

Police fulfil statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order

Police respect people's freedom of expression, speech and assembly and has all along been assisting the public in conducting peaceful and rational public events.

However recently, many protestors held public events without complying with the law by notifying the Police. Not only did they conduct unlawful assemblies in various locations but also charge Police cordon lines. There have been repeated occupation and blocking of roads which severely paralysed the traffic, severely threatening public safety and public order. When the above situation occurred, Police on one hand had to respect freedom of expression by the public, while on the other hand, maintained public safety and public order. It was after striking a balance that Police decided on the suitable course of action to take at an appropriate time so as to fulfil their statutory duty in maintaining public safety and order.

About 5.30pm yesterday (July 7), a public event concluded, in general, peacefully and orderly outside Hong Kong West Kowloon Station. Afterwards, some protestors started to block Canton Road and northbound of Nathan Road and proceeded towards Mong Kok along Tsim Sha Tsui, Jordon and Yau Ma Tei. During the course, Police exercised restraint, letting protestors express their views without impeding their action.

However, when protestors arrived near Mong Kok, some of them started to occupy all northbound and southbound lanes of Nathan Road, completely blocking the most important thoroughfare in Kowloon area and seriously affected the traffic in the vicinity.

At around 9pm, Police set up cordon line at the junction of Nathan Road and Argyle Street. Despite repeated warnings issued by the Police urging protestors to leave, some protestors refused to comply and even acted violently. In addition, Police noticed the heavy crowd flow in the area, coupled with lots of narrow lanes, increasing the safety risk at scene. As such, Police decided to take dispersal action.

During last night and recent operations, Police found that certain Legislative Council (LegCo) Members frequently stood before the Police cordon line, blocking officers in moving forward. This not only seriously obstructed Police in performing their duties but also caused danger to the personal safety of LegCo Members themselves as well as Police officers, reporters and protestors.

The purpose of Police dispersal action was to restore public safety and order as soon as possible and to minimise the inconvenience caused to the public due to road blockage.

Police appeal to the public not to obstruct its operations by any means or they might be liable to the offence of obstructing police officers.

Police all along respect press freedom and their right of reporting. Police also understand the need of the media in filming Police's dispersal action. Police will as far as practicable deploy members of Force Media Liaison Cadre to facilitate media reporting under the condition that the effectiveness of Police's operation will not be compromised. However, the Police also appeal to media practitioners to put their own personal safety first at the scene when covering public events or large-scale demonstrations. For their own safety, media practitioners should also avoid keeping "zero distance" with Police's cordon lines when Police are conducting dispersal action.

Police understand the work of LegCo Members and are willing to explain Police work to them at an appropriate time, but this must be carried out without affecting Police operations and its effectiveness. It is absolutely impossible to suspend law enforcement operations, such as when the dispersal operation is taking place, to explain to Members.

Police will continue to strive to ensure the safety and order of Hong Kong.