

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 (ExCo) meeting today (May 24):

Reporter: Thank you, Mrs Lam. I'd like to ask, Hong Kong's largest business chamber has called for quarantine to be scrapped this week, and European airlines are threatening not to fly into Hong Kong as the rest of the region opens due to the quarantine for airline staff. When will home quarantine requirements be reduced or removed? And what would trigger tighter rules for social distancing measures?

Chief Executive: I have another five weeks to go as the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. I've been leading the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic for two and a half years. As I'm approaching the end of my term, I want to reiterate that all these decisions we made on fighting the epidemic and ensuring the safety of the people of Hong Kong are based on a number of factors. One is, of course, the public health considerations. Second is the economic development needs of Hong Kong. Third is the acceptance level, or the tolerance of the Hong Kong people. After announcing the two phases of relaxation of social distancing measures, the feedback given to me is they are generally fine. A lot of restaurants and bars are now starting to do business. And so whether we would implement the final phase – actually the final phase does not involve major measures, just lifting the numbers or the percentage on the limitation of seating in venues. I said that it will be done in three phases over three months, so we may still have a final phase before the end of June, that is the end of my term, because I cannot make decisions after June 30. As far as social distancing measures are concerned, there is still a final phase, but as I see it, that final phase is not crucial to the recovery or the enjoyment of the Hong Kong people.

About border controls, as you can see from the numbers we announce every day at the 4.30pm press conference, because the local infections are kept very low now, the imported cases account for a rather significant share of the total caseload. And on top of that, we are seeing different variants under BA.2, so we have to be extremely careful in, sort of, implementing the restrictions on border controls. I would say at this point in time that it is very unlikely that, during my term, there will be more relaxations on border controls. In other words, we will still have hotel quarantine; we will still require vaccination before a passenger could board a plane to Hong Kong; and we will still impose "test-and-hold", whether at the airport or at the hotel, for a PCR test (polymerase chain reaction nucleic acid test) in order to keep Hong Kong safe.

Thank you.

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