

Transcript of remarks of inter-departmental press conference

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, together with the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law; the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan; the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung; and the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, held an inter-departmental press conference today (November 15). Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: First question regarding the situation near CUHK. The protesters are saying that if their demands are not satisfied they will continue to block the road again. And are you concerned, because tomorrow is Saturday, it's the beginning of the weekend, are you concerned that the road blockage situation will continue into the weekend and even into next week? And will classes have to continue to be suspended on Monday? Second question to CS: So what do you mean by that the Government will be using more determined measures to tackle the violent protests? What do you mean by that? Third question is regarding civil servants. Because the situation in Hong Kong nowadays is that it's so easy for you to get arrested just for passing by a protest site or just for being a curious onlooker, and a civil servant was arrested just for, well, taking MTR at Prince Edward Station on August 31. So when so many people are accusing the Police of abusing their power of making arrest, is suspension really an appropriate measure to tackle civil servants who might just be passing by or who are really innocent?

Chief Secretary for Administration: I think Secretary for Transport (and Housing) will answer the first question. I will do the second and then Mr Yeung the third one. Okay?

Secretary for Transport and Housing: Since June this year, we have witnessed extensive damage to the public transport system and road transport as well as railway transport. In any country or economy, if there was similar scale of destruction, I would assure you none of these public transport could survive. As we have witnessed during the past few months, government departments such as the Transport Department, the Highways Department and other disciplinary services as well as public transport operators have been working extremely hard with dedication and determination to maintain public transport services for Hong Kong people. It is not a magic. I must say it's "Hong Kong can do spirit" that prevails. I would appeal to those who have chosen to destruct the public transport system to think again and again and again the purpose of the destruction and why they have chosen to destruct the system that serves Hong Kong people. They are not destructing hardware. They are actually destructing all the entitlement of Hong Kong people who could travel freely, efficiently and speedily every day. The question as to how and whether the scale of destruction would escalate or become more pervasive, I would suggest you ask those who chose to destruct, but not the Government, not the public transport operators.

Chief Secretary for Administration: The second question is about how determined we are. Let me stress here, very clearly, we're determined to reinforce Government's efforts internally, that is, to co-ordinate our work, our efforts and across the full spectrum of the entire administration to tackle the present crisis, the present situation. In other words, the whole problem before us at the moment is a challenge. It's not just a problem for individual departments or bureaux, it's for the entire Hong Kong community. That's why we have to act in concert, in unison, with one heart, one mind, one purpose, one mission, which is to put violence to an end as soon as practicable for the interests of Hong Kong, for the sake of every Hong Kong law-abiding citizen. I think this is incumbent on Government and also the whole community. Let's work together, join hands together to really say no to violence.

On the part of Government, as I said at the Legislative Council debate yesterday and the day before, we've already had various co-ordinated mechanisms in place, but I've now decided to really go one step forward, that is, to reinforce our efforts on that score by making sure that our responses are well co-ordinated, making sure that they're effective and robust enough to tackle the present crisis. A good example is that we're not just helping the Police but are now ensuring that all departments, all bureaux clamping down violence, tackling violence, as the number one priority. As President Xi Jinping said yesterday, putting an end to violence and maintain law and order is the overwhelming priority of the entire Government and entire Hong Kong community. It's not just the Government alone. Hong Kong's number one priority now is to really put an end to violence and restore peace and order in Hong Kong. So we are doing it on all fronts and in a very serious fashion. For example, all disciplined services in Hong Kong are doing their very best to support the Police, not to just let the Police fight alone, they act together in unison. The Correctional Services Department, for example, a number of their officers have volunteered to take up the job of Special Constables for a temporary period under a pilot scheme to help ease the pressure on the Police. They can guard various facilities and help Police in other duties as well so that they could free up Police in front-line operation duties. It's very important.

The second thing is that, for example, when it comes to reinforcing the cleansing work and clearing of road blockages, the Food and Hygiene Services Department as well as the Highways Department plus the Transport Department at the moment are working together after every incident. From yesterday onwards, the civil aid services have also come into the scene joining effort together. Hence, it's not just by the three civilian departments but also by the civil aid services, which is another major step forward. Of course, we will ensure that every department is well-equipped, well-positioned and well-motivated to help fight the present challenges. In other words, we will try to put violence to an end as soon as practicable. I can give you more examples, but I just want to be brief and punchy here. So, I'll hand over the floor to Joshua, Secretary for the Civil Service.

Secretary for the Civil Service: Thank you CS. First of all, I cannot agree with your assumption that Police are making arrests without any grounds. The

Government would not tolerate civil servants breaching the law. The very important point is that the rationale of interdiction is to protect public interests. It would be difficult for the community to accept if a civil servant having arrested for taking part in illegal activities could return to office as normal and continue to exercise the powers and functions of his office. That is the main reason and the main grounds for our policy for interdiction.

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