



財政司司長 陳茂波
Paul CHAN Mo-po, GBM, GBS, MH, JP
Financial Secretary

31 January 2022

Mr Clement Cheung, GBS, JP
Chief Executive Officer
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Dear *Clement,*

Thank you for regularly updating me on the challenges faced by the financial services sector in maintaining business as usual amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these challenges cut across various sectors. Nevertheless I am acutely aware that, given Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre and with the regional headquarters functions of many financial institutions located here, such challenges can be compounded in the financial sector in different ways. I will not underestimate how difficult it is for the financial institutions to manage regional business from Hong Kong and retain and bring in talents. Hence my heartfelt appreciation to the practitioners of the financial sector for their continued commitment and hard work to maintain Hong Kong's leadership in the financial markets notwithstanding the woes.

We fully understand the frustrations and anxieties faced by many business including financial institutions. Therefore, while the Government's top priority must be the safeguarding of lives and protection of public health, we would adjust the preventive measures when the pandemic situation has alleviated. Yet, this unprecedented pandemic, COVID's viral mutation and its variants as well as their possible health impact, present enormous unknown risks which, if mismanaged, will have devastating consequences. This requires careful calibrations in any relaxation to ensure public health is not prejudiced.

中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府財政司司長辦公室
Office of the Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government
People's Republic of China

Although the recent emergence of the Omicron variant has delayed the originally upcoming launch of the scheme for quarantine-free travel to the Mainland, piloting with Guangdong, it is important that we use this window to step up readiness for the re-opening of our border for more hassle-free travels. In this regard, the Government has put in strenuous efforts to boost vaccination. Lately we are seeing renewed momentum: the overall vaccination rate of people who have taken the first jab is now close to 80%. A more encouraging sign is that the vaccination rate of the elderly being inoculated has risen considerably to almost 62% from just 30% six months ago. We will continue with our effort to further raise the vaccination rate, with a view to providing a favourable backdrop for further relaxation of travel restrictions.

Let me assure you that the way forward for us is clear: with a higher vaccination rate and by bringing the current wave of infection under control with our utmost effort, we will be better placed to revive the border re-opening plan, first with the Mainland given our close economic and social ties, and then incrementally with other parts of the world.

I am also keenly aware of suggestions made by the business and financial community to fine-tune some of the current restrictive measures with a view to facilitating business travel without creating undue public health risk. These include, for examples, resuming commercial flights from certain areas, shortening the 21-day quarantine period for incoming travellers from high-risk areas, allowing home quarantine in certain circumstances, and resuming and gradually expanding some sector-specific exemption schemes.

In this regard, I am pleased to let you know that the Government has just announced that with effect from 5 February 2022 the compulsory quarantine period for inbound travellers will be reduced from 21 days to 14 days in designated quarantine hotels (“DQHs”), to be followed by a seven-day self-monitoring period. That would mean the quarantine arrangements for all Group A specified places will be aligned and the enhanced surveillance arrangement will no longer be implemented. For travellers who arrived at Hong Kong before 5 February who are subject to the original quarantine orders, our Department of Health will arrange for

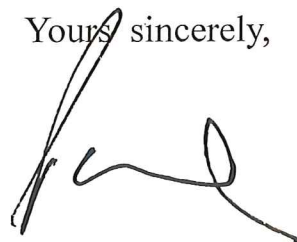
them to undergo relevant testing by batches before the completion of quarantine. If they obtain a negative test result and have completed at least 14 days of quarantine, they will be arranged to leave the DQHs in turn.

The above relaxation will hopefully go some way in addressing some of the key concerns of many, and it demonstrates that we are always prepared to adjust the restrictive measures in light of the changing pandemic situation. I hope the community will take it as a welcomed first step. As regards the other relaxation suggestions from the business community, while not underestimating the complexities of the issues involved, I will continue to bring them to my colleagues in the Government for careful and dynamic assessment.

Meanwhile, we have been closely monitoring the latest development of COVID drugs worldwide. With significant progress made in the development of antiviral treatment, we are losing no time in following up on the relevant procurement and will be setting aside sufficient resources for securing such antiviral medication.

Hong Kong's status as an international business and financial hub relies largely on our connectivity with the Mainland and the rest of the world. It is therefore crucial that we should make every effort to facilitate the travelling need of our people and friends from other parts of the world. We take this undertaking seriously and look forward to your continued support to Hong Kong.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'H' followed by a cursive name.