

S.C.M.P.

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Hong Kong picks up the pieces

# \$10m tag on riot losses

Insurance agents and businessmen were busy counting their losses yesterday after Friday's five-hour rampage by young hooligans.

And up to late last night, police were still arresting people suspected of taking part in the riot.

Between noon and 2 am yesterday, police arrested another 42 people, bringing the total number of people arrested to 172.

The official loss estimate so far \$3.7 million, but property owners in Kowloon's "golden mile" believe it could be more than \$10 million.

Tai Lam Electric alone put losses at \$1 million. Most of the hooligans who took part on the black Friday rampage were teenagers, more than half of them with criminal records.

The police Regional Commander of Kowloon, Mr George Hindhaugh, said yesterday that half the 130 people arrested had records for offences, wounding or robbery.

## Half detainees had records

Those arrested include some 30 secondary school students, with the rest mainly semi-skilled and non-skilled workers.

Eighty per cent were under 21 and the rest under 30.

About 25 per cent lived near the disturbances.

More managed to escape arrest because there were simply too many people about.

Mr Hindhaugh said the crowd was at least 10,000 during the five hours, against 700-odd police officers.

And it seems it was the dispatch of uniformed police officers that triggered off the crowd in the first place.

The officers were there because pedestrian traffic was becoming heavy as a result of the taxi drivers' protest.

But people immediately surrounded them out of curiosity and caused a huge blockage on the roads.

The officers then withdrew into the Yaumatei police station "in line with the policy of avoiding confrontation," said Mr Hindhaugh.

However, they were followed through Kiangsu Street by a section of the crowd which gradually became more unruly and at one stage surrounded the station.

About the same time, crowds began to intensify in Nathan Road, Public Square Street and Jordan Road.

Shortly after 8 pm, small gangs began inciting the crowds that had built up.

Looting, fires and criminal damage escalated in scope and seriousness and only then did the police realise that the mobs — among a crowd of 10,000 — could not be controlled by normal police anti-crime tactics.

At 10 pm, the Police Tactical Unit and Emergency Unit were mobilised (see report on Page 2).

Two tear gas grenades were fired at 10.58 pm, the only occasion when firearms were used.

By about 2.30 am yesterday, the situation was largely under control.

A total of 32 people, including three police officers, were injured, with 12 admitted to hospital and the rest treated and discharged.

Late last night, eight were still at the Queen Elizabeth and Kwong Wah hospitals, all in satisfactory condition.

Mr Hindhaugh defended the timing of the police deployment and rejected the suggestion that the disturbances would have been less serious if firm action had been taken earlier.

Recalling the early evening of Friday when the size of the crowd was not yet uncontrollable, Mr Hindhaugh said: "It's no good sending a full company of PTU after a very small incident."

"It's a question of deciding where the target is . . . you've got to identify where your problem is first and then deal with it."

He stressed that the violence was very fragmented at the beginning and thus the situation was first tackled by the normal uniformed and plainclothes men, and it was only when the main groups of rioters had been identified as having set fires that the PTU was mobilised.

Police used one company of PTU to disperse the crowd on Shantung Street, which spread and infiltrated side roads.

Two more companies then moved in from Yaumatei to sweep the area, push the crowd and start making arrests.

He admitted that the police were caught by surprise in the incidents but added that they were in full readiness.

"We didn't expect anything like that to happen," he said.

There was no evidence the incidents were organised, according to Mr Hindhaugh.

The Commissioner of Police will conduct an enquiry, he said.

Between 8 pm on Friday

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## \$10m tag on losses

(Cont'd from Page 1)

and 2 am yesterday in the troubled districts, police had received reports of 158 criminal cases, including an attempt to burn down the Urban Services Department building in Sai Yee Street.

Topping the list of crimes were 49 burglaries and robberies involving nearly \$4 million and 33 incidents of criminal damage.

This was followed by 15 cases of unlawful possession and two of possession of weapons.

There were also 16 cases of resisting arrest, 12 thefts and four cases of arson reported.

A total of 27 vehicles were damaged according to police figures, but the number could well be higher as some victims may not have made reports yet.