

## Bid to stem extortion by triads

By Jessie Yim

THE Transport Department has been urged to provide more minibus stations as a way to help stem triad activities.

A powerful minibus association has also asked the department to help organise individual drivers so that they could collectively resist extortion.

A consultant of the Hongkong, Kowloon and New Territories Public Light Bus Merchants' United Association, Mr Choi Kwok-hung, said minibus drivers were easily intimidated by triads because the drivers were not well organised.

"They are competing against one another and this makes it easier for triads to gain influence," he explained.

Mr Choi said blackmail and intimidation of minibus drivers had existed for decades.

Two incidents, which happened over the past few days, were examples of this, he said.

Last Saturday, the police arrested 26 people who were alleged to have blackmailed and intimidated minibus drivers in Wan Chai.

On Tuesday, three maxicabs serving Hung Hom were alleged to have been attacked by triad elements. Coin-collecting machines on the vehicles were broken open.

The maxicab association said this was the first time in years that maxicabs had been damaged by triads.

Maxicabs are public light buses running fixed routes assigned by the Transport Department. Minibuses are free to go anywhere.

Mr Choi said there was a shortage of proper minibus stations.

Drivers just park or pick up passengers in convenient places. "These bus stations are illegal."

He added that if there were enough bus stations, drivers would be able to operate in a more orderly fashion.

At present, they compete to get into unauthorised stations. "Triad elements usually ask for a 'management fee' in these circumstances," he said.

"If the triads were not satisfied, their own minibuses would occupy the spaces, hindering normal parking," he said.

Mr Choi also asked the Transport Department to help minibus drivers form their own management companies, or their own associations, so that they could co-operate among themselves.