

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (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 11):

Reporter: Given the current situation, are you confident that Hong Kong can still attain the "dynamic zero" infection policy that you mentioned earlier? And also are you confident that life can return to some form of normality before the Chinese New Year? Same question about the party that happened last week. Some lawmakers and attendees of the party said the focus shouldn't be on the guests, with some already identifying themselves as victims as well. They said the problem lay in the Government's policies and Cathay Pacific. Do you agree with that? And do you think the Government is to be blamed ultimately or at least partially for the controversy that emerged? And will the Government take action against CX as well? Last question, do you think that the controversy will have a bearing on your consideration as to whether you'll seek a re-election or not? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for those three questions. Let me briefly answer the last one first. I'm not going to respond to or comment on any questions relating to my future.

As far as the two questions are concerned, one is about our confidence in fighting COVID-19. Although there have been criticisms about the way that we handle this epidemic, I hope people will fairly judge the Hong Kong situation. We have so many people who have committed so many resources within the Government and outside of the Government. We have a population which is generally very compliant with the various rules and regulations. Hong Kong's COVID-19 control situation is not bad if we look at the number of confirmed cases, the number of fatalities, the ability to continue normal business, no city lockdown and so on. I would say that previous experiences have given us the confidence that we should be able to overcome this Omicron wave. The fact is that, 12 days since the first local Omicron case appeared in Hong Kong, we have not seen what has appeared in other places, that is an exponential surge. Up till now, 42 cases. And every case, except one, could be linked to the source, so to speak.

So I remain optimistic and confident that we should be able to overcome this latest round of cases. Whether life will return to normal has always been our priority. That's why I said that when the latest round of very stringent social distancing measures took effect last Friday for a usual 14-day duration, we will review critically the situation after seven days and come out to explain what the population could expect beyond the 14 days. You'll have to wait until this Friday for us to give you a more accurate assessment of the current situation.

About the birthday party, this is a most unfortunate event because of the large number of people involved, and in fact I don't know whether this is the final figure – Dr Chuang Shuk-kwan (Head of the Communicable Disease Branch of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health) mentioned a figure of 214 guests who had attended this occasion at different periods of time. And this was, in my view, well beyond the capacity of this restaurant. I'm sure the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will shortly release the results of some preliminary investigations about the restaurant, whether this restaurant could actually legally operate this sort of dinner gathering.

The investigations relating to this particular incident cannot be directly linked to other things that we are doing. We are dealing with an outbreak in a dinner party. Colleagues of the Centre for Health Protection are diligently trying to do contact tracing, so that we could prevent the spread of the infected case to other guests attending that occasion and, unfortunately, we already have a second case – another lady who was confirmed positive in her COVID-19 test and had been sent to hospital. The investigations of this particular incident are done on the basis of public health: whether the restaurant, as the operator or the food license holder, as well as the guests, has been compliant with the public health requirements. That is the investigation.

Another investigation which a lot of people have put attention to is on Cathay Pacific, whether this airline had complied with the regulations that we imposed on the airline when we granted the exemption for the air cargo crew in order to ensure that Hong Kong's air cargo flow could continue to sustain the operation of this city. So there are two separate investigations that we have to conduct for ensuring that everybody is complying with the legal requirements. It is not a matter of fault-finding. I hope people will move away from this talk about fault-finding, who is the scapegoat of what. In a public health situation of this scale, the Government has rolled out a lot of measures, a lot of regulations under Cap. 599 (Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance) but there could not be 100 per cent compliance.

I give you a few examples. We have been putting people under home quarantine, but from time to time there were still people who went out while they should be under home quarantine. There have been, up to now, over 200 cases of such non-compliance and they have been taken to court; most of them have been given an imprisonment of seven to 14 days. This is non-compliance. Similarly, when I gave you the figure that we had done about 30 RTDs (restriction-testing declarations) in the last 10 days or so, the non-compliance rate following the RTDs was 2.2 per cent. So of the 100 people subject to a RTD in a residential building, subsequent enforcement showed that two persons have not come out for the test. This is non-compliance.

Cathay Pacific is a very big non-compliance case because the air cargo crew should not have gone out during the quarantine at home. And worse still, if we discover through full investigations that some crew of Cathay Pacific, or some staff of Cathay Pacific, should not have been travelling back on a cargo flight and enjoying this exemption, that would be much bigger non-

compliance. But this has to be put under full investigation and we will take legal action once we have the full evidence of what wrong it has gone into.

The dinner party is another example of non-compliance. Whether that restaurant fulfils the requirements of a Type D Mode of Operation restaurant. A Type D restaurant has a lot of requirements. For example, yes, it is allowed to operate in full capacity, but could this restaurant take in 200 people at the same time? I have not been to the restaurant but some reporters have showed the photos and measured the size. It could hardly take in 200 customers in a restaurant like this. And a Type D restaurant has other requirements for the guests, for the customers. They have to use "LeaveHomeSafe". Two-thirds of the customers have to be vaccinated. Have all these been complied with? These are all areas that we need to investigate. There is no point to say who is at fault and who is the source of all these problems because the problems will occur as we continue to fight the epidemic. Non-compliance will happen. Nobody could aim – I could not aim – at 100 per cent compliance and put everybody under a very absolutely safe environment. But the importance is we maintain the vigilance to enforce and we punish people who fail to comply by issuing penalties and also taking them to court and other things. This is the current situation about the various cases of non-compliance.

Thank you.

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