

## LCQ 22: Police officers injured during operations between June and November

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

In the demonstrations since June this year which were triggered by the disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, the demonstrators' violent acts have been escalating continuously, turning from, at the initial stage, storming the Legislative Council Complex and government buildings, blocking roads, hurling bricks and paralysing the airport's operation, to assaulting police officers, hurling a large quantity of petrol bombs and committing arson, vandalising MTR stations and shops, "settling privately" (the code words for making vigilante attacks) those persons with different political views, etc. Quite a number of police officers were injured while on duty, and several thousands of demonstrators were arrested. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number, since June this year, of police officers injured while on duty in demonstrations, with a tabulated breakdown by (i) the injured body parts of the police officers and (ii) the seriousness of the injuries when they were sent to hospital;

(2) of the total number, since June this year, of demonstrators who were arrested for the first time and then admitted to bail, as well as the general bail conditions; and

(3) of the current number of cases listed for trials which are related to the disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, and the relevant average time needed for listing since June this year?

Reply:

President,

Since early June this year, over 900 protests, processions and public meetings have been staged in Hong Kong, many of which eventually turned into violent unlawful events. In the past five months or so, some rioters repeatedly engaged in serious illegal acts, including wantonly blocking roads, paralysing the traffic, hurling petrol bombs and bricks at various locations, setting fires, vandalising and burning shops and MTR and Light Rail facilities, and violently assaulting people with different views. These acts have seriously jeopardised personal safety as well as public order and public safety.

Police officers will be exposed to a higher risk of injury while performing their duties under dangerous circumstances, or when facing rioters who deliberately assault police officers both on duty or off duty, have propensity to violence or carry weapons. Police officers injured while on duty will not only result in impairments to their personal safety and health, but will also make them unable to perform their duties, undermining the Police's ability to enforce the law. Therefore, the public order will also suffer as a result.

Hong Kong is a society upholding the rule of law, with everyone must abide by the law. The Hong Kong law applies to all places in the territory and nowhere is above the law. It is the statutory duty of the Police to maintain public safety and public order. In case of serious threats to public order and public safety, the Police must take appropriate law enforcement actions. The Police will definitely handle lawbreakers seriously by sparing no effort in conducting investigation to bring them to justice.

Stopping violence and curbing disorder is currently the top priority of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. For the past few months, various bureaux and departments of the Government have been proactively striving to support and complement the Police's effort in this respect under their respective purview. As a professional disciplined service, the Police will continue to stand fast at their posts and carry out their duties dedicatedly. The Government would like to reiterate that if members of the public are law-abiding and refrain from using violence, there would be no need for the Police to use force.

Our consolidated reply to Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) From June 9 to November 29, a total of 483 police officers, with their ranks ranging from Police Constable to Chief Superintendent of Police, were injured during operations. Reasons for their injuries include:

(a) Being burnt by petrol bombs hurled by rioters. A police officer was hit by a petrol bomb while performing duties at Tsim Sha Tsui Police Station and suffered from severe burns to the skin as a result. Another police officer, after sustaining injuries in an attack, was inflicted with severe skin burns from petrol bombs hurled by rioters;

(b) Being burnt by corrosive liquid hurled by rioters. A police officer suffered from severe skin burns caused by corrosive liquid splashed on him when handling an incident of clashes in Tuen Mun; and

(c) Being assaulted or bitten by rioters. Some police officers were assaulted by a number of protesters during dispersal operations. A police officer had part of his finger bitten off by a protester when subduing him in Sha Tin.

(d) Being injured by hard objects including bricks, iron bars, wooden sticks and stones, resulting in fractures or various degrees of trauma. A police officer suffering from facial fracture due to attack on the head has not yet recovered;

(e) Being injured by sharp objects including sharp knives, cutters, arrows and objects sharpened by rioters such as iron rods, bamboo sticks, hiking poles and water pipes, resulting in various degrees of lacerations and stabbing wounds. A police officer was slashed in the neck by a rioter's cutter and was needed to undergo urgent surgical treatment. Another police officer's calf was shot through by a rioter's arrow and was needed to undergo surgery to remove the arrow and further treatment;

(f) Being injured by modified weapons including steel beads, glass or other hard objects shot from catapults and slingshots, resulting in various degrees of abrasions and contusions. A police officer was hit in the mouth by a metal bead.

The Police do not maintain the breakdown statistics requested in the question. However, the abovementioned unlawful acts have caused police officers facing serious threats to personal safety and even life-threatening situations. Some injured officers are yet to be able to return to work.

(2) and (3) As at November 28, a total of 5 889 persons were arrested by the Police at public order events held since June 9, 2019. Among them, 921 persons have their judicial proceedings ongoing while 33 persons have their judicial proceedings concluded.

Among the convicted cases, a person was sentenced to imprisonment of two weeks, four months and eight months respectively upon conviction of "criminal damage", "assaulting police officer" and "unlawful assembly". As part of the sentence is executed concurrently, the total sentence was imprisonment of 10 months. An under-aged person was sentenced to the rehabilitation centre after being convicted for "possession of offensive weapon in public place" and "possession of offensive weapon with intent". The detention period can be between three and nine months.

Among those who have been charged, 102 are aged under 18 and 362 reported to be students, accounting for 10.9 per cent and 38.6 per cent of the total number of persons charged respectively.

As at November 28, 3 905 persons are on police bail pending further investigation by the Police. The legal basis and statutory authority for police bail are set out in section 52(3) of the Police Force Ordinance. Such police bail may be granted to discharge a person on his entering into a recognisance with or without sureties for a reasonable or specified amount, and the arrestee shall subsequently appear at such police station and at such time as is named in the recognisance.

When a charge is laid against a defendant, the case will first be brought up in a Magistrates' Court. The actual time required for a trial to take place from its first appearance at the Magistrates' Courts varies from case to case. It depends mainly on the time required for both the prosecution and the defence to prepare for trial, with all relevant factors such as the complexity of the case, the number of defendants involved, the number of factual or expert witnesses involved, and the time needed for processing any duty lawyer or legal aid application taken into account. The

time required will also be affected by the anticipated length of the trial, the availability of counsel and the court's own availability.

When a case is adjourned for further hearings, the magistrate may need to consider granting of bail. The magistrate will process bail application strictly in accordance with Part IA of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (Cap 221). According to the record, the general condition of admission to bail for the cases mentioned in the question is that the defendant:

- (a) shall surrender to the court any passport or travel document;
- (b) shall not leave Hong Kong;
- (c) shall report to a police station as the court may specify weekly;
- (d) shall reside at a specified address and be present therein between such times as the court may specify (commonly known as "curfew order");
- (e) shall not enter any place or premises as the court may specify; and
- (f) shall pay cash bail by himself or his surety.