

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (February 14). Also joining were the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau; the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau; the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong; the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; and the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: When you work out how to bring the Hong Kong residents back from the Diamond Princess, will they be subject to further quarantine when they get back to Hong Kong? And secondly, are you concerned about the conditions that they are being kept in while they're on the Diamond Princess, particularly the close confinement where the virus can spread faster, maybe? And, Mrs Lam, there's been a lot of criticism of this administration's handling of this crisis, from the border closures to the panic buying on the streets. Are you worried that that may lead to lawmakers holding up this funding request?

Chief Executive: I'll answer the last question and then perhaps the two colleagues could help to address this question about this cruise. Since the notification was received in Hong Kong on December 31 – it's now past one and a half months – the HKSAR Government has put in every effort to fight this virus infection and this is something that friends of the media could see because you have been coming to these press conferences and media briefings on a very regular basis. We will continue to work very hard based on our very good track record in our public health experience and expertise; based on the advisory panel experts who have been with us all along in these past six weeks; and based on the dedication of our colleagues and the amount of resources that this Government is prepared to put into this fight against the disease. Today's initiative to announce the setting up of this fund with an estimated amount of \$25 billion is again one of those commitments to the people of Hong Kong. My biggest concern now is really for us to overcome this public health crisis together so that we could then focus on relaunching Hong Kong and rebuilding Hong Kong's economic strength.

Secretary for Security: Regarding the Hong Kong people who are being kept on Diamond Princess, of course we are very concerned. We care for their well-being. That is why we have sent four Immigration Officers to Japan to work with the Economic and Trade Office there together with people from the Chinese Embassy to give them the best support and assistance that we can offer. We have already indicated to the Japanese authorities whether they can consider allowing them (Hong Kong people) to do the quarantine on land and also whether the Hong Kong people can be tested as soon as possible.

The Immigration Officers together with the officers from the ETO (Economic and Trade Office) in Japan and also the Chinese Embassy officials have been keeping contact with the Hong Kong people. We are offering what we can do so as to satisfy their needs. A lot of them are asking for assistance in getting the medicine they need. Immigration Officers have already provided about 50 Hong Kong people with the medicine they need and also there are about 17 to 18 people who have received the required medicine through the cruise (operator).

We also learned that the Japanese authorities will be conducting tests by selecting people as the first batch, who are over 70 years old together with symptoms, such as fever. And those who are tested positive will be sent to hospital for treatment. Those who are tested negative will be given a choice to either do the quarantine onboard the ship or on land. We understand that there is one Hong Kong lady over 80 years old will be in the first batch of testing.

The Security Bureau has already set up a working group to look at how we can arrange these people to come back to Hong Kong as soon as possible. Officials of this working group include officers from the Security Bureau, the Immigration Department, the Food and Health Bureau, the Department of Health and various government departments with experience in arranging transportation and offering assistance.

What we are doing is liaising closely with the Japanese authorities, so as to get the first-hand information as quickly as possible. Some questions we want to get answers from the Japanese authorities include how soon these Hong Kong people will be allowed to disembark and how soon they will be allowed to leave Japan for Hong Kong. Whether they will be allowed to disembark in groups? How big will each group be? How many days may it take? These are the things that we want to get information from the Japanese authorities as soon as possible, so that the working group can look at all these things to work out how we can as soon as possible arrange for the Hong Kong people to come back. We will also look at how to deal with them when they return.

Chief Executive: If I may just supplement and answer your specific question about what will happen to these residents upon returning to Hong Kong, this is a public health matter, so I can assure you that it will still be guided by the experts' advice. I have, in fact, briefly raised this matter with the experts already, and the experts' advice will in turn be based on epidemiological evidence. That's why Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection is now liaising with the Japanese health authorities to try to get as much information as possible so that the experts could then give us advice on how to deal with the returnees. Basically, our primary objective is to look after the health and the safety of these Hong Kong people returning to Hong Kong and also the overall public health situation requirements in Hong Kong.

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam, about two weeks ago, you've mentioned about bringing those in Hubei back home but practically little progress has been announced. Could you promise the people of Hong Kong that you will try to first bring

those vulnerables, including those aged, children with long-term illness from Wuhan and Hubei back home first and if so, when is that possible? And also to accommodate those returning from Japan or Hubei, potentially subjecting to quarantines, could Secretary Yau enlighten us whether you plan to use the land around Disney, or are you in discussion with Disney to build some quarantine site around that place? What's the progress of discussion? When's this going to be ready? My second question concerns the \$25 billion that will be tabled to LegCo pretty soon. This is probably one of the – given that amount and the speed it's going to be tabled, it was sort of unprecedented, for lawmakers, Mrs Lam, is there practically a choice for them to consider these proposals, or do they have to bargain in terms of to where these should be used, and what's your message for them?

Chief Executive: I'll answer the question about this funding and then invite the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs to address the Hubei Hong Kong people. Yes, this is a pretty large sum of money, but we are facing an almost unprecedented situation and we are still in the midst of this particular situation which is still evolving. I suppose people should look at the content. This time the Government has taken some bold and decisive step to help different sectors and also to ensure that we can continue to undertake all the infection control measures that have been put in place. If members of the public and members of the Legislative Council do feel that each and every of these initiatives are as necessary, then the amount is not the most important factor, because if you want to do all these things, then you need to get the money, and I'm going to apply also for a contingency, because, as I said, the situation is evolving. In an emergency situation which we are in, you remember that when I introduced the regulations made by the Executive Council, that was premised on the declaration of Hong Kong entering into a public health emergency, so I feel that these measures are justified and they have taken into account the feedback given to us by Legislative Council Members and also expressed in public and from the various sectors. I would very much hope that Members of the Legislative Council would not bargain with us and will accept that these measures are essential, given the current situation.

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: Our colleagues and the Wuhan Economic and Trade Office, together with the Immigration Department colleagues, have been following up and rendering the necessary support and assistance to those Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei. Up till now, we have received more than 1,100 cases involving more than 2,200 Hong Kong people. We have been maintaining contacts with them, arranging to send drugs to those in need by batches, some have already arrived while some are on the way, and also providing them with hotlines as well as all the necessary assistance and support.

From day one, upon receipt of the assistance cases, we have already started the contingency planning. Because we obviously know that for those who went to Hubei to visit their relatives, they did not anticipate that they have to stay there for so long and they are anxious to come back. We have already started planning for their return arrangement. Given the number, of course we will take into account the actual ways of doing it, including the

possibility of returning by batches, how to prevent cross-infection during the return trip, and also the proper quarantine arrangement upon their return to Hong Kong. We have been doing that and we will try our very best to make this arrangement, taking into account the actual situation, particularly the availability of quarantine facilities of sufficient capacity.

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: As the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs mentioned, obviously we need all sorts of quarantine facilities for surveillance, and we therefore leave no stone unturned. I think this is a job that the entire Government is putting heads together. As far as your question on the use of the Phase 2 land (site) designated for Disneyland's expansion is concerned, we have secured the consent of the company to offer part of the site for this purpose, if it is eventually needed. Obviously, it would not provide an immediate capacity to handle the situation now, but basically if need be that would be one of the possibilities we are considering. Thank you.

Reporter: ...(inaudible)

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I don't have the exact configuration yet. We are looking at various options and obviously there are planned facilities for immediate service, which I think the Department of Health has identified. But for medium or longer term, we will identify any possible space available. In that regard, we have got the consent of the company for designating part of (the land) for use.

Chief Executive: Maybe to give you an overall picture, because quarantine facilities are extremely essential in our operation and also in situations when there are two groups of Hong Kong people returning to Hong Kong and require quarantine, so in addition to the centres that we are already using very much to the full capacity, the public housing estate in Chun Yeung Estate is extremely important. And on top of that we are embarking on in-situ expansion in Lei Yue Mun holiday camp. It's within an existing camp we find some vacant land and we are going to build on that vacant land. Actually, I went to see that particular site earlier this week. We are doing similar work in the Sai Kung outdoor recreation camp. We are also planning to use the Police's Pat Heung Junior Police Call Centre, and on this I must thank the Police for letting us use the Pat Heung centre. To find a vacant piece of land to build additional units is also on our radar screen so to speak. Thank you.

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