

Law and order situation in the first half of 2020

1. Overall crime situation

In the first half of 2020, a total of 32 345 crimes were recorded in Hong Kong, an increase of 7 050 cases or 27.9% when compared with the 25 295 cases (record low since 1977 in which half-year crime statistics were first kept) in the same period of 2019. There were 4 507 cases of violent crime, an increase of 537 cases or 13.5% when compared with the same period of last year.

The increase was attributable to crimes arising from “anti-extradition amendment bill” related incidents, including arson (287 cases, +132 cases, increase of 85.2%), criminal damage (3 369 cases, +942 cases, increase of 38.8%), offences against public order (i.e. riots and unlawful assembly, etc., 203 cases, +178 cases, increase of 7.1 folds), possession of offensive weapons (320 cases, +111 cases, increase of 53.1%), possession of unlawful instrument (138 cases, +116 cases, increase of 5.3 folds), totalled a rise of 1 479 cases (increase of 52.1%); as well as other major crimes registered with rise including deception (8 129 cases, +4 274 cases, increase of 1.1 folds), robbery (186 cases, +142 cases, increase of 3.2 folds), burglary (1 156 cases, +370 cases, increase of 47.1%), theft (10 762 cases, +854 cases, increase of 8.6%), totalled a rise of 5 640 cases (increase of 38.6%).

As the negative factors of the violent incidents in relation to the “anti-extradition amendment bill” in the past year have not yet fully subsided, the disobedience to law among some members of public is growing, economy is worsening and community-wide mask wearing has enabled criminals to conceal their identities more easily, it is difficult to restore the law and order situation to the level before the “anti-extradition amendment bill” incidents within a short period of time.

Nevertheless, by comparing the crime figure of the first half of this year with that of second half of 2019, the overall crime dropped slightly by 4.9%. The types of crimes in relation to “anti-extradition amendment bill” incidents, such as arson, criminal damage, offences against public order, etc., even recorded a drop of 30% to 80%.

2. Major crimes recorded increase

2.1 Deception

A total of 8 129 cases of deception was recorded, representing a rise of 4 274 cases or a 1.1-fold increase when compared to 3 855 cases in the same period of 2019.

The increase was mainly attributed to the surgical mask related e-

shopping scams during the pandemic since late January, where 2 292 cases were recorded, accounting for over half of the increase, with the pecuniary loss totalled \$70.22 million. Yet the number of cases have decreased from its peak of 873 cases in February to 109 cases in June. The Police have been taking active enforcement actions against this type of scam. To date, a total of 96 related fraudsters were arrested and 341 cases were detected.

The significant increase in traditional deception cases including telephone deception and online romance scams remained a matter of concern.

Telephone deception totalled 649 cases, representing a rise of 418 cases or 1.8 folds. The two common modus operandi were "Guess Who" (331 cases, increase of 1.7 folds) and "Pretend Officials" (317 cases, increase of 1.9 folds). The pecuniary loss involved in telephone deception totalled \$287.4 million, being a 4.4-fold increase. About 94% of the loss was attributed to "Pretend Officials" cases, pecuniary loss of which totalled \$270.3 million, being a 4.8-fold increase.

Online romance scam totalled 429 cases, representing a rise of 147 cases or 52.1%. The pecuniary loss involved in online romance scam totalled \$108.9 million, being a decrease of 10.5%.

In the light of the uptrend, the Police stringently enforce the law and enhance publicity to raise the public's anti-deception awareness. The Police also collaborate with relevant sectors to enhance the capability of bank staff and remittance agents in identifying victims and assisting to prevent crime.

The Anti-Deception Coordination Centre (ADCC) continues its role, including operating a 24-hour enquiry hotline, "Anti-Scam Helpline 18222" to provide instant consultation service, and collaborating with INTERPOL to activate the "International Stop-Payment Mechanism" since October last year to mitigate citizens' monetary losses. ADCC, which has been established for three years, received over 65,000 calls from members of the public, and intercepted over \$6.3 billion worth of payments to fraudsters around the world. In the first 6 months of this year, ADCC managed to intercept the transfer of about \$1.9 billion in about 410 deception cases, and prevent victims of over 140 deception cases from wiring money to fraudsters.

2.2 Robbery

There were 186 robbery cases, representing a rise of 3.2 folds when compared with 44 cases in the same period of last year. These consisted mainly of street and convenience stores robberies, which stood at 61 cases (+44 cases, increase of 2.6 folds) and 37 cases (+36 cases, increase of 36 folds) respectively. Eight cases (+7 cases, increase of 7 folds) were committed at goldsmith, jewellery and watch shops. There were no robbery cases involving the use of genuine firearms.

The monthly figure has dropped from the peak of 55 cases in February to 23 cases in June. 107 robbery cases were detected with 197 persons arrested

in the first half of 2020, representing a detection rate of 57.5%, which was higher than the overall robbery detection rate of 36.7% in last year.

2.3 Burglary

There were 1 156 burglary cases, representing a rise of 370 cases or 47.1% when compared with 786 cases in the same period of last year. Cases involving both residential and non-residential premises recorded a rise of 125 cases (increase of 25.6%) and 245 cases (increase of 82.5%) respectively. In particular, a significant increase was registered in cases involving restaurants and offices, which totalled 245 cases (increase of 63.3%) and accounted for over one-fifth of the overall burglary figure.

To cope with the rising trend, the Police step up patrols and conduct operations. A total of 213 burglary cases were detected and 227 persons were arrested, including 13 serial burglars who were involved in at least 73 cases committed at restaurants, shops and offices over the territory.

2.4 Theft

Theft totalled 10 762 cases, a rise of 854 cases or 8.6% when compared with the same period of last year. Among which, snatching (90 cases, +32 cases) and theft from vehicle (734 cases, +292 cases) recorded an increase of 55.2% and 66.1% respectively, while taking conveyance without authority (480 cases, +272 cases) showed a 1.3-fold increase.

3. Other Crimes

3.1 Homicide

There were 5 homicide cases recorded, a drop of 6 cases when compared with 11 cases over the same period of last year. They included two homicide cases arising from the illness suffered by the murderer's relative or the murderer himself; one manslaughter case as a result of a medical incident; one murder case in the form of head-bashing robbery causing the victim's death; and one murder case arising from monetary disputes. All of the above cases were detected.

3.2 Rape and indecent assault

Regarding sexual offences, rape and indecent assault cases respectively went down by 13.8% from 29 to 25 reports and 50.1% from 573 to 286 reports. No rape cases were committed by strangers. Detection rates of rape and indecent assault remained high at 92% and 73.8% respectively.

3.3 Serious drug, serious gambling, syndicated vice and triad offences

For crime types that were detected by proactive actions of the Police, including serious drug, serious gambling and syndicated vice offences, recorded a drop of around 20% to 50% when compared with the same period of 2019, while triad-related offences also recorded a slight drop of 3.7%.

In fact, as the violence and law-breaking situation arising from the “anti-extradition amendment bill” related incidents have eased since the beginning of this year, the Police have deployed resources flexibly and mounted intelligence-led operations to combat the above offences proactively, which included a tripartite anti-crime joint operation codenamed “THUNDERBOLT 2020” in May this year. During the operation, Hong Kong Police smashed a number of illegal gambling establishments, drug distribution centres, etc., resulting in the arrest of 380 persons and seizure of around \$1.4 million worth of narcotics and psychotropic substances. On the whole, the number of serious drug and gambling cases combatted and detected by the Police proactively in the first half of this year has recorded a rise of almost 2 times when compared with the second half of 2019.

While being at the forefront of fighting COVID-19, the Police remain committed to combating triads, syndicated and organised crime.

3.4 Youth crimes

A total of 2 306 youths were arrested for crimes, representing an increase of 1 072 persons or 86.9% when compared with the same period of last year. The major types of crimes committed by youths were offences against public order (684 number of youths, +628 persons, increase of 11.2 folds), wounding and serious assault (270 number of youths, +101 persons, increase of 59.8%), shop theft (192 number of youths, +22 persons, increase of 12.9%) and criminal damage (147 number of youths, +58 persons, increase of 65.2%).

It is a matter of concern that there were 73 number of youths arrested for robbery, which were 4.6 folds of the figure over the same period last year. The number of youths arrested for triad related offences also increased by 48.4% to 331 persons.

The Police strives to assist youth offenders to get back to the right path under the available mechanisms, including identifying suitable cases to be dealt with by the Police Superintendent Discretion Scheme. Moreover, since April last year, the “Community Support Service Scheme”, which was only provided to youths arrested and issued with a superintendent’s caution previously, has been extended to all arrested youths aged under 18. The Police would refer them to the relevant non-governmental organisations as soon as practicable after the arrest, so that timely support and counselling service could be provided to the arrested youths and their family.

4. Situation of incidents arising from “Anti-extradition Amendment Bill”

As of 30 June 2020, 9 216 persons were arrested in connection with “anti-extradition amendment bill” related incidents. 3 725 (or 40.4% of the arrestees) were students, of which, around 55% were post-secondary students and 45% were secondary students.

1 972 persons have been prosecuted, and 653 of them have been prosecuted with riot related offences. 252 persons had to bear legal consequences,

including 108 were bound over and 141 were convicted, the offences involved include taking part in riot, unlawful assembly, criminal damage, desecrating national flag, wounding, assaulting police officer, possession of offensive weapons, etc. 57 persons were sentenced to imprisonment from 2 weeks to 4 years. The legal proceedings of most prosecuted cases are on-going. Besides, 16 persons were issued with a superintendent's caution.

It has been over a year since the eruption of the disturbances arising from "anti-extradition amendment bill". Since June last year, protests have become increasingly violent, and in November, the "1111 Tragedy" and "1113 Tragedy" occurred where the a man was set into fire by rioters in Ma On Shan on 11 November, and another man was killed by bricks hurled at his head by rioters in Sheung Shui on 13 November respectively; the situation further escalated into riots taking place at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in the same month, in which the number of petrol bombs hurled and level of violence used by the rioters when they "hijacked" the school campuses were unprecedented.

Moreover, there are extremely violent groups using genuine firearms and explosives intended to kill police officers or force the government to accede to their so-called "demands". The Police have arrested 83 persons in connection with 15 explosives and 5 genuine firearms cases arising from "anti-extradition amendment bill", 32 of them have been prosecuted for offences including "Making explosive with intent to endanger life or property", "Making or possession of explosive", "Shooting with intent to do grievous bodily harm", "Possession of arms and/or ammunition without licence", etc.

After the Police's strict enforcement of the law, the current situation in Hong Kong has been greatly improved when compared with the scenes of frequent violence taking place over the territory more than half a year ago. In order to further prevent, suppress and impose punishment on criminal acts which endanger national security, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has come in force starting from June 30, 2020. It clearly stipulates the relevant offences, including acts of secession, subversion of state power, terrorist activities, collusion with foreign or external forces to endanger national security. With the establishment of the Nation Security Department of the Hong Kong Police Force on July 1, 2020, the Police will stringently enforce the law and conduct investigation to ensure effective implementation of the law in Hong Kong.

5. Conclusion

Since June last year, Hong Kong has been tormented by turmoil and social dissension for over a year, the stable law and order situation that this city used to maintain has been severely challenged. Meanwhile the pandemic situation remains severe around the globe and in Hong Kong. We must join hands to fight against violence and the pandemic. The Police will continue to professionally discharge its duties to uphold the rule of law and maintain law and order as well as social stability.