

Transcript of remarks by SFH, SCED and SED at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau; and the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at the media session at Legislative Council Complex today (April 29):

Reporter: How many business people do you think will be eligible for the latest exemption and on what exact date will this come into play? Also, in terms of Hong Kong's economy, the FS (Financial Secretary) just said that he will expect the economy to shrink by about four to seven per cent. How big will that impact on Hong Kong people's lives?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I'll focus on the first question as it is related to the topic the three of us are talking about. First of all, I think what we have provided under the amended Cap. 599C (the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation) is a legal provision to allow travelling between Hong Kong and the Mainland, which is essential for Hong Kong's economic development, covering, for example, production lines, professional services and business activities. Such activities are essential for Hong Kong's ongoing development. But of course, we need to strike a balance between making sure that the epidemic won't come back through these travelling (activities), and facilitating legitimate reasons for crossing the boundary. That's why we need a scheme which will be open for application (so) that such persons would be able to come through the boundary with certain conditions (imposed). At this stage, it's rather hard to tell exactly how many (persons are eligible). Because while a lot of people might wish to seek this exemption from quarantine requirements, they also need to fulfil the conditions. For instance, the scheme that my bureau will roll out would cover Hong Kong businessmen having a production line in the Mainland. So I'm talking about Hong Kong companies which have such an operation, to start with. Secondly, for people who apply for this scheme, they would need to demonstrate that there is a genuine need for them to cross the boundary for their activities. Thirdly, they must also fulfil certain requirements, like the quota requirement of a one-plus-one basis, they must be owners or authorised persons of their companies. And they also need to satisfy (the requirement) that (upon) coming back, they would need to be subject to medical surveillance. So, all these conditions together might restrict the number (of applications) as well. We will go through this scrutiny when the scheme rolls out. Of course we will keep an eye on the improvement (of the epidemic) in the Mainland, and also the improvement of the situation in Hong Kong, together with the greater need of businessmen in this particular sector.

Reporter: What would you think of criticism saying that these exemptions open the doors for a new wave of infection into Hong Kong? A question for Mr Yeung, is it true that the arrangement for cross-boundary kids is that they

can only start applying for exemption (from compulsory quarantine) after the class resumption announcements have been made? A second question, a tag-on question, is why restart classes when the summer vacation is actually coming soon?

Secretary for Food and Health: First of all, your question is about risk. The Department of Health has been very stringently conducting risk assessment of the epidemic or if we say pandemic globally including the worldwide situation, the situation in Hong Kong as well as the situation in the Mainland. As we are now seeing an improvement in the epidemic situation of China and the reasons that Secretary Yau just now has already illustrated regarding the resuming of economic activities, there is a need for some of these activities to be resumed. In balancing the current situation in China and also in capitalising the Cap. 599C amendment bill, we have included two other categories under the current system of exemption granted by the Chief Secretary. We believe that devising a scheme is not the entire opening of door for everybody who has business. It is a very carefully devised scheme that I think Edward has just now told us. They will carefully look at these people and applications. They have to go through the application process. Finally, the successful applications will be sent to the Chief Secretary for final decision. These people who have successfully applied for exemptions, like the cross-boundary drivers, still have to undergo medical surveillance, take a body temperature every day, wear a mask and report to the Department of Health when they come back to Hong Kong.

Secretary for Education: The answer to your first question is a simple yes, because we will consider what will happen to the cross-boundary students when school resumes. So before we make any decisions on the resumption of classes, they will not be granted any particular exemption under Cap. 599C. On your second question, we have been discussing with the principals and also stakeholders in the education sector and it is a genuine consensus that, if possible, we should start school as soon as possible. Even though it only means maybe one or two months' schooling, it is generally felt that we should do that.

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