

LCQ2: Preventing emergence of local terrorism

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 27):

Question:

When making public in March this year the overall law and order situation of Hong Kong in 2019, the Police indicated that during the "anti-extradition amendment bill incidents", online publicity materials had already "turned into weapon-making handbooks or even guides to kill police", and the violent acts concerned also involved the use of petrol bombs, corrosive liquids, genuine firearms and bullets and explosives. "In order to express their dissatisfaction with society and the government, rioters chose to hurt the public and cause social panic, which exactly is the behaviour of home-grown terrorism." The Police have repeatedly pointed out that the community must vigilantly guard against the emergence of home-grown terrorism. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed the risk of attacks by home-grown terrorists in Hong Kong at present; if so, of the assessment outcome;
- (2) whether it has adjusted its counter-terrorism strategies in response to the changes in the aforesaid risk of attacks; if so, of the details; and
- (3) of the measures in place to raise public vigilance against home-grown terrorism, e.g. educating youngsters with immature minds to say "No" clearly to violence, so as to prevent home-grown terrorism from taking root in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

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

Because of the incident of anti-legislative amendment, a series of processions and public assemblies have been staged in Hong Kong and ended up in violence since June last year. There were even some 10 cases involving explosives and firearms, which were extremely alarming in both destructive power and quantities. These cases are similar to overseas terrorist activities in terms of their modus operandi, showing signs of the breeding of local terrorism in Hong Kong.

First, the various types of explosives seized by the Police include TATP

(triacetone triperoxide), ANFO (ammonium nitrate/fuel oil), HMTD (hexamethylene triperoxide diamine), DNT (dinitrotoluene) and black powder, which are very powerful explosives commonly used in overseas terrorist attacks. Examples are the bombing at a federal building in Oklahoma of the United States in 1995, the serial bombing of the underground and buses in London of the United Kingdom in 2005, the bombing at government buildings in Oslo of Norway in 2011, the serial bombing at an airport and a metro station in Brussels of Belgium in 2016, the serial bombing at churches and hotels in Sri Lanka in 2019, etc. These terrorist attacks took place in different corners of the world and led to severe casualties.

Second, the detonation methods intended to be used by the persons involved in these cases resemble those commonly used in attacks by different terrorists around the world. For example, the Police seized a bomb made of a pressure cooker and nails; the same kind of pressure cooker bomb was used by terrorists in the marathon bombing in Boston of the United States in 2013, which resulted in three deaths and 264 injuries. Besides, the Police seized detonating devices made of mobile phones; similar remote devices made of mobile phones were used in the serial bombing in New York and New Jersey of the United States in 2016, which resulted in 34 injuries. The Police also seized pipe bomb (which could be hurled like hand-grenades), and similar bomb was used in the bombing in New York subway station in 2017, which resulted in three severe injuries.

Third, the Police seized extremely toxic and highly flammable chemicals of alarming types and quantities, which include potassium nitrate, ammonium nitrate, sulphuric acid, sulphur, acetone, strong acids, ethanol, cyanide, zinc cyanide, etc. If these raw materials are used for launching attacks, they will cause severe injuries and deaths.

Besides explosives, the Police seized five genuine guns and a large quantity of bullets in their operations, including a semi-automatic rifle. The same kind of rifle was used in the mass shooting on a crowd of concertgoers in Las Vegas of the United States, which resulted in over 50 deaths and 500 injuries.

The Police is conducting full investigation into relevant cases, identifying sources of the items concerned and whether organised crimes were involved in the acts of committing the offences, and closely monitoring the risk regarding the threat of local terrorism. Currently, the terrorist threat level of Hong Kong is "moderate". The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government is keeping a close watch over the situation and enhancing the gathering of intelligence, and does not rule out the escalation of the terrorist threat level.

The HKSAR Government will combat terrorism with the most stringent laws. If sufficient evidence is found upon investigation, the Police and the Department of Justice will consider prosecution under the United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance (UNATMO), and will also consider freezing the related property to cut off their funding sources and thereby prevent them from recruiting members. Regardless of whether UNATMO is used, cases of

explosives and firearms per se are very serious offences and infringe the Crimes Ordinance, the Firearms and Ammunition Ordinance, the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance, etc. with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

To prevent and combat terrorist activities, the HKSAR Government set up the Inter-departmental Counter-terrorism Unit (ICTU) in 2018, comprising members from six disciplinary forces, namely the Police, Immigration Department, Customs and Excise Department, Correctional Services Department, Fire Services Department and Government Flying Service. The Government's counter-terrorism (CT) strategy covers four areas, namely prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The setup of ICTU provides an inter-departmental CT platform on top of the existing CT framework so that various departments can collaborate to take forward a series of initiatives, which include establishing a CT intelligence exchange mechanism and work platform for various departments to enhance integration and analysis of intelligence; conducting inter-departmental CT exercises and training to ensure preparedness at all times, as well as strengthening the co-operation and synergy among various departments.

In light of the numerous cases of explosives and firearms, the HKSAR Government has enhanced the internal CT preparedness. Departments and agencies concerned have devised relevant action plans to ensure immediate and effective responses in the event of terrorist attacks.

Terrorist attacks pose harm to everyone in society, and CT is an issue concerning all members of society. Bombs are indiscriminate and will, once exploded, harm people around by killing, causing physical disabilities and destroying buildings. No one in the vicinity can escape from the explosion should it occur. Members of society should stay vigilant to guard against the breeding of local terrorism by, inter alia, heightening alertness, reporting to the Police under safe conditions, and co-operating with the Police in their law enforcement duties. The HKSAR Government will enhance CT awareness among members of the public through public education. Law enforcement agencies will also educate the public through exercises on the strategy of "Run, Hide and Report", i.e. running away from the scene as soon as possible or hiding at sheltered places, and reporting to the Police under safe conditions.

Regarding youngsters, the Government will continue to instill among them correct values through various youth programmes so that they can say no to violence. The Government will also emphasise the law-abiding awareness to help students understand that they need to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and that the consequence of having a criminal record for life will have a profound impact on their future, so that they can realise the importance of law compliance.

Thank you President.