

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (April 7):

Reporter: Hello, the first question is that could you explain the grounds of the Government's accusations against RTHK of breaching the one-China policy? Why does the Government think that there is an issue with just a question concerning Taiwan's membership in WHO? And the second, amid the risk of the outbreak, why did the Government still allow horse racing to continue? And the third question is about the pay rise, and because the pro-establishment lawmakers are among those voices urging you to take a pay cut rather than accepting a pay rise. So would you do so, like many leaders in other countries did? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Let me answer the last question first. As I have said on the occasion when we voluntarily donated a month's salary to the Community Chest to assist charitable groups, especially those that are not under government subvention, the ultimate purpose is to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Hong Kong. We will continue to do that with that objective in mind, but my first priority right now is to finalise as early as possible the package of relief measures under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund.

As far as the second issue, allowing horse racing to continue – yes, horse racing events have been given an exemption under the prohibition on public gatherings, but they are subject to extremely stringent conditions about admission. Basically, there will be no public galleries. There will be very stringent requirements before horse racing could continue. Now this brings us to a broader question of how long Hong Kong society could operate with all these very extreme measures of social distancing. If there are ways to strike a balance between achieving the objective of social distancing while maintaining some activities to go on, I think that should be the preferred approach.

I mentioned about Professor Gabriel Leung's article, I think in New York Times, he talked about a three-way tug of war. At the same time of combating the disease – on this occasion the coronavirus – we also have to protect the economy and look after the social needs of the people. Similarly in catering business, we do not go to that extreme to close all the restaurants and coffee shops and so on, because there is something called “the people's need”. But we put in very extreme measures – the six measures imposed by legislation – hopefully to achieve the objective I just mentioned.

Now finally on the question of RTHK, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development has already made a statement, I think on April 2 about this particular programme, “The Pulse”, which included an interview with the World Health Organization. I certainly endorse and support the stance and

position of Secretary Edward Yau. As far as the elaboration, I understand that Secretary Yau will be attending the Special Finance Committee meeting later today with the Director of Broadcasting, so I will leave the pair to do the further explanation. But let me make this very clear, either as a public broadcaster or government department, RTHK has to fulfil the very important and fundamental principle of upholding "One Country, Two Systems". RTHK could not claim immunity by being a public broadcaster and not observe this very important principle of "One Country, Two Systems". And even as a public broadcaster, in the charter for RTHK, there are very clear requirements of its public broadcaster role in deepening the Hong Kong people's understanding of "One Country, Two Systems". These are the clear parameters regulating the operation of RTHK.

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