

Chapter XIV : Security

14.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for Security (S for S), Mrs Regina IP, gave a presentation on the resource requirements under her policy areas for 2000-2001 (Appendix V-13).

Immigration control

Pre-entry control

14.2 Regarding Immigration Department (Imm D)'s performance pledge of achieving 85% of processing 70% of entry visa applications within six weeks upon receipt of supporting documents, Mrs Selina CHOW questioned the rationale of setting such a target and enquired why 1999's actual achievement of 90.9% could not be retained. In response, the Director of Immigration (D of Imm) advised that 90.9% was achieved in 1999 as a result of considerable overtime work undertaken by immigration staff and streamlined procedures. He agreed to explore how the processing of application could be speeded up and refine the way in expressing the target more clearly.

14.3 Some members queried the need for the creation of ten additional posts for processing applications under the Admission of Talents Scheme, having regard to the fact that only 69 applications had been received from the implementation of the Scheme in December 1999 to February 2000. D of Imm advised that despite the small number of applications received during the initial period, the ten-person team was expected to handle a total of 2 000 applications per year. D of Imm considered it premature to review the establishment of the team at this stage, but undertook to do so one year after the implementation of the Scheme. In response to Mrs Selina CHOW's enquiry on whether the processing time would be shortened with the creation of the ten additional posts, D of Imm advised that the length of processing time depended on the complexity of individual cases and the time required for verification of documents submitted by the applicants. Normally, the processing of an application could be completed within three weeks upon receipt of supporting documents.

14.4 Mr James TO noted that the annual caseload of the Parentage Testing Section of Government Laboratory established for conducting parentage verification by means of DNA profiling techniques was only around 2 500, which was much lower than the Government's estimate of the number of persons born

Chapter XIV : Security

out-of-wedlock of Hong Kong permanent residents. D of Imm explained that the caseload was estimated on the basis of the initial demand for parentage verification services arising from applications for right of abode in Hong Kong. The resource requirements for the services would be reviewed in due course with regard to the actual caseload.

Control upon entry

14.5 Referring to the provision for the installation of five additional Video Interview Rooms (VIRs), Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that VIRs should be installed at all control points so as to safeguard the legitimate interests of the suspects. D of Imm advised that as most of the suspected immigration offenders were intercepted at the airport, funds had been allocated for the installation of one VIR at the airport. It would not be cost-effective to install VIRs at the other eight control points, having regard to the high costs involved (\$500,000 for each VIR) and the anticipated low usage rate. Suspects intercepted at those control points would be transferred to the Immigration Headquarters or the Immigration Task Force at Ma Tau Kok Government Offices where VIRs were/would be installed. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered the proposed arrangement unsatisfactory, particularly for children or elderly suspects. He pointed out that the transferring of visitors who were only suspects all the way to Ma Tau Kok merely due to the lack of VIR at the entry point was unacceptable. He did not find the installation cost unjustified when considering the adverse effect of the present arrangement had on Hong Kong's international image. At the request of the Chairman, S for S undertook to follow up this issue with the LegCo Panel on Security.

Handling of complaints against immigration service

14.6 In response to Miss Emily LAU's enquiry, D of Imm advised that there had been a downward trend in the number of complaint cases received by Imm D in the recent few years and that all cases had been fully investigated by the Customer Services Unit (CSU). For those substantiated complaints, appropriate follow-up actions had been taken to rectify the situation. The efforts made by Imm D in this aspect were recognized by the Ombudsman who granted it the Ombudsman Award in 1999. D of Imm added that as there was only a slight decrease in the number of cases, the provision for CSU in 2000-2001 would be the

same as that in 1999-2000, i.e. \$2.43 million.

Notification system for Hong Kong residents detained in the Mainland

14.7 On members' concern about the progress of the establishment of a notification system for Hong Kong residents detained in the Mainland, S for S advised that the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) had taken the lead to exchange views and study with the relevant Mainland authorities on the proposed system, but a final decision had yet to be made. In response to Miss Emily LAU's enquiry, S for S confirmed that it was a requirement under the Mainland laws that the family of a person under arrest should be notified within 24 hours of the arrest. On the basis of this requirement, the Administration had been trying to work out with the Mainland authorities a system under which the families of the Hong Kong residents detained in the Mainland would be notified promptly through the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. S for S pointed out that the Administration had on various occasions reflected the concerns and views of the public and Legislative Council Members of Hong Kong on the subject. She assured members that the Administration would continue the discussion with the Mainland authorities for an early implementation of the notification system.

Operation of the Hong Kong Police Force

Maintenance of law and order

14.8 On the measures taken to monitor the work of police officers on patrol, the Commissioner of Police (C of P) advised that in the past, the police officers concerned were required to sign duty books. Nowadays, with the development of telecommunication equipment, the supervisors of the officers concerned could maintain frequent contacts with them and monitor their work more effectively. The supervisors might also conduct surprise checks on the spot. As regards Mr James TO's proposal of using electronic duty books, C of P advised that such an arrangement would require the development of a sophisticated electronic system and was therefore too costly for the purpose.

Chapter XIV : Security

Prevention and detection of crime

14.9 Mr James TO sought a breakdown of the \$106 million under Subhead 103 Rewards and special services of Head 122, particularly on the expenditure on interception of communications. S for S advised that as the provision under Subhead 103 was for the expenditure on rewards and services of a confidential nature, the Administration had to be cautious in handling the matter so as to avoid any sensitive information deduced from the figures by the public. The Administration was reviewing the extent to which information about the expenditure could be disclosed to the public, and the legislation on interception of communications with an aim to introducing a bill on the subject into the Legislative Council in the next legislative term. Mr TO considered that if it was not the right time to disclose the information to the public, the Administration should at least explain the details to Legislative Council Members who were responsible for monitoring Government expenditure. He therefore requested the Administration to brief members in camera. S for S noted Mr TO's views and concerns, but considered it more appropriate for the Administration to respond after thorough consideration of the matter.

14.10 On measures to combat vice activities, C of P advised that the Police would continue to review policies concerning enforcement against vice activities, and to encourage the public to report such activities. The Police had also been monitoring relevant advertisements on newspapers and taken enforcement actions where appropriate.

14.11 On measures to encourage crime reporting, C of P advised that the crime reporting procedure had been streamlined under the Station Improvement Programme. Training had also been provided to police officers on how to complete the procedure expeditiously. Moreover, the public was encouraged to report crime by fax or by completing forms.

Issue of fixed penalty tickets and traffic summonses

14.12 In response to Mr Gary CHENG's enquiry, C of P advised that in view of the steady increase of registered and licensed motor vehicles and the improved economic climate, the number of fixed penalty tickets for parking offences was estimated to be increased by 11.79% in 2000. The Police would continue to work closely with the Transport Department to monitor the general

Chapter XIV : Security

parking situation in Hong Kong, and step up enforcement action where necessary.

14.13 Mrs Selina CHOW noted that the Police did not have the statistics on traffic summonses issued to Government departments. She asked whether Government vehicles were exempted from liabilities in respect of traffic offences and if not, whether the departments or the drivers concerned were responsible for the payment of the penalty charges. C of P advised that the Police did not have such information. The Chairman suggested C of P to find out the situation by consulting the Government Land Transport Agency.

Operations

14.14 Mr James TO noted that five exercises for counter-terrorist activities were conducted by the Police in 1999-2000, while only one was conducted in 1997-1998 and two in 1998-1999. C of P pointed out that the five exercises conducted in 1999-2000 were small-scale trial-runs for counter-terrorist activities at the airport. In view of the advance in technology, Mr TO suggested the Administration to consider ways to combat terrorist activities on computer network.

Redevelopment of Police Headquarters

14.15 As regards the redevelopment of Police Headquarters which cost \$3.2 billion, C of P advised that the Administration had taken Members' views into account and decided to scrap the officers' mess on the top floor which would be used for office purposes. The revised proposal would be submitted to the Public Works Subcommittee on 29 March 2000.

Overcrowding of prisons

14.16 In view of the high occupancy rate of prisons in 1999 (119%) and 2000 (115%), members were concerned about the measures to address the problem. The Commissioner of Correctional Services (C of CS) advised that since 1994, a total of 2 100 additional certified accommodation had been provided. At present, the problem was more acute in maximum security institutions and prisons for female offenders. The short-term solution was to expand some of the existing facilities, for example, the redevelopment of Stanley Prison and Tai Lam

Chapter XIV : Security

Correctional Institution to provide 151 and 260 additional certified accommodation respectively. In the long term, the Administration was planning for the completion by 2005 a new prison in the New Territories for 1 000 inmates. As regards Victoria Prison, C of CS advised that the overcrowding situation was only temporary, and would be improved after repatriation of the Vietnamese detainees there. C of CS also pointed out that it was difficult to improve the facilities of Victoria Prison because the building was not originally designed for use as a modern prison. Nevertheless, funds had been earmarked in 2000-2001 for upgrading its fire prevention facilities.