

Transcript of remarks by SCMA, S for S and SFH at media session (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, at the media session at the Central Government Offices tonight (February 24):

Reporter: I would like to ask why it takes so long for the Wuhan flights to be arranged? What made the task possible now? Where will the people coming back from Hubei be sent? Do we have enough quarantine facilities? On Korea, the ban is to include those who visited Korea in the past 14 days. How will the government check who has returned from Korea in the past 14 days?

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: Upon receipt of the assistance cases, we have been discussing with the relevant departments and public health experts to map out a feasible and safe plan to take Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei back to Hong Kong as early as possible. But we have to deal with it very carefully so as to minimise the public health risks. We must also have some conditions fulfilled before we could start the operation, including whether we have sufficient quarantine facilities. As you may recall, we lacked sufficient quarantine facilities at the early stage. The situation is now slightly better. I think we have places to accommodate those returnees.

Secondly, we have to take into account the epidemic situations in the Mainland as well as in Hong Kong. To transfer a group of people from one place to another involves pretty much public health risk and we have to assess it very carefully.

Thirdly, since all local transport (in Hubei) is basically locked down, if we have to arrange all those Hong Kong people to go to the airport and take the chartered flight back, we need the support and assistance of the Hubei Provincial Government and the local governments. We need to discuss with them the detailed arrangements and also their readiness, because we all know that at present, they are also facing a very serious epidemic situation and they have been doing their very best in achieving progress.

So we have to take into account all these factors. In the meantime, of course we have discussed with the relevant government departments and health experts to map out a plan. Now is the right time that we can take it forward and discuss with the Hubei Provincial Government on the detailed arrangements so that we can kick start the operation of arranging chartered flights to take Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei back to Hong Kong in batches.

Secretary for Food and Health: On how to identify those people who are coming from Korea, whether they are from Korea as or whether they are coming from

Daegu or Gyeongsangbuk-do, we are working very closely with colleagues from the Immigration Department, so that they will identify these people for us. Then, these people (for the two areas) will be approached by the Port Health Office colleagues for health assessment as well as put them on medical surveillance. For the rest, they will be put on medical surveillance. This is the arrangement for tonight. As far as tomorrow is concerned, those Hong Kong residents who are coming from the two areas will be given quarantine order and they will undergo compulsory quarantine in designated quarantine centre. The rest, who are not coming from those two areas, will be put under medical surveillance.

Secretary for Security: Let me add that there are two new measures that we have introduced in view of the situation in Korea. First of all, we have issued a red travel warning (Red Outbound Travel Alert) in regard to visit to Korea. This is first of all to let Hong Kong people think really carefully whether the visit to Korea is avoidable. Try not to go, right? Unless it is really necessary. That will reduce, first of all, the number of Hong Kong people who may be returning to Hong Kong after visiting Korea. That will reduce the number of people who need to be examined carefully at the airport. And this measure is for the benefit of people who are planning to visit Korea and also for Hong Kong people at large because they will be in some way interacting with the people who have visited Korea.

The second thing is the Immigration Department will be examining visitors who arrive at Hong Kong since the new quarantine order, i.e. to ascertain whether the visitors have ever been to the Mainland within the last 14 days, so that the examination has taken place. And now we will extend that examination to cover whether the visitors have been to Korea in the last 14 days.

One thing I have to remind people is that anybody who provides wrong or misleading information to the Immigration Officers or in the course of the Port Health (personnel) examining them, they are likely to commit an offence against the public health relevant legislation. Besides, there is a general provision under the Immigration Ordinance that anybody who provides false or misleading information to an Immigration Officer, that is an offence liable to imprisonment up to 14 years, so it is a very serious offence. And I wish to reiterate that the measure that we are introducing is for the benefit of the visitors themselves and also for the benefit of Hong Kong people at large. So, understand the consequences and appreciate the need that we need to introduce the measure.

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