

More public services to resume in a safe and orderly manner

In view of the need to fight the epidemic for the whole community, the Government has implemented special work arrangements for government employees since December 2 last year. Save for those involved in the provision of emergency services and essential public services and in anti-epidemic efforts, all other government employees were arranged to work from home. Taking into account the needs for the functioning of society and the economy, a spokesman for the Government announced today (January 26) that in addition to the continued provision of emergency services and essential public services, government departments will also resume the provision of some basic public services from January 28.

"Despite the impact of the epidemic, the Government has the responsibility to maintain the continuing functioning of the community and the economy. To meet the needs of the public and enterprises, bureaux and departments will resume the provision of some basic public services from January 28 onwards upon the implementation of targeted measures to reduce social contact and measures for infection control. The Government's ultimate goal is to resume full public services when conditions permit," the spokesman said.

Government departments will announce separately the services to be resumed, relevant arrangements and details. As bureaux and departments may need time to deploy their staff and resources and make necessary adjustments, they may not be able to provide full services immediately.

"In view of the need to reduce the flow of people and social contact, bureaux and departments will adopt flexible measures to reduce the number of staff working in an office at any one time as far as possible, such as splitting staff into two teams which may then take turns to work from home, or staggering of work and lunch hours to the widest possible extent. We appeal for the understanding of members of the public as opening hours of some offices may be adjusted, waiting times for public services may be lengthened, or a longer time may be needed for the processing of applications," the spokesman said.

The spokesman appealed to the public that, where necessary, they are encouraged to use alternative means, such as post, drop-in boxes or online channels, to receive the services they need. They should wear surgical masks at all times when they are entering or are present in any government buildings or offices, and comply with the infection control measures implemented by relevant departments including temperature checks, using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app and crowd control arrangements.

The spokesman also appealed to employers to make flexible work arrangements for employees in accordance with their operational needs

including allowing them to work from home when appropriate so as to reduce the flow of people and social contact in the community.

Twenty-three building plans approved in November

The Buildings Department approved 23 building plans in November, with six on Hong Kong Island, 11 in Kowloon and six in the New Territories.

Of the approved plans, 12 were for apartment and apartment/commercial developments, one was for commercial developments, two were for factory and industrial developments, and eight were for community services developments.

In the same month, consent was given for works to start on 12 building projects which, when completed, will provide 110 824 square metres of gross floor area for domestic use involving 2 427 units, and 53 434 sq m of gross floor area for non-domestic use. The department has received notification of commencement of superstructure works for 12 building projects.

The department also issued 22 occupation permits, with seven on Hong Kong Island, six in Kowloon and nine in the New Territories.

Of the buildings certified for occupation, the gross floor area for domestic use was 290 163 sq m involving 4 392 units, and 32 752 sq m was for non-domestic use.

The declared cost of new buildings completed in November totalled about \$15.4 billion.

In addition, 14 demolition consents involving 14 building structures were issued.

The department received 2 943 reports about unauthorised building works (UBWs) in November and issued 1 498 removal orders on UBWs.

The full version of the Monthly Digest for November can be viewed on the Buildings Department's homepage (www.bd.gov.hk).

Community Care Fund extends Pilot Scheme on Support for Elderly Persons Discharged from Public Hospitals after Treatment

The following is issued on behalf of the Community Care Fund Secretariat:

The Community Care Fund (CCF) today (January 26) announced the extension of the Pilot Scheme on Support for Elderly Persons Discharged from Public Hospitals after Treatment upon its completion in end-January 2021 for 32 months up to September 30, 2023, with a new mode of operation to be implemented from October 2021. The Pilot Scheme as extended continues to be administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

The Pilot Scheme was launched in February 2018 through a "medical-social collaboration" model in 10 hospitals under three clusters (Kowloon East, New Territories East and New Territories West) of the Hospital Authority (HA). The HA conducts assessments and refers persons aged 60 or above who are in need of transitional care and support services (i.e. in need of temporary residential care and/or community care and support services after discharge from hospitals) but are not covered under the existing Integrated Discharge Support Programme for Elderly Patients to the Pilot Scheme.

Under the new mode of operation starting in October 2021, the SWD will select three non-governmental organisations through invitation for proposals under which each of them will set up a Transitional Care Team to provide services to needy elderly persons referred by respective HA clusters (Kowloon East, New Territories East and New Territories West). Medical staff of the relevant hospitals will make assessment and formulate discharge plans for elderly patients in need so as to facilitate planning for appropriate nursing care, rehabilitation and care support services. Needy elderly persons will subsequently be referred to the Transitional Care Teams, who will provide transitional residential care and/or community care and support services. It is expected to serve about 1 000 elderly persons each year and benefit a total of about 2 000 elderly persons in two years in the new mode of operation under the Pilot Scheme.

Details of the Pilot Scheme as extended can be found on the CCF's website (www.communitycarefund.hk) or the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk). For enquiries, members of the public may also call the CCF Team of the SWD on 3422 3090 during office hours.

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 (January 26):

Reporter: Firstly, about the issue on potential lockdowns in future like the one we saw on the weekend in Jordan. Can the Hong Kong citizens expect the scope would be smaller, when you mentioned that it could be just a street or several blocks, and the time would be shorter and the operation would be held confidential, before notice? And secondly, do you think it's time to beef up penalties for those who didn't take the mandatory testing at the first place – we saw some in Jordan and some in Laguna City as well that they didn't go tested it in the first place? And thirdly, can you explain why did you ask Beijing for the Sinopharm vaccine? Is there a need to ask for them for the vaccines? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. About the first question, actually I mentioned that shortly after this operation in Jordan, we have had a very quick wash-up to identify areas for improvement because it has proven to be an effective tool to help us to combat COVID-19, which means that the Hong Kong SAR Government will be ready to use it again when the situation warrants. It is always necessary to see whether we could do better in the next operation. As a result of that very quick wash-up, we have identified at least three areas that we could improve. One is in the announcement. For an operation like this, of course we would like to keep it strictly confidential until the operation commences. In this case, it should be 4am on Saturday but unfortunately, somehow, there was quite extensive leakage. In future we will have to decide how to ensure better confidentiality or if unfortunately, again, there was a leakage, whether we should come out earlier so as to calm people down because I still felt that if it was just an operation of two days, and with the necessary support and supplies given by the Government, maybe the residents will not be so nervous and decided to leave.

The second improvement measure is the scope, as you have put it. On this occasion, although everybody said it was a small district, but in Hong Kong, because of our density and our multi-storey buildings, this very small area actually has over 150 buildings now with 7 000 residents, which then means it's very difficult for us to conduct in a very efficient manner. The next thing we need to consider for the next operation is whether we could be more focused. We should do smaller-scale restriction-testing operations but we could do more at the same time. It could be one in this district, another one in another district, but the scale of each operation could be smaller.

The second is once we started the operation, how we could compress the

time so that the inconvenience to residents could be minimised. In compressing the time, we have to revisit each of the steps in the procedure, from arranging them to come down to testing to collating the specimens to send to the private laboratories, to getting the results out and then notifying the residents via SMS. All these will be revisited before the next operation.

The second question, enforcement is very important. It is part and parcel of any operation, whether it is the normal compulsory testing regime on a territory-wide basis, or under this restriction-testing, but we have to accept that Hong Kong's operation is under a very inefficient or insufficient framework because we don't have the data of the residents in each area. In the Mainland China, you have "hukou"; we don't have that so we don't know who are the residents living in a particular building, especially for private buildings. For public rental housing we have a better idea because of the Housing Department's record, but in the private buildings we actually don't know. What we could do is we go back to that building without notice and then we try to check everyone coming out of the building whether they have an SMS showing a negative result. If no, that means you have not complied, then we will take down your personal data and then pass to the Centre for Health Protection to consider issuing a summons, or where permissible, issue a fixed penalty ticket. There are two legislative regimes for us to take enforcement actions. We will continue to do that. But I really hope that we don't need to talk about enforcement. This is public health. This is for the benefit of the individuals, their family and also the whole district and the whole of Hong Kong. So please help us to promote compliance without resorting to enforcement.

About vaccines, we have been very concerned about the supply of vaccines for Hong Kong people, because this is really sort of the light at the end of a tunnel. Over many months, we have worked out advance purchase agreements with three manufacturers, actually we are still discussing a fourth in order to have at least one vaccine per technology. But the three vaccines that we have advance-purchased so far all have a little bit of hiccup, so to speak. For the one that has been authorised by the Secretary for Food and Health, that is the Fosun/BioNTech, it is now legally for use in Hong Kong but the supply will only come in end of February from Germany. The second is the Sinovac. Again, it has to be authorised and the supply has been delayed. The third is the AstraZeneca, which has always been a later supplier – towards the second part of the year. But at the same time we have some desperate need for vaccination amongst the high-risk group or amongst those cross-border workers. We have 10 000 truck drivers crossing the border every day and they have to take test every day. Now that we have a vaccine, there was a proposal put to us that they should be vaccinated as early as possible together with the Mainland truck drivers so that there could be greater assurance and safety. With those considerations in mind I triggered what I have been given to understand when I was in Beijing last November, that if there is a need in Hong Kong, then the Chief Executive could always approach the Central People's Government (CPG) for help in trying to secure a certain proportion of Mainland-developed or Mainland-produced vaccines to come to Hong Kong, and that's exactly what I have done. I'm sorry I could not disclose further

details because that would be pre-empting considerations and decisions by the CPG. But judging from what the CPG has been doing for us over the whole year of tackling COVID-19, they have always been very supportive, whether in providing us with face masks when they were still in shortage, helping us to take back Hong Kong people from Wuhan, from all over the world, and building this wonderful interim hospital for us, renovating the AWE (AsiaWorld-Expo) into isolation facilities and also helping us to do a Universal Community Testing Programme last September. I hope and I would continue to appeal to the CPG to give us support on the issue of vaccine supply.

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

[Speech by CE at 2021 Hong Kong Forum on US-China Relations \(English only\) \(with photo/video\)](#)

Following is the video speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at 2021 Hong Kong Forum on US-China Relations today (January 26):

The Honourable Mr C H Tung, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to be invited by Mr Tung, Chairman of the China–United States Exchange Foundation, to extend a virtual welcome to all distinguished guests attending the Hong Kong Forum on US–China Relations. I wish to congratulate the Foundation for organising this Forum to explore and predict Sino–US relations at the very timely occasion, that is, literally within days of the inauguration of a new US administration under President Joe Biden. Indeed, I believe all eyes are now watching closely the development of Sino–US relations in the President’s first 100 days. In a rather unprecedented way, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government is amongst those watchers, and I will tell you why in a moment.

Before we look into the future, let's review the past since I spoke to guests attending the Forum held here in Hong Kong in July 2019, during a dinner I hosted at Government House. Our city was then facing the most severe social unrest in recent Hong Kong history ignited by opposition to a Government legislative proposal on the return of fugitive offenders, but in terms of relations between China and the US, it was then a moment of hope. The July 2019 Forum coincided with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US. And, just 10 days prior to the Forum, at the Group of 20 Summit in Osaka, President Trump and President Xi had agreed to resume talks after a year-long trade war started and stoked by the US.

Regrettably, the pause and the promise of resuming talks did not last. Indeed, over the past 18 months, ties between China and the US have sharply deteriorated and the causes of such deterioration have gone well beyond trade and investment. That, ladies and gentlemen, is a reality as lamentable as it is harmful, both to bilateral relations between the world's two largest economies, and to global economic growth.

Equally lamentable if not outright resentful is the unilateral action taken by the former US administration against Hong Kong during that period. Those totally unjustified actions, or sanctions on the HKSAR Government, businesses and individuals were imposed under the so called "Hong Kong Autonomy Act" and the former President's Executive Order.

The former US administration tried to justify its actions by referring to the enactment and implementation of the National Security Law in Hong Kong in June last year. Such argument cannot stand up to scrutiny.

It is the legitimate right and duty of every state to safeguard its national security. Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China with a high degree of autonomy under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. Given the extreme social unrest and violence that overwhelmed Hong Kong in 2019, the enactment of the National Security Law by the Central Authorities was both necessary and rational.

What's more, the Law is clear and entirely focused on four types of acts and activities that can seriously endanger national security. It contains specific provisions upholding Hong Kong people's rights and freedoms. It also provides for important principles of the rule of law, including the presumption of innocence, the prohibition of double jeopardy, and the right to a fair trial. These important features have put our National Security Law on par with, if not superior to, similar national security laws in other jurisdictions, including the US.

As a matter of fact, since implementation of the National Security Law, street violence which had haunted Hong Kong people for months since June 2019 have subsided and stability restored. Such a stable environment is vitally important to the prosperity of Hong Kong and the business activities of both local and overseas enterprises here. I hope the new US administration will view the National Security Law in Hong Kong in a fair manner. Meanwhile, I and my 11 senior colleagues who have been sanctioned will not be intimidated. We will continue to steadfastly, dutifully and lawfully carry out our duties to safeguard our Country's national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

Like the Forum in July 2019, here we are today, at another timely China–United States Exchange Foundation Forum embracing a glimpse of hope. We are here to weigh the potential of another promising moment, for China and the US, for Hong Kong and for the world at large. With Mr Biden becoming the 46th President of the US, we hope that bilateral relations between the world's two leading economies will start to improve, providing the impetus for global recovery.

President Xi Jinping has made our country's position clear. In his congratulatory message to President Biden, President Xi said that he "hoped the two sides would uphold the spirit of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win co-operation," that they would "join hands with other countries and the international community to promote the noble cause of world peace and development."

And I am glad to note that President Biden, in his inauguration address, seemed to echo President Xi's sentiments, at least in terms of the importance of international co-operation. President Biden mentioned that the US will "engage with the world once again. Not to meet yesterday's challenges, but today's and tomorrow's." He added that the US "will be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security."

We all hope that President Biden will soon turn his words into deeds. In this regard, I am sure many governments around the world are relieved to hear that the new US administration will re-engage with the World Health Organization, that it will join the Covax vaccine programme to help stem the spread of COVID-19 and fast-track the availability of the new vaccines to the wider world. For the environmentalists, the new US administration's decision to rejoin the Paris climate accord will indeed be a piece of good news to kick start the new year.

Hong Kong has long been a gateway between Mainland China and the world. Instead of being caught in the geopolitical tensions between nations, and notably between China and the US, we hope to play a constructive role leveraging on our unique advantages under "One Country, Two Systems". Indeed, Hong Kong and the US have enjoyed longstanding success in business, trade and finance. In 2019, our bilateral merchandise trade reached US\$66 billion. Let me add that the US trade surplus that year amounted to more than US\$26 billion – the highest among the US' many trading partners. Take in the decade between 2010 and 2019, America's cumulative merchandise trade surplus over Hong Kong was at an awesome US\$310 billion.

On financial services, US banks, insurers, private equity firms are a major player in Hong Kong's financial sector which accounts for over 20 per cent of our GDP; they stand to benefit considerably from Hong Kong's participation in the continuous reform and opening up of the Mainland capital markets. Thus, both in trade and investment and finance, Hong Kong is a highly valuable business bridge between China and the US.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong is our largest international chamber. That's not surprising, given that nearly 1 300 US companies are based in Hong Kong. And more than 280 of them keep their regional headquarters here. Our people-to-people bonds are equally strong. Hong Kong is home to 85 000 US citizens. We welcome US businesses and individuals to continue contributing to and benefiting from Hong Kong's many promising prospects.

Indeed, with stability restored, I paid a trip to Beijing, Guangzhou and

Shenzhen last November to discuss further measures to support Hong Kong's integration into the national development. I have subsequently outlined in my 2020 Policy Address a series of initiatives to inject new impetus to Hong Kong's economy. I am confident that once the COVID-19 pandemic has finally been brought under control, there will be enormous opportunities for us to seize.

With remarkable efforts in controlling the pandemic, China has already regained economic growth, being the only major economy to show real growth in 2020. With our unique advantages under "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong is set to benefit from our country's development. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will be an excellent entry point. The Greater Bay Area comprises Hong Kong, Macao, and nine cities in Guangdong, with Shenzhen and Guangzhou the core engines for development alongside Hong Kong and Macao. Boasting a population of some 72 million, a combined GDP larger than Australia and a per capita GDP of US\$23,000, the Greater Bay Area looks to rise as one of the world's strongest regional economy, particularly as an innovation and technology hub. Beyond innovation and technology, Hong Kong will drive financial services for the region, given our longstanding strengths in financial services, our ability to bridge East and West and the unmatched depth and quality of our professional services.

In short, I believe that Hong Kong's future is bright, but we need to have a stable global and local environment for us to thrive. That brings me back to today's forum: healthy China-US relations are important to the world in many ways, and that can only be achieved through constructive dialogue at all levels. Today's forum provides an excellent platform for such dialogue, and I congratulate the China-United States Exchange Foundation for bringing together so many insightful leaders from around the world to exchange views on how to promote China-US relations, and how to make the world a better place for us all.

I wish you all a very fruitful forum, and as I have promised Mr Tung, I look forward to again hosting a dinner at Government House for guests at the next Forum in my capacity as Chief Executive of the HKSAR. As we are approaching the Year of the Ox, may I wish you all an industrious and rewarding year ahead. Thank you.

