

Transcript of press conference (with video)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, together with the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; and the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, held an inter-departmental press conference today (September 2). Following is the transcript of remarks at the press conference:

Reporter: My first question is for Mr Frank Chan Fan. Protesters vandalised various MTR stations and also disrupted the traffic to the airport despite the injunction. What more can the Government do to effectively ensure the normal operation of the transportation? My second question is for Mr Yeung. So with the beginning of the new semester, it is very likely that the protests will be taken from the street to the school through different forms, so what measures will the Government take to ensure what happened on the street won't happen or repeat in the schools? Thank you.

Secretary for Transport and Housing: Thank you for the question relating to the vandalism we witnessed yesterday and the day before. In respect of airport operations, we have taken all necessary precautions, and (maintained) closer communications with all the parties concerned, for example, the Police, the Transport Department, the Civil Aviation Department, the Airport Authority (Hong Kong), public transport operators and also the air services such as airline and supporting service companies within the airport island. We have done whatever we can. As you have just mentioned, we have the by-laws to exercise, we have successfully secured injunction order from the court. We have to appreciate the execution of the injunction order is only operational or implementable at time of peace, when people are respecting the rule of law and to act and behave in a civilised manner. But in a situation like yesterday where vandalism prevails and damages are common, then you know injunction is seemingly not working well. Therefore, we have to think and to work out other strategies to tackle such happening if it would happen again. I would appeal to your understanding that I cannot disclose too much because that would affect subsequent operations and strategies but I can assure you that the airport community and the Government are working very closely with the determination to tackle this very seriously.

Secretary for Education: On your second question, I think, it's a common value in society and also among the education sector that schools should not be used as places for raising political demands or trying to exercise pressure on the Government on political issues. We would like to keep schools as a calm, peaceful and orderly place for students to study. In the past few weeks, we have been liaising and also discussing with different stakeholders in the sector with the purpose, or with the objective, of how we could ensure that the school would be operated as normal as far as possible. I think, of course, we need to monitor the situation closely but we are prepared to provide support and advice to the schools if necessary.

Reporter: First of all, for Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung. You mentioned that the Government is trying to mend ties with work on dialogue as well, but on last Friday we saw mass arrests of prominent pro-democracy figures right before the day when people are expected to defy a police ban on mass protests. So what exactly is the Government doing when a lot of people, critics, political analysts, are expecting that such moves will escalate further, further escalate the situation, make people further angry and go out to the street. So what exactly was the Government doing? Is the Government really doing, actually doing any work in trying to de-escalate the situation to try to resolve the crisis? And my second question is for Mr Lee, John, as the security chief, now we're seeing the deterioration of the image of "Asia's finest – the police force", which is under you, and we're also seeing an escalation in the damage in relations between normal residents, who are unmasked, who are not wearing any masks, wearing flip flops, residents clashing with Police. And how do you feel about the damage in the police image in people's, normal residents', heart? And can you also, my second question is with regards to what happened in Prince Edward and the Police came out early in the morning on Sunday at around 3.30am telling us that the Police used their professional judgment, professional ability, to tell between protesters who were wearing plain clothes and normal civilians, normal passengers. What sort of training? Can you tell us more about that training? And right after she said that during chaotic situation, it's really hard to tell who's protester and who's not, who's a normal civilian. So is that how Police conduct their investigation and responses by reaching a conclusion first before finishing an investigation? Thank you.

Chief Secretary for Administration: Let me deal with the first question first. One must not confuse or mix law enforcement with dialogue. Law enforcement has to be carried out in its normal way, and at the same time, we must continue to lay the ground – a platform for dialogue – the two certainly not mutually exclusive. And also the reality is that you must have calm and reason to be restored in the first place before you can actually launch the dialogue. That's why we've always been saying we should stop the violence straight away, without further ado, and then kick-start the dialogue which means that we have to start to lay the ground – preparatory work. That's exactly what we are doing. Once calm is restored, society back to the normal, then they're ready to go forward. That is exactly why we are not losing any time. On the one hand, law enforcement is to be continued. But, if violence continues, we must stop it. Violence is violence. We must stop it without further ado, no nonsense. Society must be back to normal. Hong Kong is a society believing in rule of law. We've been very successful over the past, not only practising but preaching the rule of law in Hong Kong. So calm must be back in the first place, but we also start doing the preparatory work so that we can then follow up with dialogue straight away, so that we're not losing any time. The two therefore (are) certainly not mutually exclusive. OK?

Reporter: ...law enforcement or the way Hong Kong Government is doing things is actually escalating the tension...not helping your work in creating that dialogue, that platform. Are you not seeing this situation?

Chief Secretary: Well, as I said earlier, you mustn't mix the two together, that's what I say. Law and order must be restored without further ado, no nonsense. You know, we're all yearning for law and order, all yearning for calm and reason society, back to the normal Hong Kong that we're familiar with. At the same time, we mustn't sit on our hands and say, oh, once calm is restored, then we can start. Why don't we make the best of this opportunity now, make the best of time, lay the ground, prepare the work, so that once the situation is conducive to dialogue, we can kick-start and move forward?

Secretary for Security: Thank you for your question. First of all, I am proud of the Hong Kong Police Force. They remain Asia's finest. Because despite the dangers and the difficulties they are faced with, they still discharge their statutory duties with courage and commitment. And this is despite the fact that petrol bombs were thrown at them, weapons were used to attack them, sharp objects were used to harm them, and mobs out-numbered them almost to a degree of 10 to one, they still hold fast to what they're required to do. Compared to what they do with law enforcement agencies overseas, I think they are exercising strong restraint. They're trying to reduce the minimum injuries and harms to everybody. So this is the background that we must take into consideration completely before we give a fair assessment of what Hong Kong's situation is and how Hong Kong Police is upholding the law in Hong Kong.

Condoning violence is not de-escalation. Condoning unlawful activities also is not a way to de-escalate. Where people commit crimes, contravene the law, then action must be taken. That is our value. That is the rule of law. In respect of the incident in Prince Edward station, we must take the whole circumstances into consideration, rather than a very small snapshot of a particular moment. The Police will take action according to what they have in hand of the evidence and intelligence. They will take action against the people whom they believe have committed crimes or offences which may result in serious injuries to other people. So we have to look at the incident in its own circumstances. There are considerations that the Police must take based on what they have. I think you all know that there were violent protesters who got into the station, they got changed. Some changed to look as if they were normal "kai fong" of the area. Some had taken off their masks with a lot of them didn't. So the Police took action according to what information they had and they made decisions according to the actual circumstances. They may consider doing something immediately, but they may also have to consider refraining from taking some actions considering the whole situation. First of all, whether it is safe for them to do so, or whether if they continue to do a particular action, then the situation will probably land them into a predicament where their own safety will be endangered and the situation will get worse.

The Police officers had to do what they needed to do and we have not been able to have a full understanding of the picture without knowing what subsequent action the Police might have taken in respect of certain people. So I trust that the Police will look at the whole case according to its circumstances that evidence and intelligence they had and they have taken

action to deal with it in accordance with what they consider to be needed to control the situation.

In regard to the police-community relationship, I agreed that it is something that we should all help to address. We have a police force who have been so courageously discharging its duties despite all the dangers and attacks that I earlier explained to you, including petrol bombs thrown at them, wooden poles, long poles and sharp objects targeting them, and rocks and bricks thrown at them. Despite all these, they still hold up to the commitment to discharge what is required to be done in law for them to ensure law and order. In respect of the action they have taken, of course, there will be inconvenience and some bystanders may have to go through some discomfort. But I have explained times and again that the police action is in reaction to the violent act that had been targeting them. If we altogether ask for all these violence to be de-escalated, then I am sure that the police action that needs to be taken will also be in reaction to the de-escalated violence. And I think this is the commitment society as a whole should do. The Police will do their best. But I urge every one of you to collectively de-escalate the violence, so that we all will continue to have the peace and tranquility that we used to have.

Reporter: protesters in plain clothes and normal civilians. How does the Police do that?

Secretary for Security: I have explained to you that the Police made use of what they knew about, the evidence and intelligence, the identifiable feature of people they wanted to take action against, so as to take what they decided the right action. So this is what they are doing now and they have done previously.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)