

LCQ 1: Incident in Prince Edward Station

Following is a question by the Hon Alvin Yeung and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 13) :

Question:

According to the footage captured by the media, on the night of August 31 this year, some police officers attacked members of the public, who did not put up any resistance, with batons and pepper spray and pointed guns at them on the platforms of MTR Prince Edward Station and inside the train compartments thereat. It has been reported that on that night, the Police evicted journalists and volunteer first-aiders from Prince Edward Station and then, by claiming that there were no injured persons in the station, hindered the entry of ambulancemen of the Fire Services Department (FSD) to the station to perform rescue work, resulting in the delayed treatment of quite a number of injured persons. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) between the night of August 31 and the early hours of the following day, of the respective numbers of police officers, firemen, ambulancemen and personnel of other government departments (please specify) who were on duty inside MTR Prince Edward Station and Lai Chi Kok Station, the respective numbers of persons arrested in the Concourse, on Platforms 1 and 2 Level and Platforms 3 and 4 Level inside Prince Edward Station, as well as the respective numbers of injured persons, arrestees and other non-government personnel who were conveyed by a specially arranged train from Prince Edward Station to Lai Chi Kok Station (and provide a breakdown by the exit through which they left), and set out such figures in tables;

(2) of the reasons and the legal basis for the Police evicting journalists and volunteer first-aiders from Prince Edward Station on that night; whether the Government has assessed if the eviction of journalists has infringed upon the freedom of the press enjoyed by Hong Kong residents under Article 27 of the Basic Law; if they have assessed, of the outcome; and

(3) given that despite the Government's repeated denial of the death of any person during the aforesaid confrontations, quite a number of members of the public still suspect that the Police have concealed some information, whether the Government will make public all footage captured on that night by the closed-circuit television cameras at the MTR stations and by police officers' body worn video cameras, so as to allay public concerns?

Reply:

President,

On August 31 this year, a large group of protesters participated in unlawful assemblies in various districts in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories during which rioters blocked roads, vandalised public property, setting fire, hurled petrol bombs at government buildings at a large scale, assaulted police officers recklessly by bricks and iron poles, and even hurled iron railings and miscellaneous objects onto the tracks of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), completely disregarding the safety of other passengers.

At about 10.45 pm in Prince Edward Station, a large group of rioters got into arguments with other passengers in the train compartments. As seen on news coverage and online footage, passengers including the elderly were abused, assaulted and attacked by these rioters, who later even sprayed the train with a fire extinguisher, resulting in chaos inside the compartments.

The MTR reported to the Police, and later made announcements requesting passengers to leave the train compartments. Apart from the MTR who reported to the Police, the Police also received 999 reports from members of the public. The Police thus dispatched policemen to Prince Edward Station to stop violent acts and effect arrest against offenders.

The Police were attacked by rioters after entering the station. When police officers arrived at the platforms and entered the compartments, rioters used umbrellas and other objects to attack them. It was necessary for police officers to use appropriate force including batons and pepper spray for arrest and dispersal.

Regarding the incident in Prince Edward Station, as of October 31, the Police arrested a total of 66 persons for alleged offences including "unlawful assembly", "criminal damage" and "possession of offensive weapon". During the operation, the Police seized weapons and gears such as petrol bombs, laser guns, slingshots, steel pellets, helmets and gas masks.

My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In the evening of August 31, the Police sent different units of uniformed and plain-clothes officers into Prince Edward Station to combat violent and illegal acts, arresting 52 people in the Prince Edward Station lobby and on platforms 3 and 4. Seven of the arrested people were escorted by the Police from Prince Edward Station to Kwai Chung Police Station. Later, Prince Edward Station was under siege by protesters. Out of safety and security concerns and after discussing with the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), a special train trip was arranged to send the remaining 45 arrested persons to Lai Chi Kok Station, seven of whom were immediately sent to hospital for treatment after arriving at Lai Chi Kok Station.

During the period from the evening of August 31 to the early hours of September 1, 38 personnel of the Fire Services Department (FSD) were performing duties at the MTR Prince Edward Station, among which 20 ambulance personnel escorted seven patients from Prince Edward Station to Lai Chi Kok

Station. There were another 18 ambulance personnel at the B2 Exit of Lai Chi Kok Station that night who delivered the seven injured arrested persons from Lai Chi Kok Station to Caritas Medical Centre and Princess Margaret Hospital in batches.

(2) According to section 10 of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap. 232), it is the Police's statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order. As such, when unlawful assembly and violent acts occur, the Police must take appropriate actions to restore public peace.

Hong Kong has press freedom and the media's right of reporting, which the Police will strive to facilitate. The Police also have the statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order. Mutual respect and understanding are beneficial to the work of both sides.

Besides, the Police also always make every effort to facilitate all ambulance services, and will not obstruct or delay such services. Furthermore, most police officers have received first aid and basic medical training and are able to provide preliminary treatment for injured persons before ambulance personnel arrive at the scene.

At 10.45 pm, the MTR called the Police for assistance because the train doors could not be closed due to passenger disputes on the train. Subsequently, smouldering was found in the train compartments and a number of Passenger Alarm Devices inside the compartments were activated. The MTRCL, out of safety concerns, activated the evacuation procedures at 10.53 pm, including making appeals through announcement and sending staff to assist passengers in leaving, as well as closing the Prince Edward Station. The Police received the reports from the MTR and members of the public and entered Prince Edward Station. As MTR had closed the MTR Station, and the Police had to handle a large number of arrestees at the scene, with dangerous weapons such as petrol bombs, slingshots seized; due to safety considerations, the Police appealed to all persons at the scene to leave Prince Edward Station as soon as possible.

When the Police were aware that ambulances had been deployed to the scene to assist the injured persons, immediate coordination was arranged with the FSD and the MTRCL for ambulance personnel to enter the MTR Station to provide medical care for the injured persons. As a large group of persons besieged the station and dug out bricks from the pavements, the Police considered the vicinity unsafe after assessment. After discussing with MTR, and out of safety considerations, a special train was arranged to send the ambulance personnel and the injured persons to Lai Chi Kok Station, and then transferred to the Caritas Medical Centre and the Princess Margaret Hospital respectively for treatment.

(3) Regarding the Prince Edward Station incident on August 31, the Hospital Authority and the FSD have repeatedly clarified in public and clearly confirmed that no one died. The groundless allegations of still saying that someone had died are sheer fabrications and malicious rumours; the intentions to smear the Police Force and create conflicts in society are ill-

willed.

The Police's criminal investigation is actively being undertaken, including reviewing the relevant footage captured by the Police and the footage of the closed-circuit television cameras that night from the MTRCL, etc. Such information may likely be evidence in the criminal trial, and to ensure a fair trial, it is inappropriate to and cannot be disclosed before the trial. The court's trial is open and will be known by members of the public and the media.

Thank you, President.