

2000 Policy Address : Briefing of Security Panel
Opening Statement by S for S

Introduction

At the Security Bureau, our pledge is to keep Hong Kong a secure and safe city. Our primary objectives are to maintain law and order, to ensure effective immigration control and to safeguard public safety. By achieving high security and safety standards, we have managed to maintain Hong Kong as one of the safest cities in the world. You will find the details of our progress and our new initiatives for the coming year in our Policy Objective Booklet entitled 'A Secure and Safe City'. I shall now go over some of the salient points in the Booklet.

Maintaining Law and Order

2. The crime rate in 1999 is the third lowest in the past 26 years. Although the overall crime rate (1,126 cases per 100,000 population) and the violent crime rate (230 cases per 100,000 population) have slightly increased by 5.1% and 5% over the 1998 figures, the overall crime rate is lower than that of many major metropolitan cities such as London, Tokyo and Toronto.

3. The law and order situation in Hong Kong is improving gradually in 2000. In the first eight months, the overall crime rate increased by only 1.9% whereas the violent crime rate decreased by 2.6% when compared with the same period last year. A number of categories of serious crimes had also decreased, e.g. goldsmith/watch shop robberies

by 22.2%, bank robberies by 11.8%, robberies with pistol like object and serious narcotics offences by 8.3%, wounding and serious assault by 2.9%, and homicide by 2.8%. There were, however, increases in other crimes such as blackmail, thefts, rape, pickpocketing and missing motor vehicles.

4. We will continue to upgrade the Police's equipment to meet changing operational requirements. We plan to replace the command and control system currently used by beat officers by a digital communication system by 2004. In addition, we will implement by phases the second five-year Information Systems Strategy Plan to ensure that modern information technology is applied in daily Police work. It is anticipated that both the effectiveness and efficiency of the Police work will be greatly enhanced by these improved facilities and equipment.

Rehabilitating Drug Abusers and Offenders

5. The drug abuse trend in Hong Kong has continuously declined since 1995 but in the first half of 2000, the number of reported drug abusers had risen. This increase was mainly fuelled by a rise in psychotropic substance abusers, especially abusers taking drugs such as Ecstasy and Ketamine. To tackle the problem, we have set up a multi-disciplinary task force early this year with a view to recommending to the Government a comprehensive strategy in 2001. The task force has already put in train a number of initiatives, including stepping up publicity on the harm caused by psychotropic substance abuse. It also proposes to amend the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance to tighten control on Ketamine and issue a code of practice for rave party organisers.

6. In line with our all-out approach to counter drug trafficking and organised crimes, we attach great importance to work on the anti-money laundering front. The efforts of Hong Kong in combating money laundering are well recognized by the international community. In 2001–2002, Hong Kong will assume the presidency of the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), a preeminent international organisation examining and recommending standards and good practices to counter money laundering. Hong Kong's leading role in the FATF will further demonstrate our commitment to international cooperation in stemming transnational crimes, money laundering activities and drug trafficking.

7. Our penal policy ensures the safe and orderly custody of offenders. We are making good progress in implementing projects to increase prison capacity. In the coming year, we will have more than 400 new penal places coming on stream - 151 places under the Stanley Prison area redevelopment project, and 260 places from the redevelopment project of the Tai Lam Correctional Institution. We are planning an expansion project for the Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre with a view to providing 400 additional penal places starting 2003/2004. We will continue to increase prison places to relieve prison overcrowding and formulate a long-term prison development programme to meet penal needs. We will also improve prison management and security by making use of appropriate technology.

8. We are committed to the re-integration of inmates into society as law-abiding citizens. We will continue to improve our rehabilitative and aftercare services for inmates. We have re-introduced the Rehabilitation Centres Bill to provide for a new short-term residential rehabilitative

programme for young offenders. We will continue to upgrade and modernize the education and vocational training programmes for young offenders by seeking external accreditation. We will also improve our welfare and psychological counseling services to inmates and launch a drug abuse awareness programme to help them quit drugs and reduce their risk of re-offending. We will strengthen our publicity strategy to enhance community acceptance of and support for rehabilitated offenders.

Facilitating Travel Convenience

9. Enhancement of travel convenience for Hong Kong residents and visitors to Hong Kong is crucial to maintaining our status as an international financial centre and ensuring the continued prosperity of our economy.

Freer Access

10. We maintain a liberal visa regime and allow travellers from over 170 countries and territories visa free access. At present, only nationals of 41 foreign countries need to apply for visas to visit Hong Kong. With a few exceptions, simplified application procedures^{Note} are in place for them to obtain visit visas within 14 days.

Note

The CDCMs and the HKSAR Beijing Office may issue visas to the nationals of some 30 countries without reference to the Immigration Department, if the intended visit does not exceed 14 days. Other applications will be referred to the Immigration Department. In respect of such referred applications, with a few exceptions, the CDCMs or HKSAR Beijing Office may directly issue the visas 14 days after referral of the applications concerned to the Immigration Department if the latter does not have any unfavourable comments.

11. HKSAR passport holders may now travel visa-free to a total of 72 countries and territories, including the recent additions of Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and the Slovak Republic. We will continue to lobby the EU for visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders.

More Efficient Service

12. In the past year, 98.1% of passengers at the airport were cleared within 15 minutes, against the pledged standard of 92%. Up to 98.5% of passengers at other control points were cleared within 30 minutes, against our pledged standard of 92%. This performance was achieved against a 12% growth in overall passenger traffic last year. At Lo Wu alone, increase has been recorded at an annual rate of 17%. To cope with the surging demand, we have adopted a number of measures including flexible redeployment of staff, improvement of counter design, enlargement of queuing area, addition of counters, and installation of a pair of escalators to allow contra-flow operation. We are also considering how to re-engineer the business processes and make best use of information technology to further increase the handling capacity of the control points.

13. Following a consultancy review, the Immigration Department has mapped out an updated Information Systems Strategy for implementation. The Department will implement a number of projects in phases, including the upgrading of its information technology infrastructure and enhancement of the Immigration Control Automation System.

14. Automated passenger clearance at control points is another key project in the pipeline. This will require not only the installation of a new computer back-up system and ‘auto-gates’ or unmanned counters, but also the use of a new smart ID card.

HKSAR ID Card

15. On the smart ID card project, a LegCo brief has just been released. The ExCo at its meeting on 17 October has decided that :

- (a) a new ID card and new supporting computer system should be introduced in early 2003;
- (b) the new ID card should take the form of a smart card and have the capacity to support multiple applications;
- (c) the incremental implementation of the multi-application smart ID card scheme should be endorsed in principle and announced for public consultation; and
- (d) after the new card system is up and running, a region-wide ID card replacement exercise should be conducted for residents in Hong Kong by phases, in accordance with specified age groups, with a view to completing it within four years.

16. Implementation of the above policy is of course subject to the provision of the necessary funds by the Finance Committee of this

Council and the necessary legislative amendments in due course.

17. Details of our policy proposals are set out in the LegCo Brief. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several points :

- (a) There is a need to replace existing ID cards as they are no longer forgery-proof. Moreover, the existing supporting computer system will reach the end of its life expectancy by end 2002.
- (b) A smart card is preferable to a non-smart card as the former will enable the Government to better serve the community. Apart from improved card security, a smart ID card with biometric data stored on it will lay the foundation for introducing automated passenger clearance and facilitate efficient and secure authentication of a card holder's identity in field operations.
- (c) Subject to further feasibility studies and public views, a smart ID card may be employed for providing more efficient, better quality and value-added services to the community. The public may use one card for different functions.
- (d) The Administration has recommended and ExCo has agreed that the proposed smart ID card should have multi-application capacity. This means chip memory will be reserved on the smart card to allow for possible non-ImmD applications. However no definitive

decision has been taken on the adoption of any additional application. Possible initial applications may include driving licence, library card and digital certificate. Further feasibility studies and consultations are required before any of these applications may be implemented.

- (e) ImmD will launch a community campaign, to brief District Councils and to stage exhibitions in shopping malls to explain smart ID card technology and the measures to be taken on data protection, and to solicit views on card face design.

18. We fully recognize that data privacy is a key issue that must be handled most cautiously. To address privacy concerns, we maintain a close dialogue with the Privacy Commissioner and ImmD will carry out Privacy Impact Assessments at various stages of the project. Government will employ appropriate technology/techniques on data protection including measures at hardware, software and application levels so that the data cannot be accessed, read or altered by unauthorized parties. As a matter of principle, we agree that only essential data should be stored on the memory chip. All sensitive data must be encrypted. Data should be used only for the purpose they are collected, and should not be shared with other departments which are not authorized to use them.

19. Submissions will be made to Members in the near future for funding approval of the ID card project and extension of the Deputy Director of Immigration (Special Assignment) post. Before then, we will brief Members in greater detail on various aspects of the smart ID

card project at the meeting of the Security Panel scheduled for 24 October 2000.

Vietnamese Boat People

20. Last June we closed the Pillar Point Vietnamese Refuges Centre, the last one of this kind in Hong Kong and in the world. The closure of the Centre was seen both internationally and locally as a humanitarian act, as the some 1,400 former residents were offered new and permanent homes. It also brings an annual saving of some \$14 million for our taxpayers. Since the closure there has been a significant drop in Vietnamese illegal immigrants arrivals, from some 80 per month a year ago to around 40 per month now.

Admission of Talents and Mainland Professionals

21. We launched the Admission of Talents Scheme in December 1999 to enable Hong Kong companies to bring in talents from the Mainland for work. Hitherto, Mainland residents were barred from employment in our private firms, except for manual work under the Supplementary Labour Scheme. This was an anomaly as there were no similar restrictions against foreign nationals. Foreign nationals are allowed entry for employment as professionals, provided that they meet the qualifying criteria including the cardinal rule that they possess talents, skills or qualifications of value to and are not readily available in Hong Kong.

22. The Admission of Talents Scheme is open to all nationals, but

targeted mainly at Mainland residents because others already have a channel to enter Hong Kong for employment.

23. By the end of September 2000, 349 applications were received under the Talents Scheme. Of these, 74 were approved; 166 were rejected; 53 were withdrawn; and the remaining 56 cases were under processing. The majority of the approved cases were in the fields of IT/telecommunications/Multi-media technology (36); engineering and environmental protection (18); and money and finance (9).

24. There are two common misconceptions about the Scheme :

- First, only PhD holders can apply. This is untrue. Whilst about half of the eventual entrants do hold a Doctoral degree, many others with a Master or Bachelor Degree have also gained admission. The overriding principle is that they must possess talents or skills not readily available locally which can enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness.
- Second, talents must be paid a very high salary. This is also untrue. The criterion is principally that the remuneration package should be broadly comparable with market rate. As a matter of fact, most of the successful applicants are in the HK\$20,000 - HK\$50,000 pay zone.

25. Any worries that the Scheme might cause job displacement are now proven to be misplaced. Our survey conducted on the employers concerned has confirmed that, as we always believe, the

Scheme helps to create new jobs. Survey results show that on average one talent creates six additional jobs.

26. However, the Scheme is not being used as much as we wish it to be. Feedback shows that some firms, small or newly-established enterprises in particular, have found it difficult to locate talents in the Mainland and bring them over. The Labour Department will assist by offering their existing interactive Employment Service website as a rendezvous for employers to meet talents. This website will be hyper-linked to Immigration Department's homepage for easy access. Details of implementation are being worked out and will be publicly announced. Meanwhile, we continue to promote the Scheme, e.g. through contacting prospective users in connection with the opening of the Science Park and Cyber Port.

27. There are increasing calls from the business sector, the IT industry in particular, for admission of Mainland professionals to fill positions for which suitable local employees are unavailable. We have heard that business opportunities have been lost because companies cannot find the right people at the workplace. Talents, be they recruited from the Mainland, overseas or locally, need to be supplemented by professionals. They play different but complementary roles. Talents focus more on innovation and research which will bear fruits in the medium or longer term. Professionals attend to firms' immediate needs. Mainland professionals may, for instance, apply new technology to existing production activities; use their own experience to forge trade links with Chinese enterprises; and help Hong Kong firms to explore the immense business potential in the Mainland arising from China's accession to the WTO.

28. We will review existing immigration policies in a prudent but proactive manner, taking full account of the supply and demand for professionals in the marketplace. In developing an appropriate strategy, we remain guided by the objective of facilitating economic development whilst safeguarding job opportunities for the local workforce.

Right of Abode

29. Currently, there continue to be roughly 7,000 right of abode (ROA) claimants remaining in Hong Kong illegally. To us, the legal position is very clear. Except for those covered by the judgment of the Court of Final Appeal of 29 January 1999 and Government's Concession decision, all Mainlanders claiming the right of abode must return to the Mainland to lodge their claims under the Certificate of Entitlement Scheme. The Administration has given a specific undertaking in respect of certain ROA claimants currently engaged in litigation, and we will honour the undertaking. However, a claim for the right of abode per se is no excuse for a Mainland resident to remain in Hong Kong without the permission of the Director of Immigration.

30. Acting within the remits of the law, removal actions have been and will continue to be taken by the Immigration Department against overstayers and illegal immigrants whose continued stay in Hong Kong is not justified. The removal action that has been taking place over the past few days is part of this on-going work.

31. In connection with the implementation of the judgment of the

Court of Final Appeal given on 29 January 1999 on the eligibility for right of abode of persons born out of wedlock, we introduced to this Council yesterday the Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2000 which provides for a genetic test procedure for verification of claimed parentage by persons claiming right of abode under the Immigration Ordinance. Since there will be opportunities for us to explain the Bill to Members in detail, I shall leave this subject for the time being.

Notification Mechanism

32. We have recently reached agreement with the Ministry of Public Security (PSM) on the establishment of a reciprocal notification mechanism covering residents under detention or criminal prosecution, and residents who died of an unnatural death. The agreed arrangements will be effective from 1 January 2001.

33. The mechanism is an administrative arrangement agreed between the two sides after candid discussions based on the principle of One Country Two Systems and mutual respect for the other side's legal system. The successful conclusion of the agreed arrangements fully demonstrates the Mainland authorities' appreciation of the community's concern over Hong Kong residents detained in the Mainland. The notification mechanism will enable the SAR Government to quickly relay relevant information on Hong Kong persons detained or deceased in the Mainland to their families, so that appropriate assistance can be arranged in a timely manner. We will give Members a more detailed briefing on the notification mechanism at the Security Panel meeting to be held on 24 October.

Safeguarding Public Safety

34. The Government and the community share a common goal to improve fire safety in Hong Kong. More and more building owners and occupants actively participated in the fire drills, seminars and exhibitions organized by the Fire Services Department and at the district level. We will continue to increase community awareness of and involvement in fire safety and step up enforcement to ensure that the fire safety measures in buildings are properly maintained.

35. We are pleased to see an overall compliance rate of 96% with fire hazard abatement notices over the past year. The business community also responded positively to the Fire Safety (Commercial Premises) Ordinance which provides for better fire safety protection for prescribed commercial premises and old commercial buildings. We aim to introduce the new legislation into LegCo by end of 2000 to improve fire safety in other types of buildings by phases, starting with old composite (commercial/domestic) buildings, where the fire services condition is most unsatisfactory, followed by domestic buildings. We have also reviewed the Fire Services Ordinance and aim to introduce amendment legislation in the coming year with a view to strengthening the enforcement power, and preserving the deterrent effect of the penalty provisions. We will re-introduce the Karaoke Establishments Bill in the current legislation session and hope to bring the licensing scheme into effect next year.

36. We are committed to protecting the public from the risks

involving dangerous goods and chemicals. We have completed a comprehensive review of the existing legislative framework to improve the control of dangerous goods and ensure that our safety requirements are in line with international standards. We will re-introduce the Dangerous Goods (Amendment) Bill into the LegCo later this year.

37. We have been able to achieve the new performance target of responding to 92.5% of emergency ambulance calls within 12 minutes. To further improve the quality of our emergency ambulance service, we have completed a feasibility study on the provision of paramedic service on all ambulances. We will follow up with a comprehensive study on the implications of such provision and consider an implementation plan. We will also review the Non-Emergency Ambulance Transfer Service to improve the service quality and cope with increasing demand. To enhance the survival rate of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest patients, we will implement a comprehensive community cardiac pulmonary resuscitation training programme for members of the public.

Concluding Remarks

38. We have made good progress in our policy initiatives last year and we intend to carry this good performance into the coming year. We have set new goals for ourselves and we are confident in meeting the challenge. I firmly believe that we are moving in the right direction and we have the backing of a loyal and professional corps of disciplined services who have pledged to give their best to the community. Together with the support from the legislature and the community, we are aiming for a higher standard of performance.