

Remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (May 27):

Reporter: Good morning Mr Lee. So firstly, what is Hong Kong's position and response on the potential ban by the US (United States) Government in foreign student enrolment at Harvard University? And with the Education Bureau urging local universities to attract top talent, what can institutions in Hong Kong offer to ensure that those who are affected by the US administration's decision will choose to come to Hong Kong? And secondly, regarding last week's MTR service disruption, there have been comments saying that the penalty and the special fare day is not sufficient to compensate passengers. Would the Government consider asking for more compensation from MTRC (MTR Corporation) and is there any need to review the railway firm's overall operations? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Hong Kong will welcome any students who have been discriminated by the US policy, who face difficulties to study or continue their studies, in the US universities. We welcome them to come to Hong Kong to continue their studies in our universities. The Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) Government, together with the eight UGC (University Grants Committee)-funded universities, will do all our best to facilitate and assist any students who suffered from this discriminatory and unfair treatment, so that they will find a way to study in Hong Kong. We will do the maximum facilitation and assistance. We will be in touch with the Harvard Alumni Association so that both of us can work together to help the unfairly treated students. I have already raised the enrolment ceiling of (non-local students) in the eight UGC-funded universities during my term from 20 per cent to 40 per cent, doubling the quota. We have room in this quota to accept students who have problems studying in the US to come to these eight UGC-funded universities. If there is the need, I will consider further raising this ceiling. So, I want this message to go out to any students who face discriminatory and unfair treatment in the US, so that they know that Hong Kong's doors are wide open to them to come to study in the universities of Hong Kong.

In regard to the suspension of service of MTRC, particularly the event last Thursday during which the suspension of service lasted for over five hours, this incident, together with two other incidents that happened this year, reflect that there are inadequacies in the emergency response and contingency planning of MTRC. Yesterday (May 26), Transport and Logistics Bureau, together with MTRC, attended LegCo (Legislative Council) to report on the matter, and Transport and Logistics Bureau has already asked MTRC to submit a comprehensive investigation report within one month and recommend remedial action.

The MTR is a major transportation system in Hong Kong. It serves over 5 million passengers every day, so any disruption is going to cause inconvenience of a different scale. Yes, we have been focusing on rectification, in which we have systems to impose punishment on MTRC, but I think it is more important to focus on prevention, so that there will be no disruption to happen. And we should also focus on response when there are, unfortunately, such incidents. So I have made four directions:

First, MTRC must review the entire railway network system comprehensively and systematically to enhance it. This includes improving maintenance standards, renewing equipment and components, use of new technologies, and establishing a regular risk-monitoring and assessment system.

Second, MTRC must strengthen its emergency response and contingency handling capabilities in training. This includes incident reporting and information dissemination, setting up dedicated emergency response teams, increasing manpower, strengthening mobilisation and enhancing communication equipment and conducting regular drills.

Third, MTRC must improve alternative transport arrangements during suspension of service, regularly conduct stress tests and drills, and design an effective information dissemination mechanism that focuses priorities on passengers' needs and ensures timely and comprehensive information is disseminated to reduce public inconvenience and anxiety.

Fourth, the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the Transport Department and the EMSD (Electrical and Mechanical Services Department) must exercise leadership and guidance, particularly in MTRC's implementation of its five-year plan for facilitating the upgrade, maintenance and technology applications, and system and personnel enhancements. Prevention is better than rectification, so MTRC has to comprehensively work in those directions.

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