

LCQ1: Weapons seized by Police in recent months and law and order situation in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Ting-kwong and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

In recent months, the Police seized a large quantity of weapons (including pistols, an AR15 long-range rifle and several hundred bullets), and suspected that some people had planned to use such weapons in public events for causing casualties so as to frame the Police. The Police also seized large quantities of petrol bombs, incendiary bombs, explosives and chemicals which may be used for making weapons. It has been reported that last month some members of a foreign extremist organisation came to Hong Kong to participate in demonstrations. The aforesaid incidents have caused quite a number of members of the public to worry that the law and order situation in Hong Kong is deteriorating. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the lethality of the various types of firearms, as well as the respective quantities of the various types of weapons and chemicals that may be used for making weapons, which were seized by the Police since June last year;

(2) whether the Police have investigated the origins of the firearms and other weapons seized and if there is any connection with foreign terrorist organisations, and of the follow-up actions taken; and

(3) of the authorities' assessment of the current law and order situation in Hong Kong, as well as their strategies for stopping violence and curbing disorder and for preventing foreign terrorists from engaging in illegal activities in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

There have been more than 1 200 public order events since June last year, with many of them ended in violence. The continuous escalation of violence, as well as the increasingly frequent demonstrations and conflicts and their extensive impact, have caused grave threat to people's lives and properties, resulting in a very worrying situation. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government strongly condemns the escalating violent acts and adopts zero tolerance to any persons who resort to violence for their own purpose. It is the responsibility of the HKSAR Government to

stop violence and curb disorder and to restore public peace by taking resolute measures.

My reply to the three parts of Hon Wong's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The continuous escalation of violent acts of rioters in just six months or so has caused grave concern. The types of weapons and dangerous goods seized by the Police at different places and premises were of a great variety and were extremely alarming in terms of both destructive power and quantity. Major examples of serious cases are as follows:

(i) On July 20 last year at an industrial unit in Tsuen Wan, the Police found self-produced powerful explosive of TATP, 10 completed incendiary bombs, nitric acid, slingshots, pellets, knives, iron rods, etc. The power of the explosive could cause severe injuries.

(ii) On August 1 last year at an industrial unit in Fo Tan, the Police found a batch of weapons, including two bows, six arrows, petrol bomb and a large quantity of raw materials for making petrol bombs, and seized a considerable amount of essential oils containing cannabis; at a flat in Tin Shui Wai, the Police also seized 30 smoke bombs, 27 half-finished smoke bombs and raw materials for making smoke bombs including potassium nitrate, magnesium, fuses for explosives, etc.

(iii) On November 2 last year at a flat in Wan Chai, the Police seized 59 petrol bombs and nearly 20 litres of inflammable chemicals including turpentine, petrol and ethanol.

(iv) In mid-November and early December last year at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Police seized a total of about 8 000 petrol bombs, about 800 bottled liquefied petroleum gas, about 1 000 bottles of petrol and nearly 700 bottles of inflammable chemicals (including acetone, acetonitrile, aniline, methanol, dichloromethane, silane, etc.), and about 600 weapons including hammers, arrows, knives and air pistols.

(v) On December 8 last year at a flat in North Point, the Police seized a 9mm Glock semi-automatic handgun, 105 bullets, five magazines, as well as three items of dagger, sabre and katana. Three of the five magazines seized were fully loaded and ready for use.

(vi) On the same day, in the vicinity of Wah Yan College in Wan Chai, the Police found two radio-controlled improvised explosive devices weighing about 10 kilograms in total. Such devices were found to be composed of aluminium nitrate and hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD), a highly explosive organic compound. Ignition of the devices would pose lethal damage to the surrounding 50-to 100-metre range and lead to collapse of buildings. These devices also contained many sharp nails to create greater lethality.

(vii) On December 14 last year at Siu Lang Shui Road in Tuen Mun, the Police seized a radio control for explosives and about 27 grams of suspected explosive powders, and arrested three men who were allegedly conducting tests

on explosives. There were signs of explosion at the scene.

(viii) On December 20 last year at a public place in Tai Po, the Police arrested a man and seized a gun. The suspect fired a shot during the arrest. Fortunately, the incident caused no injury. An AR-15 long-range rifle, 200 bullets and a circular speedloader were subsequently seized at his relevant flat.

(ix) On December 24 last year at a mini-storage in Kwun Tong, the Police seized 500 grams of smoke cake, 15 grams of explosives and dozens of bottled chemicals (including nitrocellulose and sodium chloride).

The Police do not maintain relevant statistics on all the types of weapons and chemicals that may be used for making weapons for articles seized during operations. I must solemnly point out that illegal possession or use of weapons, firearms and ammunition, explosives, dangerous goods and the like constitute very serious crimes in contravention of many criminal offences, the maximum penalty of which is life imprisonment.

The Police will make full investigation into each case to track the source of weapons, firearms, explosives and chemicals seized and the motive for committing crimes. As far, there is no evidence linking the cases to overseas terrorist organisations. Nonetheless, the Government will closely monitor and cautiously examine the cases to identify any possible risk of involving local terrorism.

(3) As for the law and order situation, crime figures in the first half of last year showed a downward trend but since June, there have been many processions and demonstrations and rioters have been wantonly hurling petrol bombs and bricks, setting fires, vandalising and burning shops and public transport facilities, assaulting people with different views, etc., causing deterioration in the law and order situation in Hong Kong. From January to November 2019, 52 250 crimes were recorded, representing an increase of 4.2 per cent over 50 122 crimes recorded during the same period in 2018. The overall crime detection rate in the first 11 months of 2019 was 36.1 per cent, which was lower than the overall crime detection rate of 42.9 per cent during the same period in 2018. In the past six months or so, the Police devoted considerable manpower to handle over 1 200 public order events and the violent acts of rioters. Routine policing work, such as crime prevention and patrols, was unquestionably affected as a result. Maintaining good public order relies not only on police officers' efforts but also citizens' abiding by the law. If members of the public turn a blind eye to violent acts of rioters and refuse to co-operate or even obstruct the Police's law enforcement operations, or condone even further assaulting against police officers, deterioration in public order is the price we have to pay.

The Security Bureau has been co-ordinating the work among disciplined services for making collaborative efforts to stop violence and curb disorder. For example, the Immigration Department exercises effective immigration control to prevent the entry of suspected criminals, terrorists, etc. into Hong Kong. The Customs and Excise Department monitors and checks imported goods to ensure that illegal goods do not enter Hong Kong. The Fire Services

Department conducts inspections to ensure that no dangerous or controlled goods are unlawfully sold or possessed in the market. Various disciplined services also fully assist and facilitate the Police's work in terms of intelligence and support. In addition, the Chief Secretary for Administration personally chairs a high-level Inter-departmental Action Task Force to oversee the work of different bureaux and departments in monitoring, response, follow-up, dissemination of information, etc., with a view to ensuring that all work is well-coordinated and handled in an effective and expeditious manner.

As regards counter-terrorism (CT), in April 2018, the HKSAR Government set up the Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit (ICTU) comprising members from six disciplined services. ICTU is tasked with monitoring the global terrorism trend and CT measures, reviewing and improving CT strategies in Hong Kong, developing CT training, optimising various contingency plans, etc. Apart from fostering closer liaison and smoother collaboration among relevant departments, ICTU can also achieve synergy in various aspects such as CT intelligence, training and emergency response education with a view to enhancing the overall CT deployment and safeguarding the risk of terrorist activities.

Thank you, President.