

## LCQ3: Violent incident in Yuen Long

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Cheuk-ting and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

It has been reported that from late night on July 21 this year to the early hours on the following day, a large number of white-clad men (some of them suspected to be members of triad societies) assaulted members of the public and journalists with weapons at MTR Yuen Long Station and its vicinity. After launching the assaults, the white-clad men went into Nam Bin Wai Village and gathered there. A police superintendent led a team of police officers into the village to carry out criminal investigation, and talked with the white-clad men in the village office. He subsequently told the journalists at the scene that no one holding offensive weapons had been spotted, and he did not make any arrest on the spot. Some members of the public queried that the Police had let the criminals walk free and colluded with triad societies. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as a Yuen Long District Council member has indicated that he conveyed to the Police on July 19 the intelligence that some people were planning to launch assaults, and the Police had replied that they "will certainly make corresponding deployment plans", of the deployment plans made by the Police for the day on which the incident happened, the manpower deployed to tackle the incident, and whether plain-clothed police officers were sent to the nearby areas to conduct surveillance;

(2) given that a large number of white-clad men loitered at Kai Tei outside Yuen Long Station at dusk on that day, why the police officers in several police cars passing by that area did not disembark to disperse the white-clad men; why the Police merely deployed two police constables to the scene upon receipt of reports of a large number of people launching assaults; given that the reinforcement police officers who subsequently arrived at the scene left the scene after being criticised by members of the public, and the white-clad men subsequently re-entered the station and launched another round of assaults, whether it has assessed if the police officers' failure to remain at the scene constitutes a disregard of public safety and a dereliction of the duty to collect evidence, and whether the Government will apologise in this regard to all Hong Kong people, in particular those who were injured in the incident; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(3) given that while the aforesaid superintendent is one of the accused in the alleged police-triad collusion, it has been reported that he has recently been transferred to take charge of a unit responsible for investigating the aforesaid assault case, whether it has assessed if such duty arrangement will give rise to any conflict of roles or interests; whether it has assessed if

the Police's failure to make arrests on the spot has increased the difficulty in arresting the assailants, and whether the fact that only six persons have been prosecuted so far with the mastermind still being at large has reflected that the Police's investigation work is perfunctory and that the Police have condoned the assailants?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will never tolerate violent acts or condone violent radicals. In respect of the serious violent clashes that took place on the night of July 21 at the Yuen Long Station of the West Rail Line (WRL), the Police have commenced full investigation. As at October 31, a total of 35 persons aged from 18 to 61 were arrested. Six of them are charged with "taking part in a riot" and "conspiracy to wound with intent", etc. The Police's investigation is still ongoing, and the likelihood of further arrests is not excluded. In fact, a person was also arrested yesterday according to the information on hand.

In respect of complaints, the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) has set up a special task force to proactively study the large-scale public order events arising from the legislative amendments since June 9. The scope of study covers the violent incident in Yuen Long on July 21. The Complaints Against Police Office (CAPO) has received 74 complaints in relation to the incident and is actively looking into the matter. The IPCC will also specifically study the incident. Besides, two persons have applied for a judicial review of the Police's handling of the incident, and another person has raised a civil lawsuit. As such, while answering the questions raised by the Member as far as practicable, I must do so on the principle of not causing prejudice to the relevant investigations and judicial proceedings

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

(1) As indicated earlier by the Police at a press conference, the Police had received information about the activities in Yuen Long on July 21 beforehand, but the information available at the time, including the nature and circumstances of activities, was inconsistent. Upon assessment, the Police deployed uniformed and plain-clothed officers in Yuen Long to work on vehicles and on the ground, and activated an operation command centre at 6pm that evening for monitoring and responding to the situation.

Details of the Police's deployment in Yuen Long that day, such as the handling of calls, understanding the situation at the scene and changes, manpower deployment, etc involve operational tactics and strategies, disclosure of which is inappropriate lest it affects the effectiveness of the general operational deployment in future.

(2) The New Territories 999 Regional Command and Control Centre handles about 2 300 calls on average every day. However, within the few hours between 10pm and 1.30am on July 21, the New Territories 999 Regional Command and Control

Centre received over 24 000 calls. The situation was extremely unusual; it was a hundred times of what is normal and the number was far overloaded.

Some people appealed on the Internet to members of the public to make 999 calls together, draining the Police in handling the calls, deliberately causing nuisance and paralysing the 999 emergency service. The abuse of 999 service that night was extremely serious, making it not only impossible for members of the public who had actual needs to call the Police for help, but also difficult for the Police to determine the authenticity of the reports, seriously hampering the Police's assessment of the situation and corresponding deployment.

Shortly before the violent incident which occurred at WRL Yuen Long Station, the Police received numerous reports, including a person being assaulted in "Kai Tei", fire and traffic incidents, etc, where a number of police vehicles were dispatched to the locations concerned to handle such reports. Upon receiving the report on the violent incident at the WRL Yuen Long station, the Police immediately sent officers to the scene.

Police officers arrived at the WRL Yuen Long Station at about 10.52pm where a large number of people who were emotionally unstable were found at the scene. Upon making risk assessment, they reported the situation to their supervisor, requested reinforcement and stood by in the vicinity. I wish to point out that police officers often face severe threats to their personal safety when dealing with protests and clashes in recent months. At the weekend prior to the incident that occurred at Yuen Long Station, that is July 14, a large number of mobs attacked the Police inside the Sha Tin New Town Plaza, causing serious injuries to a number of officers, including one police officer whose finger was bitten off.

Upon arrival at the WRL Yuen Long Station, the reinforcement team was once surrounded by more than a hundred people who were emotionally unstable and hurling abuses. The team could only retreat from the station area after assisting the ambulance personnel to move the injured out of the station.

Regarding police vehicles driving past "Kai Tei" many times without making dispersal operations as mentioned in the question, according to the information of the Police, the officers concerned did not find any acts of breach of the peace when passing by the area three times that night. With regard to gatherings which do not involve breach of the peace, the Police's operation will generally consider the overall intelligence at the time to decide whether or not to take some immediate actions.

With regard to the Police's operation on the day, the CAPO has already started investigating into the complaints received. The Police will actively assist the IPCC in conducting the independent study to ensure fair and impartial investigation.

(3) Regarding the alleged "police-triad allusion" as mentioned in the question, these are extremely unfounded and malicious allegations. I must point out seriously that the Police always stand against lawbreakers

(especially triads) and definitely fight against them comprehensively. The Police have a full-fledged strategy in combatting triads, planning undercover operations from time to time, as well as protectively blocking the income source and criminal proceeds of triads. The Police's determination and efforts in combatting triads are resolute. These can be clearly seen from the figures of operation, arrest and prosecution.

During case investigation, police officers will make arrests when there is reasonable suspicion and sufficient evidence. If police officers do not make arrest on the spot, it does not mean that the Police will not conduct subsequent follow-up or arrest. As I have said before, so far 35 persons have been arrested in the case, with six persons charged with the offences of riot and wounding with intent.

As for the transfer of a police officer mentioned in the question, this is an internal personnel transfer within the Police Force. These transfers happen every now and then as part of the general operation of the Police Force. Under all circumstances during case investigation, the Police will spare no efforts in investigating the relevant cases impartially and in bringing suspects to justice.

Thank you, President.