

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this evening (March 27). Also joining were the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Ms Elizabeth Tse; and the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene, Miss Vivian Lau. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam, so after the U-turn of your alcohol ban, so what confidence should the community have that your Government will not change its stance on these other measures you just announced tomorrow? You said you just raised a suggestion on Monday but your wording on Monday was more like an announcement. So has something gone wrong in the decision-making process? The second question, on the timetable of announcing such series of measures, don't you think the Government has been slow and indecisive in taking these drastic measures to contain the surge? And finally, questions on the estimates of residents returning from overseas. As overseas epidemic situation has further worsened, what are the contingency plans? And right now the arrivals from the Mainland do not need to wear wristbands, and what's your response on calls from experts that tougher measures should be put on them? Thank you.

Chief Executive: There are three questions. One is whenever a government policy requires legislative backup, that piece of legislation has to be enacted with the approval of the Legislative Council upon the endorsement of the Executive Council. So it is not entirely correct to say that there has been a decision making in enacting a piece of legislation to ban the consumption and supply of alcoholic drinks in bars or restaurants. That particular proposal has not reached that stage. That proposal was floated by me, of course having discussed internally within the Government, as a means to enhance social distancing, as a result of the large number of confirmed cases arising from customers gathering in bars, particularly in a location in Hong Kong. I'm very pleased that upon our suggestion, there have been very extensive discussions and active debate in society on whether that particular measure was an effective one. The consensus is perhaps any measure to tackle the issue of infection should not be focused on a particular sector or particular setting, but the crux of the matter is to reduce social interactions as far as possible. So today we are announcing with the endorsement of the Executive Council a piece of subsidiary legislation in order to achieve that objective. Any gatherings of four persons or more will be prohibited, unless it has been specifically exempted under that piece of regulation.

As far as your second question, I think the best way to look at the effectiveness of the Hong Kong SAR Government's various measures over the past two and three months is to look at the incidence of infection in Hong

Kong as well as the absolute cases. Yes, we are very worried by the surge in cases in Hong Kong, especially a record-breaking 65 cases today, but if you look at the comparison, Hong Kong ranks very low when compared to other countries in terms of both the absolute numbers and also the incidence of infection per one million population. I wouldn't say that this is entirely the credit or the results of government intervention. That is also the collective efforts of the people of Hong Kong. But certainly what we have done at various stages – almost on a weekly basis and a daily basis we have been making announcements, introducing measures and enacting at least four pieces of new regulations – all these efforts point to the direction of trying to contain the spread of this virus.

As far as the third question about returnees from overseas, the first question we need to answer is: do we allow them to come back? The answer has to be yes, because these are Hong Kong residents. They enjoy the right to enter and exit Hong Kong under the Basic Law, which is a constitutional as well as a human right for the people of Hong Kong. We have to enable them to come in. Allowing them to come in but at the same time trying to contain the virus is a major challenge, because all these Hong Kong people returning apparently are from highly infectious places. If you look at the numbers, I think Hong Kong students studying in the United Kingdom have already clocked up over 30 confirmed cases. The response is really to ask for their co-operation to subject themselves to the compulsory 14-day quarantine at home, to respect the monitoring measures that we have put in place, like the wristbands and this location-sharing service, and also to participate in the test that we have introduced. And we will enhance the test as Secretary Sophia Chan has outlined to you.

As far as Mainland arrivals, there are now very, very few Mainland arrivals after all these measures have been put in place. I suppose you are referring to the second batch of returnees of Hong Kong people from Hubei. Is that right?

Reporter: Yeah ...

Chief Executive: From Hubei?

Reporter: ... and also the daily ...

Chief Executive: There isn't any daily. Secretary Lee could give you the figures about Mainlanders coming in. As far as the Hubei returnees, according to the experts, their risk is much lower than the returnees from highly infectious places overseas and we have to be very pragmatic and realistic. All the things that we are now using in this anti-epidemic work are in short supply. Hospital beds, especially isolation beds, are in short supply. Quarantine centres are in short supply. Quarantine camps are in short supply. Medication, perhaps sooner or later, will be in short supply. Wristbands are in short supply. Staff are in short supply. We have to be very realistic and find a way forward in order to make the full use of our short supply of resources in order to achieve the objective on a sustainable basis, because I don't know how long this will last, especially we still have quite a large

number of Hong Kong people coming back by air. The earlier arrangement is for the Hubei returnees, since they are of lower risk, to be put on another form of monitoring, which is the apps for location sharing, which is far more convenient for returnees from Mainland because I think many of them will have this WeChat service. But as far as other monitoring measures, they are the same. We are as vigilant as we could in ensuring that people coming back to Hong Kong will not cause more spread of the virus in Hong Kong. Thank you.

Reporter: ... estimates of the returnees from overseas?

Chief Executive: Don't know. There are so many people abroad. You can only estimate on the basis of flights, how many flights there are every day coming back from overseas.

Reporter: Good evening, Mrs Lam. Why is the Government not enacting a full curfew and closing restaurants like other countries? Is the Government putting, you know, business first? Second, Beijing is claiming each day that they have no new domestic cases. As some people return to Hong Kong from China and with borders, you know, set in the future to be relaxed, do you have 100 per cent trust in the accuracy of Beijing's epidemic data? And this one isn't about the virus but it's quite urgent – we know of US journalists set to be ousted this week from China who also have Hong Kong permanent residency. How can they be barred from journalism here? The Immigration Department has nothing to do with their cases. Will Hong Kong defy Beijing on this or somehow tell a permanent resident that they can't work a certain job?

Chief Executive: There are a few questions. I'll try to answer them and perhaps the Secretary for Security could supplement if needed. First is in the course of rolling out anti-epidemic measures, we are guided by the advice from the experts on the expert advisory panels. The most important advice given to me over the last few days is really on enhancing social distancing. But we are also very aware that Hong Kong needs to continue because there are a lot of normal operations, activities that need to continue, just like we still need goods trucks coming into Hong Kong, bringing Hong Kong the food and daily necessities that we need. It's not a question of putting which sector's interest above which sector's interest. We are acting in the overall public interest of Hong Kong.

As far as the situation in Mainland, I think everybody is fully aware that the situation has stabilised. If not because of the imported cases, there would be no more cases in the Mainland. That's why the Mainland authorities, like Hong Kong authorities, are now very worried of importation of cases from abroad. And you might have picked up already from today, Guangdong has also imposed certain quarantine arrangements on arrivals from Hong Kong and Macao into Guangdong. Whether the Mainland situation or statistics could be trusted, I will refer you to what the WHO has said about the situation.

As far as the immigration matters, we will act in accordance with the law. As I've mentioned, we cannot deny the entry of Hong Kong residents, despite they coming back from highly infectious places. It's exactly because

of the law and the constitutional and human rights of these people. In all individual cases about foreigners coming in and other things, we will act in strict accordance with the law.

Reporter:...

Chief Executive: What's your question? I've answered four questions.

Reporter: About the journalism. Permanent residents who may be barred from journalism in Hong Kong?

Chief Executive: We will be acting in accordance with the law.

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