

CS' "Letter to Hong Kong" (English only)

Following is the "Letter to Hong Kong" by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, broadcast on Radio Television Hong Kong this morning (April 11):

Good morning, Hong Kong.

The fourth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic has lasted for some time. To our great relief, the number of local confirmed cases has remained at low levels in recent days. The Government's multi-pronged strategy of continuously enhancing our anti-epidemic measures and preventing the importation of cases has proven effective.

Apart from keeping social distancing measures in place and mounting an extensive promotion of testing, we have specifically strengthened the manpower in contact tracing as this is a particularly crucial measure in cutting the chains of viral transmission.

The Department of Health's Contact Tracing Office has redoubled its efforts in speeding up the process of identifying close contacts. Their sterling efforts in contact tracing in the "gym cluster" last month have significantly helped in suppressing rebounds within a number of days. This was a remarkable success.

For this, I must thank all those who have helped, including some 200 colleagues seconded from the disciplined services to the Contact Tracing Office. Their experience in investigation has helped improve the precision and efficiency in contact tracing. Their deployment also frees up the medical and nursing staff for other professional duties.

Our vaccination programme is also well under way, offering every Hong Kong resident, aged 30 and above, a choice of vaccines.

Many experts have openly called on members of the public to get vaccinated. They stress the necessity for a considerable proportion of the population to receive vaccination in order to achieve herd immunity, which would in turn help Hong Kong get through the epidemic.

I urge you to take advantage of this city-wide free vaccination programme – for yourself and your family, friends and loved ones, and of course for the good of Hong Kong.

Despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic to our economy, Hong Kong is on the path of recovery. The economy is expected to rebound in the second half of this year. For that, we should thank our "one country, two systems" framework, our role as the business bridge between the Mainland of

China and the rest of the world, as well as the tremendous and historic opportunities in our integration into the overall development of our country.

The recent passage of China's 14th Five-Year Plan lends support to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and our pivotal role in it. It also supports Hong Kong's development as a global innovation and technology hub, an international aviation centre and an exchange centre for arts and culture between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

Central to that promising future of Hong Kong is the National Security Law, enacted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress last June. Its impact on restoring law and order has been telling.

Violence has all but disappeared. Advocacy of "Hong Kong independence" has subsided. Stability has been restored.

This means that you can now move about without fearing for your personal safety. It means, too, that you are free to express your views openly, while being respectful of the rights of others and not undermining national security.

Our rule of law and judicial independence remain solid and strong. So, too, are our basic rights and freedoms, including the freedom of speech, of the press, publication, association, assembly, procession and demonstration.

In short, Hong Kong has largely reverted to the safe, rational, inclusive and vibrant society it has long been celebrated for. The Hong Kong that we all know and love.

Safeguarding national security, after all, is essential to the good workings of any economy, any nation. National security is internationally understood and accepted. China is no different.

The 15th of April, that is next Thursday, is the first National Security Education Day after the National Security Law has been implemented in Hong Kong.

Those of you who use the Cross-Harbour Tunnel will have seen the big banner, with its clear blue-sky background and its message "Uphold national security, safeguard our home." It is part of a Hong Kong-wide publicity and public education campaign organised for the first time by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the Hong Kong SAR.

The campaign features a series of activities to raise our citizens' awareness about national security. Equally important, it is designed to deepen our understanding of the National Constitution, the Basic Law and national security.

Apart from an opening ceremony and seminar on the 15th of April, the programme includes an open day of the academies of our disciplined services, an exhibition at the City Gallery in Central that will run through the 2nd of

May, as well as other public events.

Going hand in hand with national security is Hong Kong's electoral system. In recent years, radical and violent elements attempted to hijack the political process in Hong Kong, seriously disrupt the vital work of the Legislative Council (LegCo), advocate independence and sow chaos in society. These seriously undermined the stability and prosperity of our city.

An electoral system that cannot safeguard "one country, two systems" and our constitutional order is a defective system. That is why, on the 30th of March, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress amended Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law.

The objective in doing so is clear: to ensure that Hong Kong is administered by patriots – by Hong Kong people who champion "one country, two systems" and wholeheartedly respect and support the constitutional order of the Hong Kong SAR.

Patriotism, no less than national security, is an accepted international norm. Indeed, political security is the foundation of national security. Without it, Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability can never be achieved.

A refashioned Election Committee will play an important role in the new system. The Committee will comprise 1 500 members from five sectors. Beyond its current role of electing the Chief Executive, the Committee will elect some legislators as well. It will also nominate candidates for the Legislative Council elections.

In doing so, it will make LegCo more broadly representative of Hong Kong. Indeed, the number of seats at LegCo will expand from 70 to 90.

Let me emphasise that the electoral changes will not impinge on the rights of Hong Kong residents to vote or to stand for election. Candidates from any political background faithful to the constitutional order can stand for election and, in accordance with the law, be elected.

Articles 45 and 68 of the Basic Law of the HKSAR, which stipulate respectively the ultimate aim of the selection of the Chief Executive and the election of all LegCo Members by universal suffrage, remain intact.

If approved by the Executive Council, the Government will introduce the Bill on the amendments into LegCo next Wednesday – the 14th of April. We sincerely hope that we can secure LegCo's passage by the end of May.

That would set in motion three major elections in the coming year: for the Election Committee in September, for LegCo in December and for the Chief Executive next March.

In short, we are committed to moving ahead, to ensuring a government that works for the people of Hong Kong, to building a thriving economy, an

engaged community and a rewarding future for us all.

I am confident that the new electoral system will bring the executive authorities and the legislature closer together. It will allow them to put aside their differences and build consensus for the good of Hong Kong. For all of us.

Thank you.