions that we have imposed on airlines under the current policy. We will continue to review and make necessary adjustments in the light of the Hong Kong epidemic situation.

I don't want to comment on the work of the next Chief Executive, except to repeat what I said on an earlier occasion, that every Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should possess the quality to understand fully the dual accountability of the Chief Executive, which is very, very unique. The Chief Executive has dual responsibility – he or she is responsible to the Central People's Government and at the same time to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. I also said on that occasion that the Chief Executive will need to have a very good grasp of this unique principle of "one country, two systems", "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and a high degree of autonomy. Whoever possesses these qualities I'm sure will be able to do the job well.

My decision not to seek a second term is my decision. Why does anybody have to make a public response on my decision? I welcome my friends, my supporters, who send me messages that they did appreciate what I have done in my term, but there is no need for any official response from any government, including the Central People's Government. Thank you.

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

