

LCQ2: Measures to stop violence and curb disorder

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

The disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments have persisted for half a year, during which the radicals have incessantly blocked roads, vandalised facilities and attacked police officers and members of the public, and some people even died. The targets and scope of their attacks are continually expanding and the weapons they use are increasingly lethal. There are comments that apart from dealing a heavy blow to the economy and international reputation of Hong Kong, the chaotic situation has also resulted in members of the public being tormented by the turmoil and social dissension. Members of the public are deprived of freedom of speech and a normal life as they silence themselves to avoid attacks and dare not go out because of personal safety concern. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will set up a coordinating committee on stopping violence and curbing disorder, to be chaired by the Chief Executive with members comprising the relevant Secretaries of Departments, Directors of Bureaux and Heads of Departments, to make pragmatic and objective assessment and judgment, on a daily basis, on the latest situation on the street, the damages to public facilities, traffic conditions, etc, and to instruct the relevant government departments to take preventive and contingency measures to curb violence, so as to safeguard the safety, dignity and human rights of members of the public and ensure the smooth operation of public transport;

(2) as there are comments that the results of the District Council Ordinary Election held last month have reflected the distrust of many members of the public in the Government and their dissatisfaction with its performance in policy implementation, whether the Government has conducted a review in this regard; if so, of the outcome and improvement measures; and in order to rebuild the trust of members of the public in the Government, how the Government will tackle as early as possible the torrent of unsubstantiated information on the Internet, lest the social atmosphere is agitated; and

(3) whether the Chief Executive will, before setting up an independent review committee, first alleviate the dissension within society properly and eliminate the confrontational and hostile sentiments between the police and the public; if so, of the measures in place; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to Hon Starry Lee's question is as follows:

(1) To tackle the spate of illegal activities during the civil unrest since June this year, the Chief Executive (CE) has been leading the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG) to handle the issues and ensure the normal functioning of the society. At the meeting held every weekday morning, CE, together with all Principal Officials (POs), will review and discuss the latest situation and the response to that. In addition, CE will hold meetings with the concerned POs to plan and deliberate on tactics in the light of the latest development. On the days of large-scale public order events (POEs) (usually on Sundays), CE would chair meetings with POs to monitor and respond to the situation. Further, in early October this year, CE formed a high-level inter-bureau task force within the Government. The purpose is to co-ordinate and follow up on the series of issues arising from the recent social unrest. In terms of actual operation, the Government will in accordance with established practice activate the "Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre" (EMSC) in a timely manner as appropriate. Apart from monitoring the situation during POEs in different districts, EMSC will also communicate and coordinate with relevant departments and assist the Government to co-ordinate emergency response as required. EMSC will make timely reports to the key officials to keep them up-to-date.

To effectively cope with and expeditiously respond to POEs involving escalated violence, I, as the Chief Secretary for Administration, chair a high-level Inter-departmental Action Task Force (IATF). The function of IATF is to oversee and co-ordinate the various actions that bureaux and departments need to take expeditiously and effectively to monitor, respond to and follow up on the situations, as well as to disseminate information and dispel rumours. The objective is to support the Police in stopping violence and curbing disorder. The work of IATF includes expeditious removal of street blockages and speedy repairs to damage done to public facilities so that members of the public can resume their daily routine as quickly as possible. In addition, IATF has followed up on major incidents such as the closure of the Cross Harbour Tunnel (CHT) owing to serious damage caused by violent protestors. Under the co-ordination of IATF and with close collaboration of the relevant departments (including the Transport Department, Highways Department, Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, Architectural Services Department, Fire Services Department, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Police), we completed the repair works quickly and re-opened CHT within a short period of time. Before and immediately after the re-opening of CHT, the Government arranged special ferry service to cater for the commuting needs of the local residents.

We are keenly aware that in order to cope with the serious situation that Hong Kong is currently facing, all bureaux and departments must work together as a team and in unity. At a meeting with the Heads of Departments, CE clearly required all bureaux and departments to spare no effort in stopping violence and curbing disorder. Through high-level co-ordination, we will continue to strengthen collaboration amongst the departments and closely

monitor and react swiftly to the development of the protest actions, with a view to ensuring that the community can be business as usual as soon as possible.

(2) The 2019 District Council Ordinary Election ("the Election") was held smoothly on November 24. The cumulative turnout rate, of about 71.2 per cent, is a record high. This shows that voters hoped to express their views through the Election. In general, the poll was held in a peaceful, safe and orderly manner, representing a wish of the public for the community to return to a peaceful and safe one as soon as possible.

The Government respects the Election results. We have noticed that there are various analyses and interpretations in the community in relation to the results. Quite a few are of the view that the results reflect people's dissatisfaction with the current situation and the deep-seated problems in society. We will listen to the opinions of members of the public humbly and seriously reflect.

Regarding online messages, the Information Services Department (ISD) and bureaux and departments have been closely monitoring the situation. When it is spotted that unverified information circulating widely online is stirring up negative sentiment in the community, the Government will make clarifications via multiple channels as soon as possible to allay concerns. ISD has set up a dedicated webpage and launched a series of one-minuters on the social media platforms to disseminate government clarifications and important messages. At the same time, ISD has launched a set of TV/radio APIs themed "Check facts to keep fake news in check" to remind the general public to beware of various information that they come across.

(3) Members of the public enjoy the freedom of expression, speech and assembly in accordance with the law. The Police have a statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order. When unlawful acts take place, the Police must take appropriate actions to respond. If there is no unlawful act, the Police do not need to take any enforcement action at all. We understand that recent violent protests have caused tension between the Police and the public. However, to maintain rule of law and public order in an effective manner in Hong Kong, efforts and strength of the Police alone are not enough. Support and cooperation of the public are also required. Only with mutual understanding of each other can we restore order in society and ensure Hong Kong continues to be a safe city.

CE and the political team will continue to engage in in-depth dialogue with people of different political stances and background in the community, so as to get a better understanding of the deep-seated problems in society and find pragmatic solutions. In addition, we have announced that we will invite community leaders, experts and academics to set up an independent review committee to examine and review the deep-seated social problems. We hope that through looking into the causes of the social events that took place in the past months, the committee can come up with solutions for the Government. We will listen to the views of the community before we decide on the timing to set up the committee.

Thank you, President.

Transcript of remarks by Secretary for Justice at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, at a media session after attending the Legislative Council meeting today (December 11):

Reporter: Secretary, what do you think of the court's ruling on the mask ban? Now that officers can no longer enforce the law under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, what do you think of that?

Secretary for Justice: The case is still under its judicial process, and it is sub judice, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Reporter: Secretary, have you offered to resign from your post and stay in London? And are you expecting to be removed from your post any time soon? Second question regarding the arson attacks targeting the courts, the slogans painted on the buildings specifically say that they do not trust the rule of law here in Hong Kong. Do you think your department has any role to play in the loss of confidence in regards to the rule of law?

Secretary for Justice: Arson is a very, very serious crime, and therefore no one should try and attempt to think that they can get away with arson lightly. It can attract a life sentence. Any arson act, which I think is not just before the court, but in various other places in Hong Kong, should not be allowed to continue and should be condemned. Insofar as the attack on the court is concerned, that is even more disgraceful, and it is very sad to see that people in Hong Kong are attacking our own court, which is truly independent and has been upholding the rule of law. We, in the Department of Justice, continue to support the judicial independence as well as the rule of law in Hong Kong.

As to the speculation, which is a pure speculation that has been reported recently in some social media about resignations and all the rest of it, it is a pure speculation. I urge you all, as responsible media, to check the facts and to look at evidence rather than to just repeat what has been said. Thank you very much.

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

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LC: CS presents Government Minute in response to Report of Public Accounts Committee No. 71A and No. 72

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in presenting the Government Minute in response to the Report of the Public Accounts Committee No. 71A and No. 72 in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

President,

I lay on the table today the Government Minute (GM) responding to Report No. 71A and 72 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

I welcome the PAC Reports No. 71A and 72 presented to the Legislative Council on May 8 and October 16, 2019 respectively. I am grateful for the time and efforts devoted by the Chairman, Mr Abraham Shek and Members of PAC. The Government accepts PAC's various recommendations and sets out in detail the specific responses of the relevant bureaux/departments in the GM. PAC has conducted public hearings regarding "Centre for Food Safety: Import Control of Foods" in Report No. 71A and "Employment services provided by the Labour Department" in Report No. 72. I would like to highlight the key measures taken and progress made by the two departments (namely, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Labour Department (LD)) in response to the recommendations.

Import Control of Foods by CFS

The Government attaches great importance to safeguarding food safety. CFS will continue to discharge its responsibilities in import control of foods to ensure the safety of imported foods. To this end, CFS will adhere to its established mechanisms and procedures in implementing a pre-entry licensing system, verifying health documents, and conducting food inspections and surveillance at various food import control points of air, land and sea routes.

With respect to the control of foods imported by air, CFS definitely does not accept importers pre-selecting food samples for inspections. According to its operational manual in use, CFS staff must personally inspect each consignment of the targeted food by taking samples at random and examine the import documents. Having regard to Audit Commission's (Audit) observations, CFS has enhanced the guidance and training for and supervision of its frontline staff, including setting out the number of samples to be collected and formulating the guidelines on random sampling for physical inspections at the Airport Food Inspection Office, and implementing improvement measures to step up supervisory inspections of its staff.

For the control of foods imported by road, CFS has put in place a series of improvement measures, including extending the joint operations with the Customs and Excise Department. Apart from targeting vegetable vehicles, vehicles carrying regulated foods (e.g. eggs, meat, etc.) are also covered. Measures also include issuing a checklist on the required import documents for different types of food and the items to be inspected for the frontline staff at the Man Kam To Food Control Office, and requiring the frontline staff to check whether the vehicles and containers transporting chilled meat and poultry are on the approved list of CFS and to ensure that only those on the list are released.

Regarding the control of foods imported by sea, CFS is actively considering the feasibility of setting up a formal food control office with chilling facilities at the Kwai Chung Customhouse checkpoint with a view to enhancing inspections of targeted food consignments. It has updated the operational manual to clarify the requirement for CFS staff to witness the act of breaking container seals, and enhanced its computer system to ensure that the same food consignment will not be issued with multiple import licences. CFS has also stepped up its supervision to ensure that officers will take appropriate follow-up actions in accordance with the operational manual against importers which are late in submitting original health certificates for food consignments imported by sea.

CFS has implemented various improvement measures concerning the control of live food animals and live aquatic products, including checking whether the consignee's name on the animal health certificate matches with the importer's name on the permit issued by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department during import inspections, and verifying whether the quantities of livestock admitted to slaughterhouses match the quantities shown on the movement permits issued by officers at boundary control point to drivers. Furthermore, CFS has reviewed and will introduce within this year a simplified Food Import Declaration Form for completion by drivers in order to collect the necessary information more effectively for food traceability.

Regarding the registration of food importers or distributors, CFS has taken measures to further remind its staff at the boundary control points to check the importer's registration status immediately upon the arrival of a food consignment, and to take appropriate enforcement actions against unregistered food importers. CFS has also enhanced the supervision of food trader inspections to ensure that officers of the Food Importer/Distributor Registration and Import Licensing Office keep a proper record of the findings of inspections and follow-up actions, which include putting food traders involved in unsuccessful inspection cases on a monitoring list based on the circumstances of individual cases. Further, CFS has improved its monitoring system to remind its staff to arrange inspections of food traders on the list.

Meanwhile, CFS is developing and setting up five major information technology (IT) systems with a view to supporting the work of its frontline staff and reinforcing its capability in control and surveillance of imported foods, management of food safety incidents, risk assessment and food

traceability. These IT systems are expected to be rolled out in an order of priorities starting from late 2019 and be completed by 2024.

Employment services provided by LD

With respect to employment services provided by LD, LD has been actively following up on the recommendations made by the Audit's and PAC on its provision of employment services, and has introduced various improvement measures with a view to providing more effective and convenient employment and recruitment services for job seekers and employers.

LD strives to enhance the employment opportunities of job seekers with special needs (including young and elderly job seekers and job seekers with disabilities) and step up its efforts in assisting them to stay longer in their jobs upon placement. LD will launch a pilot scheme to encourage young people, elderly aged 60 or above, and persons with disabilities engaged respectively under the Youth Employment and Training Programme, the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme to undergo and complete on-the-job training through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. Apart from that, the department will launch a pilot programme in conjunction with non-government organisations to provide employment services to ethnic minority job seekers through a case management approach.

Taking into account the local economic situation and employment situation of the labour market, LD will continue to review the operation of its services from time to time. Corresponding adjustments or enhancements will be initiated in a timely manner so as to better meet the changing needs of both the job seekers and the employers.

President, I would like to thank the Chairman and Members of PAC again for their efforts and guidance. The concerned bureaux and departments will strictly adhere to its responses in the GM to make improvement in its daily operations and ensure the proper use of public funds.

Thank you, President.

LCQ21: Seasonal influenza vaccination

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Pierre Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

The Department of Health (DH) introduced in October last year the School Outreach Vaccination Pilot Programme under which outreach teams went to various schools to provide free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) for primary school students. In October this year, DH regularised the Programme and extended, on a pilot basis, the Programme to kindergartens and child care centres. In addition, under the Enhanced Vaccination Subsidy Scheme Outreach Vaccination, schools may invite the participating doctors published on DH's website to provide free SIV for their students at their schools. On the other hand, DH provides respectively free and subsidised SIV to eligible groups through the Government Vaccination Programme and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of (a) primary schools and (b) kindergartens/child care centres which have participated in (i) the School Outreach Vaccination Programme and (ii) the Enhanced Vaccination Subsidy Scheme Outreach Vaccination, since the beginning of the current school year, as well as the relevant details; the respective numbers of school children who have and who have not received SIV, and how the relevant school children uptake rate compares with that of the same period last year;

(2) of (i) the amount of expenditure incurred by the Government for procuring seasonal influenza vaccines and (ii) the total amount of subsidy claimed by the private doctors participating in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, in each of the past five years;

(3) of the number of persons in each of the groups set out in the table below who received SIV and the uptake rate, in each of the past five years (set out separately in tables of the same format as the table below);

Year:

Group	Number of persons who received vaccination	Uptake rate
Children between six months and under six years old		
Children aged between six and under 12		
Persons aged between 12 and under 50		
Persons aged between 50 and under 65		
Persons aged 65 or above		
Pregnant women		
Persons with chronic health problems		
Overall population		

(4) of (i) the quantity of nasal seasonal influenza vaccines procured by DH and the amount of expenditure so incurred, as well as (ii) the respective numbers of persons from the various groups set out in the aforesaid table who received such vaccines, since April last year; whether it will consider using more of such nasal vaccines in providing SIV for children;

(5) of the respective (i) quantities of seasonal influenza vaccines procured by DH and the Hospital Authority (HA), and amounts of money involved, as well as (ii) quantities of unused but expired or damaged seasonal influenza vaccines which were discarded by DH and HA, and amounts of money involved and relevant procedure, in each of the past five years; and

(6) whether the Government will consider subsidising all members of the community for receiving SIV; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Vaccination is one of the effective means to prevent seasonal influenza (SI) and its complications. It also reduces the risks of flu-associated in-patient admission and mortality. Therefore, the Government has all along been encouraging the public to receive vaccination as early as possible. In 2019/20, free or subsidised seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) is provided for eligible groups under the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP), the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS) and the 2019/20 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination School Outreach (Free of Charge) (School Outreach (Free of Charge)). To enhance the uptake rate among school children, the Department of Health (DH) has regularised the School Outreach Vaccination Pilot Programme in 2019/20 to cover more primary schools, and extended the coverage to kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and child care centres as a pilot programme. The DH also actively co-ordinates with schools and private doctors to organise outreach SIV activities in schools. In consultation with the DH, the reply to the six parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As at November 24, 2019, a total of 431 primary schools and 706 kindergartens/kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres participated in the School Outreach (Free of Charge), while a total of 107 primary schools and 51 kindergartens/kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres provided outreach SIV under the VSS (School Outreach (Extra Charge Allowed)). As at November 24, 2019, about 229 000 children aged between six months and under 12 received SIV under various government vaccination schemes, representing an uptake rate of 33.5 per cent. The uptake figure is comparable to that of the corresponding period last year.

(2) The expenditure incurred by the DH for procuring SI vaccines under various government vaccination schemes, and for subsidising vaccination provided by private doctors under the VSS in the past five years are detailed in Annex 1.

(3) The number of persons in each eligible group who received SIV under various government vaccination schemes and their uptake rates in the past five years are detailed in Annex 2. Since some people from the eligible groups might have received SIV through arrangements other than government vaccination schemes, the figures related to these persons are not reflected in Annex 2.

(4) As nasal SI vaccines have not been widely used in Hong Kong, and having regard to their supply, the DH has provided this type of vaccine for some of the schools served by its outreach teams in 2019/20 to test the feasibility and logistical arrangements in applying such vaccines under various vaccination schemes. A total of 2 000 nasal vaccine doses were procured in 2019/20, involving an expenditure of \$380,000. As at November 24, 2019, over 600 primary school children and 500 children from kindergartens/ kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres have received nasal vaccination. The DH will review the experience in the trial and consider whether such vaccines should be used in the future, taking into account factors such as their supply and acceptance rate.

(5) The DH is responsible for procuring SI vaccines under the GVP and the School Outreach Vaccination Programme (Note). SI vaccines used by the Hospital Authority under the GVP are procured and allocated by the DH. In general, the product life of SI vaccine can last for one year and expired vaccines will not be used. Unused but expired or damaged vaccines are arranged for disposal in phases in accordance with the statutory requirements. In the past five years, the cost involved in the disposal of these vaccines has been included in the expenditure for procuring vaccines under various vaccination schemes (see Annex 1). The quantities of SI vaccines procured and the number of doses of unused but expired or damaged vaccines under various vaccination schemes in the past five years are detailed in Annex 3.

Note: Including all participating primary schools and a small number of kindergartens/ kindergarten-cum-child care centres/child care centres under the School Outreach (Free of Charge) which DH provides outreach vaccination services.

(6) Certain groups of people are at higher risk of catching severe influenza or transmitting influenza to those at high risk, and should be given higher priority for SIV. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases under the Centre for Health Protection examines from time to time local epidemiological data, latest scientific evidence and overseas experiences, and reviews the recommendations regarding the priority groups for SIV. Every year, the Government will make reference to the recommendations from the Scientific Committee, practices of overseas health authorities, other public health factors and the affordability of people receiving vaccination, etc. in order to designate the eligible groups under the VSS and the GVP and consider whether there is a need to expand the target groups of relevant scheme. For example, the Government has expanded the eligible groups of the VSS to cover people aged between 50 and 64 since 2018/19.