

## LCQ9: Specialised crowd management vehicles

Following is a question by the Hon Claudia Mo and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

It has been reported that all of the three specialised crowd management vehicles (commonly known as "water cannon vehicles") purchased by the Police with a budget of \$27 million will be delivered to Hong Kong by the end of this month. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the implications of the introduction of water cannon vehicles on the Police's staffing establishment and operational arrangements, and the details of the public money involved;
- (2) whether the Police have completed the formulation of a code on the use of water cannon vehicles and guidelines for operating them; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) as some members of the public are worried about the abusive use of the water cannon vehicles by the Police, whether the Police will make reference to the practices of foreign countries and make public the code on the use of water cannon vehicles and guidelines for operating them, in order to enable the public to monitor the use of water cannon vehicles by the Police; if not, of the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether the Police, at present, have plans to acquire other new accoutrements for handling the various types of public events; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong residents enjoy the freedom of and the right to lawful assembly, procession and demonstration. The Police have been handling all public order events in a fair, just and impartial manner in accordance with the law of Hong Kong. It has been the established policy of the Police to endeavour to strike a balance between facilitating the smooth conduct of lawful and peaceful public meetings and processions on the one hand, while on the other, minimising the impact of such events on members of the public and road users, as well as ensuring public order and public safety. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been urging participants of public order events to remain law-abiding, peaceful and orderly when expressing their views and refrain from behaviour that is

detrimental to public order or violent.

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

(1) to (3) Having reviewed their past experience, the Police considered it necessary to enhance the equipment for effectively handling large-scale and prolonged public assemblies that are held simultaneously at various places and illegal behaviours that may occur on such occasions. The Police were granted funding in 2015-16 for procuring three specialised crowd management vehicles (SCMV) with water spray devices in order to handle riots or illegal acts that may occur during large-scale and prolonged public assemblies more effectively.

The SCMV's will be equipped with public address systems to effectively give advice, warnings or other messages to the protestors. The vehicles can also effectively disperse persons who stage violent charging acts, create a safe distance between these persons and police officers, reduce the chance of injury to them and police officers, and provide the Police with an additional operational option.

The first SCMV was delivered to Hong Kong in mid-May this year and the remaining two will be delivered within this month at the earliest. The vehicles will be first transferred to the manufacturer for assembly and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department for examination to ensure that they are in compliance with the electrical and mechanical safety standards, and then delivered to the Police for testing and training. It is expected that the vehicles can be put into operation by the end of this year at the earliest.

Although overseas law enforcement agencies of such countries as France, Germany, Belgium and Korea have already used similar vehicles when handling large-scale public assemblies or riots, it is the first time SCMV's are introduced to Hong Kong. As such, we understand that the public may have concerns about SCMV's.

The HKSAR Government respects the public's rights and freedoms of peaceful assemblies, processions and expression of views, but participants of public order events, when expressing their opinions, must abide by the law, act in a peaceful and orderly manner, and refrain from any illegal or violent act. If there is any illegal act, violent act or act that is detrimental to public order and public safety, the Police have the responsibility to assess the circumstances at the scene and exercise professional judgement, and take appropriate actions to ensure that public order and public safety remain unaffected.

Same as the principle of the Police's guidelines on the use of force, SCMV's shall only be used when it is absolutely necessary for the Police to achieve a lawful purpose. Police officers shall, before using such vehicles and when circumstances permit, give warning of their intention to use them, and the persons involved shall be given every opportunity, whenever practicable, to obey police orders. Police officers will definitely exercise

restraint at all times when using such vehicles. The Police will cease using them once the purpose has been achieved.

The Police are now drafting the guidelines and training programmes for the use of SCMV's in a thorough and prudent manner so as to ensure that instructors and operators can have a firm grasp of the performance and operation of the vehicles and manoeuvre them effectively and safely to support operational deployments. The Police will require all operators to have received the relevant driving, operation and safety training before they operate the vehicles and strictly follow the code and guidelines concerned. Besides, the Police will arrange for the vehicle manufacturer to provide training and demonstration for the relevant officers and consider sending officers to some overseas countries to exchange experiences on the use of SCMV's with law enforcement agencies there.

The Police Tactical Unit will be responsible for staff training and arrangements in relation to the SCMV's. Since the guidelines for the use of the vehicles involve operational details and the Police's tactical deployments, it is not appropriate for disclosure or else it may undermine the capability and efficacy of Police operations.

(4) According to the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, law enforcement agencies should develop a range of means and instruments as broad as possible for handling different situations. The Police will from time to time review, procure and replace the accoutrements of police officers to ensure that various kinds of actual operational needs can be met.