

LC Urgent Q: Emergency measures to allay public resentment

Following is an urgent question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

The situation in Hong Kong has continued to deteriorate recently. Not only a student, who had been injured during the course of the Police's dispersal operation, died eventually, but resistance activities also occurred in a number of districts in the past five consecutive days since the 8th of this month, and such confrontations have a tendency to spread across the whole territory. Apart from the continued law enforcement actions to be taken by the Police, whether the Government has formulated any emergency measures to allay public resentment, so as to avoid further deterioration of the situation?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to Hon Ip Kin-yuen's question is as follows:

In the past few days, rioters unlawfully assembled in different locations in Hong Kong, and unscrupulously attacked Police officers and members of the public holding opposite views. An innocent member of the public was set on fire and is still in critical condition. The HKSAR Government strongly condemns such extremely cruel acts.

In the meantime, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government expresses great sorrow and regret over the unfortunate death of a man who fell from a carpark in Tseung Kwan O, and extends sincere condolences to his family, friends and schoolmates. The Police have pledged to conduct an in-depth investigation into the case, and submit to the coroners a report with the recommendation of holding a death inquest for the coroners' decision. If an inquest is to be held, all investigation data will be disclosed in open court.

Recently, radical netizens have initiated an "all-in strike" (i.e. labour strike, boycott of business, and class boycott) and other protests actions like blocking roads, disturbing transportation services and vandalising transport facilities, causing serious traffic disruption. The daily activities of going out, going to work and going to school of the general public have been significantly affected. Some masked rioters ignored the safety of others and threw bricks, wood planks, mattresses, bicycles, and even petrol bombs onto railway tracks. They set shopping malls on fire and

threw items and bricks onto roads from atop so as to block the roads, causing injuries to passersby and damages to vehicles in motion. The throwing of petrol bombs, which is an outrageous act, has become common. Many areas in Hong Kong have been affected by these unlawful activities of the masked rioters, and the situation has persisted. These unlawful acts are outrageous, pre-meditated and planned.

Hong Kong is a city which respects the rule of law. The law applies to all places in Hong Kong and nowhere is above the law. Whenever unlawful activities occur, the Police are duty-bound to take enforcement actions according to the statute. Most of the incidents in recent days took place on the campuses of tertiary institutions. We urge schools to focus on education. The society should denounce and not condone violence, as violence only breeds more violence and undermines the rule of law. This would only cause greater harm. The outcome would be detrimental. The violent acts that were carried out in recent days were sheer violence and nothing else. The seriousness, extensiveness and danger of such acts have clearly crossed the line of any civilised society or reasonable person. They have seriously affected the freedom to the daily lives of the general public to go to work, go to school or simply go out. The violent acts are bringing serious threats to Hong Kong, and putting Hong Kong in an untenable position.

No one should violate the law even if they are discontented with the Government or the current state of social affairs. No one should resort to or rationalise violence. The HKSAR Government will give its best effort to stop violence as soon as possible. We are determined to stop violence and curb disorder, defend the rule of law, and restore social order promptly.

Destruction is easy but construction is not. Destruction and vandalism can be done in split seconds, but to mend social rifts and rebuild mutual trust to allow Hong Kong to move forward is not an easy matter. As a responsible government, the HKSAR Government not only strives to stop violence and curb disorder, but is also tenacious to overcoming differences through dialogue. The Chief Executive announced on 4 September four actions to bring calm and order and as the starting point for Hong Kong to move on. Apart from formally withdrawing the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill, the HKSAR Government is fully committed to supporting the study of the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC), and will closely follow up on the recommendations of IPCC's reports. Furthermore, the Chief Executive and the political team will engage in in-depth dialogue with people of different political stances and background in the community, so as to get a better understanding of the deep-seated problems in society and find pragmatic solutions to those. Furthermore, as I mentioned in my reply to oral question number six just now, the Government would invite community leaders, professionals and academics to independently examine and review society's deep-seated problems and advise the Government on solutions. We are undertaking the necessary preparatory work, and will start the work on the independent review panel on deep-seated conflicts as soon as practicable after the situation has stabilised somewhat.

The social incidents in recent months have brought serious impacts on the local economy and livelihood. In this connection, since August this year, the Government has announced three rounds of helping measures for enterprises and the general public. These measures cost a total of over \$20 billion. Some of the measures aim at reducing the operational costs (such as reduction or waiver of license fees or rent) borne by and tax liabilities of small-and-medium enterprises, or providing assistance to them in terms of capital flow. Helping measures for the general public include increasing the percentage of tax relief applicable to salaries tax for the Year of Assessment 2018/19, providing one-off electricity charge subsidy to residential accounts, and providing targeted relief measures for industries affected most.

The spread of violence is severely detrimental to the lives of every member of the public, as well as our economy, daily operation and international image. Hong Kong can simply not sustain long-term destruction and confrontations. We appeal for the support of the general public to treasure Hong Kong, defend the rule of law and social order, and denounce violence. The Government will take strict enforcement actions against all unlawful and violent acts. We are confident, determined and capable to overcome the current challenges and mend social rift. The Government will bring Hong Kong out of the woods by a "three-pronged" approach. Firstly, we will stop violence and curb disorder as soon as possible. Secondly, we will proactively engage the public in dialogue. Thirdly, we will seriously tackle deep-seated social issues accumulated over time.