

## Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (August 18):

Reporter: Question number one, do you actually have a concrete plan in saving the businesses or restaurants to make sure that they can survive now that the social distancing measures are extended for another week as many of them have said they're now on life support and they cannot survive any longer? And how soon in your opinion that the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) 3.0 can be rolled out? And also a question about sanctions from the United States. How are you going to promote Hong Kong to US businesses or even other overseas business if you are not welcome overseas? How should the international community see Hong Kong as a whole when its leader or other officials are not welcome there? And also about the new recruits, you mentioned that new recruits who are arrested or charged will have their contracts terminated. Why are you only targeting people arrested in illegal public activities rather than other offences like theft? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. First is, we are still in a very severe situation as far as the COVID-19 epidemic is concerned. There are several indicators which do not give us that sense of comfort, that this is a time for relaxation of these social distancing measures. One is we have not seen a downward trend yet. Yes, the number of cases has reduced to two digits instead of three digits half a month ago but they are still fluctuating from one day to another day. Second is we are seeing some worrying clusters emerging. One is at the container port involving maybe thousands of workers, the other is in the dorms resided by the foreign domestic helpers when they are changing jobs while in Hong Kong. Third is our testing has not been conducted as comprehensively or as speedily as we would like to see. So with these factors, it is simply not possible to do significant relaxation, and also by the same token, it would be very difficult for me as the Chief Executive to give you a plan on when the epidemic will go away. I don't think any leaders of any governments including the World Health Organization could do that sort of projection. In fact, the more common way of saying it: until an effective vaccine is discovered and produced and widely applied, we probably will have to live with this virus for a pretty long time under what we call "new normal" circumstances.

Now many industries are hard hit by this epidemic, especially those providing hospitality, catering, tourism and personal services because of the social distancing measures, and the 16 000 eatery outlets in Hong Kong are amongst the hard hit sectors. That's why in AEF 1.0 and 2.0 we always have an item for the catering industry, and this has been welcomed by the sector when the particular measures were introduced. We will engage the sector and try to

come up with measures that we would provide them with more relief, so that we could all preserve our capacity and wait for the economy to come back.

When will the AEF 3.0 be rolled out? On the last two occasions – as an indicator, I wouldn't say this is a commitment – we took about three weeks from announcement to funding approval by the Finance Committee. I understand that the Legislative Council President and the Chairman of the House Committee have decided to convene a special meeting of the House Committee on August 28 to discuss our anti-epidemic work. That will be about 10 days from now, so hopefully we will be able to present some proposals for discussion and thereafter take the case to the Finance Committee for approval because there is no way that we could meet those additional requirements from the contingency that I used to tell you. There used to be a contingency within the AEF 2.0, but that contingency has also been more or less exhausted over the last few weeks.

Now, sanctions- these sanctions are totally unjustified and we will take up some of those sanctions, especially those involving trade, because Hong Kong is a separate member of the World Trade Organization, to be mistreated by another member of the World Trade Organization breaches the rules and regulations of this international body, so we will take up with the World Trade Organization against those sanctions. But your question's focus seems to be on myself – If I'm being sanctioned by America, I couldn't go to the US, how could I do overseas promotion? To be very honest with you, since taking office in 2017, I have not been to the United States. I had been planning, but I have not been to there, partly is because in 2016, as the Chief Secretary, I have done a very extensive US official trip covering three cities of San Francisco, New York and Washington DC. Now, without a physical visit by the leader of the Government doesn't mean that we could not do overseas promotion work. We still have three Economic and Trade Offices in America and we have our Invest Hong Kong arms which would be very happy to introduce Hong Kong's strengths, especially in the Greater Bay Area, in the financial services to US companies interested in setting up their business in Hong Kong, and we can also work through the chambers. I hope that in asking that question, you too will feel that the leader of this Government has been mistreated by the US administration. But that, never mind, as I said, despite some inconvenience in my personal affairs that is nothing that I will take to heart at all, we will continue to do what is right for the country and for Hong Kong.

Now, new recruits, i.e. the probationers. One is, civil servants are public officers and we have very high expectations of every member of the civil service. They have to, under the national security law, pledge allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and to uphold the Basic Law. They are subject to a more stringent set of standards and I would advise whoever wants to join the civil service of the HKSAR, they have to make sure that they can fulfil those requirements. In terms of management of the civil service, recruitment is important, so we bring in the right people. Second, their probation period is very important. We want to observe these civil servants to ensure that they meet the high standards that I have just described because once they move on to confirmation, our rules

and regulations make it very difficult for us to dismiss a permanent employment civil servant. This time round, the Civil Service Bureau has focused on the probationers, advising the heads of departments to make sure that they are monitoring and observing not only the performance of the probationers on the job but also their conduct, their other behaviours to make sure that they will be good enough to continue to serve the people of Hong Kong, being an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China.

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

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## **Government introduces enhancement measures for Distance Business Programme**

The Innovation and Technology Commission today (August 18) introduced enhancement measures for the Distance Business Programme to further support enterprises to develop distance business during the epidemic.

"The Programme has received an overwhelming response since its launch, reflecting the enterprises' keen demand for developing distance business during the epidemic. In view of the extended epidemic situation, we decided to introduce a number of enhancement measures in response to the industry's needs and to enable enterprises to make the best use of the funding to adopt a variety of information technology (IT) solutions to develop distance business," a spokesman for the Commission said.

The enhancements are as follows:

1. From 9am on August 31, enterprises may submit a second application in which the categories of the IT solutions must be different from the approved categories in the first application. They may submit a second application after they have replied to the Secretariat on the result of the first application. The assessment criteria of the Programme remain unchanged. Each enterprise may receive aggregate funding of up to \$300,000;
2. The funding period for subscription-based IT solutions will be extended from six months to 12 months. This arrangement is also applicable to applications approved earlier;
3. The restriction that related entities being regarded as one single entity are not allowed to submit applications will be lifted; and
4. Social enterprises with certifications issued by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service for the Distance Business Programme will also be eligible.

The Distance Business Programme aims to provide funding support for enterprises to continue business and services during the epidemic through adoption of IT solutions. The Programme was opened for application on May 18 this year. As at 10am today, it had received an overwhelming response of 17 372 funding applications from enterprises, 95 per cent of which are from small and medium-sized enterprises. Of the 14 056 applications processed so far, 12 818 have been approved with total funding of more than \$540 million.

The application deadline for the Programme is October 31. Enterprises wishing to apply for the Programme's funding are advised to submit applications online as soon as possible. Details are available on the Programme's website ([u.hkpc.org/dbiz](http://u.hkpc.org/dbiz)). For enquiries, please contact the Programme Secretariat by phone on 2788 5070 during business hours (9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except public holidays)) or via email at [dbiz@hkpc.org](mailto:dbiz@hkpc.org).

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## **Hongkong Post arranges COVID-19 testing for frontline staff**

â€‹Hongkong Post today (August 18) announced that a total of around 3 800 frontline staff responsible for mail delivery, outdoor duties and counter service will be arranged to undergo COVID-19 testing in batches on August 20 and 21. The Chief Executive announced on August 7 that the Targeted Group Testing Scheme would be extended to cover frontline employees of government departments with frequent contact with members of the public, including frontline staff of Hongkong Post.

Hongkong Post has hired a qualified testing agency for the provision of testing through established procurement procedures. The service contract has been awarded to Hong Kong Molecular Pathology Diagnostic Centre Limited and it will be responsible for providing Hongkong Post with a one-stop testing service. Nasopharyngeal swabs will be used for specimen-taking in this exercise and the testing agency will deploy manpower to collect specimens from staff. The specimens will then be delivered to the testing agency's laboratory for testing and the agency will notify Hongkong Post of the test results. Hongkong Post estimates that, for each of its approximately 3 800 frontline staff, testing will be completed within two days of taking a specimen.

Hongkong Post reassured that the testing agency will only have access to the serial numbers of specimens and will not acquire or retain any personal information of staff. Test results will be made known to staff through Hongkong Post. The testing agency will inform Hongkong Post of the serial number(s) for positive results, and Hongkong Post will then forward the information of the staff concerned to the Centre for Health Protection for

follow-up action.

Proper infection control measures will be implemented at the testing sites. Staff undergoing testing are required to have their body temperature checked and have their hands sanitised with alcohol-based handrub before entering the sites. Partitions will be installed at the whole area designated for specimen collection and queuing instructions will be marked on the floor as a reminder to maintain social distancing.

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## **Policy Address consultation launched**

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, today (August 18) announced the commencement of the public consultation exercise for the 2020 Policy Address. Mrs Lam will conduct online consultation sessions with stakeholders from different sectors to listen to their views on the Policy Address.

"Due to the need to focus on fighting the severe epidemic situation in Hong Kong, we have deferred the commencement of the public consultation exercise for the Policy Address this year. To maintain social distancing, I will conduct theme-based consultation sessions to listen to the views of stakeholders from the relevant sectors via video conferencing. Apart from fighting the epidemic, it is incumbent upon the Government to help the economy recover and relieve people's burdens. I sincerely invite members of the public to give their views on the 2020 Policy Address, so that we can formulate policy initiatives that meet the needs of our society," Mrs Lam said.

Starting from today members of the public can give their views through the Policy Address website ([www.policyaddress.gov.hk](http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk)), the dedicated Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/PolicyAddress2020](https://www.facebook.com/PolicyAddress2020)) or the Instagram account ([www.instagram.com/PolicyAddress2020](https://www.instagram.com/PolicyAddress2020)) for the 2020 Policy Address public consultation, or by email ([policyaddress@pico.gov.hk](mailto:policyaddress@pico.gov.hk)), phone (2432 1899) or fax (2537 9083).

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## **Chai Wan Public Fill Barging Point closed**

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

As Standby Signal No. 1 has been issued, Chai Wan Public Fill Barging Point has been closed at 8.30am today (August 18) until further notice.