

## LCQ13: Quarantine arrangements for air crew

Following is a question by the Hon Dominic Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 19):

Question:

It is reported that since the end of last month, some locally based air crew of Cathay Pacific Airways Limited (CX) have contracted one after another the Coronavirus Disease 2019 and spread the virus in the community. Such incidents have revealed the loopholes in the quarantine arrangements for the locally based air crew of CX, such that the air crew may opt to "fly out on a passenger flight and return on a cargo flight", thereby exempting from the compulsory quarantine requirement. The Chief Executive has subsequently stated that the senior personnel of CX has been instructed to conduct a holistic investigation into the incidents and submit reports to the Government. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) how the practice of the aforesaid air crew violated the quarantine requirement specified by the Government; of the measures put in place to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents;
- (2) whether CX has already submitted the reports to the Government; if so, of the specific details of the reports; if not, whether it knows the progress of the relevant work of CX;
- (3) whether the Government will follow up CX's failure to comply with the Government's quarantine requirement; if so, of the details and progress; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) given that the Government has, since the 1st of this month, tightened the quarantine arrangements for locally based air cargo crew by extending the duration of self-isolation in designated quarantine hotels from three days to seven days for all locally based air cargo crew who have laid over at specified places, whether the Government has reviewed if such quarantine period requirement is sufficient; if it has reviewed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the justifications for that; if the outcome is in the negative, whether the quarantine period will be extended?

Reply:

President,

In response to the questions raised by the Hon Dominic Lee, our consolidated reply is as follows:

The Government has all along been vigilant to cope with the developments

of the global and local epidemic situation. It has put the quarantine arrangements for air crew under constant review and made timely adjustments, with a view to guarding against imported COVID-19 cases, while maintaining smooth air cargo services into and out of Hong Kong in order to meet the daily needs of the public and maintain the normal operation of the community and the economy.

According to the quarantine arrangements for air crew, the potential public health risk of locally based passenger crew is relatively higher. They perform flight duties on passenger flights to outports. Even though they are subject to stringent closed-loop requirements during layover at outports, they come into direct contact with passengers. Hence, they are required to undergo self-isolation at designated quarantine hotels (DQHs) after obtaining a negative result from COVID-19 testing upon their return to Hong Kong.

As for locally based air crew who perform flight duties on turnaround passenger flights without laying over at outports, they are only allowed to undergo home isolation after obtaining a negative result from COVID-19 testing, on the condition that the aircraft carry no inbound passengers on their return. In view of the latest developments of the epidemic situation, the Government has adjusted such arrangement. This type of locally based air crew are now also required to undergo self-isolation at DQHs upon their return to Hong Kong, with effect from December 30, 2021.

Regarding the issue concerning locally based passenger crew going home direct to undergo quarantine after laying over at outports and returning to Hong Kong on aircraft carrying cargo only, as well as the cases of Cathay Pacific Airways Limited's locally based air crew allegedly contravening the Government's quarantine requirements during home isolation, the Chairman of Cathay Pacific has already submitted a written explanation to the Chief Executive as requested. The Government also noted the statement issued by Cathay Pacific on January 11. After seeking legal advice, the Police laid charges on the two former Cathay Pacific air crew concerned on January 17. The Government will continue to conduct in-depth investigation and follow up seriously. If the investigation identifies sufficient evidence, indicating the need for the Government to take further legal actions, the Government will not hesitate to take actions. As the investigation is still ongoing and involves legal proceedings, the Government is not in a position to comment further at this stage.

Taking into account various factors, including the latest developments of the epidemic situation, public health risk assessments and the operational needs of the aviation industry, the Government will continue to review and enhance the quarantine arrangements for air crew in a holistic manner. Monitoring will be further stepped up, in order to ensure airlines and air crew will be able to accurately understand and strictly comply with the relevant requirements. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to review and make timely adjustments to the relevant arrangements, and will work with the aviation industry jointly on the anti-epidemic efforts, with a view to facilitating the resumption of normal operation of society as soon as possible, while minimising the impact on the community and the economy to be

brought about by the hampered air cargo services due to the tightened quarantine arrangements.