

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council (ExCo) meeting today (May 31):

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam. First, will residents face any legal consequences if they show up at Victoria Park on June 4? Could you state where the red line is, such as will residents who commemorate the June 4 crackdown in private, such as lighting up a candle in their house, violate the National Security Law? And second, several ExCo Members have expressed reservation over suggestions of senior civil servants receiving a record pay increase when many people are jobless. Will you or the ExCo consider cutting down the increments for senior civil servants? And third, are you worried about the pub clusters and will you postpone further easing or reduce the capacity per table at the bars? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, any public activity in Hong Kong, regardless of the purpose, has to fulfil the requirements in the law. As far as any gathering is concerned, there are a lot of legal requirements. There is the National Security Law; there are the social distancing restrictions under Cap. 599 (Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance); and there is also a venue question – whether a particular activity has received the authorisation to take place in a particular venue has to be decided by the owner of the venue.

About the civil service pay, this is an annual exercise. In the last two years, the pay has been frozen. This year, yes, the pay trend survey results show that there is a positive rate, especially at the higher level. But as the Secretary for the Civil Service has repeatedly said in public, and we have been practising this repeatedly in previous years, we do not just rigidly follow the pay trend survey results to adjust the civil service pay on an annual basis. There is a basket of six factors. Ultimately, it is for the Chief Executive in Council to take account of the six factors to decide on the pay for the civil service. We are still in this process. For the time being, no decision has been made on adjustments to the civil servants' pay in the 2022 pay adjustment exercise.

As far as the third phase of the social distancing measures is concerned, as I announced on March 21, the roadmap for relaxing the social distancing measures should take three stages over a period of three months in a gradual and orderly manner, but the ultimate objective is to ensure public safety. So, in announcing the implementation of each stage, we also have to take into account the actual COVID-19 situation in Hong Kong, not only the number of positive cases reported daily, but also the hospitalisation situation, the risk of community infections and also the prevalence of the variant of BA.2.12.1 of Omicron. As things now stand, we are in a sort of

stagnant situation, with the daily number of positive-tested cases staying at around 200 and 300 cases, including local infections as well as imported cases. But there have already been over 10 such infection clusters in the community, especially the two most recent cases involving bars. So, we will have to take a very prudent approach, and my position at this moment is we probably will not introduce the third and final stage of the social distancing relaxation before the end of June.

But the final phase actually involves only removing any remaining restrictions on the operation of these premises, for example, the maximum number of people in a banquet, the capacity – whether it is 75 or 85 per cent, whether it should go back to 100 per cent – and the permission of dancing and live performances. On balance, I feel these activities would not be very detrimental to the return to normalcy of the great majority of Hong Kong people. In finding a pragmatic balance, as I have been doing in the last two and a half years, we will have to take a more prudent approach.

Thank you.

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