

Transcript of press conference on impact of the non-co-operation campaign

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, and the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, held a press conference today (August 6) on the impact of the non-co-operation campaign. Joining them were the Deputy Director of Highways, Mr Ng Wai-keung; the Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Management and Paratransit), Ms Candy Kwok; and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (Quality Assurance and Management) of the Fire Services Department, Mr Cheng Sui-on. Following is the transcript of remarks at the press conference:

Reporter: Apart from just condemning the disruption or violence caused by some protesters, does the Government have any concrete solutions to resolve the crisis? And also, why is the Government refusing to set up an independent commission of inquiry to look into the root causes of the recent protests and also what happened in Hong Kong in the past two months when so many others including senior officials, you know, current civil servants, academics, hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens are demanding for such an inquiry? And also, regarding the issue of the use of force by the Police, the Police have been firing tear gas to disperse protesters in residential areas and a lot of citizens have reported that they were affected and being tear-gassed. Do you think this is really the appropriate way to handle the situation, and are the Police basically taking the action at the expense of the safety of these ordinary citizens? And also, Mr Lee, can you confirm that if the ICAC is basically looking into the police behaviour in Yuen Long in July the 21st? Thank you.

Chief Secretary for Administration: I think the pressing issue before us now is to restore law and order and bring Hong Kong back to harmony. That is the number one issue we've got to tackle. It's a matter of great concern. You must have law and order back first before you can actually discuss and look into how Hong Kong should move forward. So I think the prime task now is not to dwell on the other policies but to really put Hong Kong back on an even keel particularly to make sure that law and order is here to stay. Very important. Without safety, if we are not living in safety but in panic, then it's not the answer to the present situation so that we all agreed that we should restore law and order first, first and foremost.

The second thing is what we've been doing in the last two months. In fact, if you look at the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance issue, we have actually – I used the word – put a complete full stop to the fugitive offenders bill exercise. The whole thing is now really off the agenda – you don't have to worry because it's a complete full stop has been put on it as the CE time and again repeated, that politically there is no way that it can be revived. So we can rest assured that this is not an issue that we should be concerned

about.

On why an independent commission of inquiry is not pursued, the reason also has been explained clearly that we've got an established procedure, mechanism, in the nature of the Independent Police Complaints Council, which is statutory, which is entirely independent and in fact consists of a number of senior barristers, legal lawyers and so on so forth. It's highly representative of the community. In fact, this afternoon it held a special meeting and in fact confirmed that it has kick-started its work to reconstruct the entire picture of what happened from the 9th of June up to the 2nd of July, particularly in terms of police performance, police behaviour. And also, I'm sure that it will continue to extend its duration of its examination, duration of study, beyond the 2nd of July to cover recent events, particularly in past few days and certainly beyond if necessary. Now, don't forget this is an independent statutory commission already kick-started its work without further ado, and in the process it will also proactively approach organisations including the media, including yourselves, to provide information for it to reconstruct, establish the truth, nothing but the truth, and for them to follow up there and then. So the ball is already rolling, put it this way, so in fact this is action, not inaction. So I hope the community will understand that we are already, you know, really taking concrete action in response to public aspirations.

I'll leave it to Mr Lee to answer the second question.

Secretary for Security: The series of incidents that affected the public peace and causing violence were unprecedented since the return of Hong Kong to the Motherland. They were the most widespread, most damaging, and most serious. They created serious danger to Hong Kong society as a whole. The Police reacted to where protesters gathered, particularly violent protesters. In simple words, protesters chose the location, the Police had to deal with them where they gathered and where they may cause violence or damage to public safety and public peace.

They were widespread that is why some might have taken place in residential areas because protesters spread to different places including residential areas. I have explained earlier why the Police had to take action in the appropriate way to deal with the circumstances in accordance with the actual event.

We have seen on television that even at a particular moment there might not be something would happen, we have to look at the incident not just during that single minute or second, what happened before and what could potentially happen afterwards are all factors that the Police should have to be taken (into account) while they decide what action to be taken by them so as to deal with the potential breach of public peace and the potential violence. And it is a lot of people's understanding, crowd psychology, that action can easily be transferred from one person to another because a person may easily copy and follow what another person has done. Actually on the television you will see that when one protester has started a particular course of action, a lot of other people will follow and join in. So there are

a lot of factors that the police officers have to consider at the time, at the location, when they are faced with a crowd, particular a crowd which has been hostile or could later become hostile, then they have to decide what appropriate action they have to do.

And the use of tear gas is mainly to ensure that there will be a safe distance between the crowd that the police officers have to deal with, so that when there is really a confrontation then the degree of harm and injury could be reduced to the minimum. And also the use of tear gas also take into account of other police action that they may be contemplated such as arrest action because there could be people who have acted violently and that violence could spread to other people and also cause serious injury to people in that area, including reporters and people, who as some reporters have mentioned, onlookers. So the potential risk to safety is high as you have been watching on the television. Police just have to take all these factors into consideration so as to deal with the violence and the breach of public peace.

I would appeal to people's understanding that under the law, under the Police Force Ordinance, they are under a legal duty to ensure protection of lives and property and also to enforce the law. And they have been doing this for a long time over 10 odd hours a day with heavy equipment facing potential violent attack. Please understand that they have a duty to do and they are still doing their duty despite all these risk and potential danger. And the police officers are doing their best to ensure law and order is maintained.

The ICAC is independent, of course they decide their action, so this may be a question you have to refer to them.

Reporter: Mr Cheung you say you have to bring back law and order to Hong Kong but how exactly are you going to do that? Is it by bombing people with tear gas and arresting them? Do you think just by arresting more people these series of protests will stop? Is it not a wider problem of a lack of governance or people losing faith in the Government?

And also a question for Mr Lee. Police have been seen – I've seen Police wearing – onlookers or members of the public – you've said they are under serious stress but is it a legitimate reason for people to put up with officers in uniform who are enforcing the law to be acting in such a manner against them? And you can see that the general public, some of them, have took to the street and supported the protesters in booing and shooing the police officers. How do you explain that then? Should people really put up with the policemen's attitude to some members of the public just because they are under stress? Thank you.

Chief Secretary for Administration: Let me answer this question frankly, that the police officers are also part of Hong Kong community. They are no different from all of us. They've got families in Hong Kong, they're all Hong Kong people. We must not make any distinction. In the last few weeks in fact, I feel sorry for the Police. They've been made to bear the brunt of all this opposition. But what they are doing now is purely in response to violence.

They are responding to violence. They want to keep law and order. It's their duty. It's incumbent of the Police as, you know, defender of Hong Kong's safety. Upkeeping our safety in Hong Kong is their duty. They are doing it professionally, they are doing it really, I would say, stoically despite the challenge they are facing. The families are subjected to a lot of abuses and so on, you know, but they are soldiering on. And we have to be fair to them. Of course if there is behaviour, certain behaviour which is excessive and so on, as I said, the Independent Police Complaints Council already announced this afternoon they are kickstarting the work straight away and will contact all media organisations, including yourself, to come forward to help them reconstruct the entire scenario, the picture, from the 9th of June up to the 2nd of July at the first stage. I am sure they will cover well beyond the 2nd of July. Much has happened, in fact, in the last two/three weeks.

So, the so-called examination work is already underway, in progress. As I said that, you know, if violence is not here, if there is no violent action at all, there is no reason why the Police would have to act the way they have to. They are doing the job to really defend Hong Kong, make sure that we got law and order in Hong Kong in place. People living in safety, in certainty, not in panic, is very very important. Okay, I'll leave it to Mr Lee to answer the rest of the questions.

Secretary for Security: Different people, of course, may have different opinions about different things. And I surely understand that there would be people who may have their own opinions about Police's action. Equally, there are a lot of people who want the Police to take action to restore peace, to restore order and to restore safety and security of the whole of Hong Kong. There are, of course, a lot of supporters who have been to different police stations to express their appreciation of the Police's efforts. If there are things that people may disagree with what the Police had done, then, of course, complaints can be made. They will be investigated fairly and impartially and all these complaints will be monitored by the IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Council). But I think the answer to your question is: stop the violence, let us return to normal life so that we can talk to each other more. We can get on with our daily business. And if the Police is not attacked, or if any public meeting or public procession is orderly and peaceful, then there is actually no need for the police to take any enforcement action and so have been the years of the procession and public meeting. But the escalation of the violence is before our eyes, on television, on the Internet. We can't ignore that. And when these violent cases happened, then the Police have a legal duty to do it. And there are a lot of supporters who want this public peace to be restored, to want this public order to be restored, to want this violence to be stopped. So the simple answer to each one of the society is: stop the violence and don't acquiesce to violence. Any acquiesce to violence do encourage violence. And violence, as you all know, is not a solution to problem. Violence only creates more violence and nobody wants violence in this society, I think.