

To: Houston Chronicle, Seattle Post-Intelligencer and San Francisco Chronicle

March 10, 2020

Dear Editor,

I refer to the article from *The Conversation* by Matthew Seeger of Wayne State University that your paper carried online on March 6. In the article, the writer wrote about crisis communication and cited Hong Kong as one of the examples illustrating the importance of credible sources of information and he said HKers had lost even more confidence in their government for lack of a transparent and rapid response to COVID-19. To these points, I would like to make some clarifications.

Hong Kong has a robust system for fighting epidemics and has gone through the tragic SARS outbreak in 2003. In the face of a novel virus this time, we dare not underestimate its severity. Our preventative work against the disease started immediately once the Hong Kong Department of Health first received notification of the situation from the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China. On January 25, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government raised the COVID-19 response level to "Emergency", the highest level.

Assisted by a number of experts, the HKSAR Government has taken actions based on the continuous assessment of the situation with a view to cutting off the transmission of the virus in Hong Kong. Decisions are made within hours as we race against time to stay ahead of the virus.

We also understand that open and transparent communication is key in dealing with crisis situation. To be effective in tackling the disease, we must alleviate the public's anxiety through timely dissemination of easy-to-understand information. We also have to clear any misinformation in a timely manner. We disseminate the information to the public through different channels and the following are some of the channels for communication -

- Daily press briefings by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) and the Hospital Authority;
- A dedicated website was set up by the CHP for consolidating and disseminating information;
- An interactive map dashboard on COVID-19 infection situation in Hong Kong, which enables the public to keep abreast of the current situation and the relevant figures;
- A dedicated government webpage that provides integrated, one-stop information;
- Publicity campaigns to disseminate personal hygiene messages through online and offline media in a number of ethnic minority languages apart from English and Chinese.

We are fully committed to fight this global health crisis in an open and transparent manner.

Your sincerely,

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