

International Co-operation in Combating Immigration Offences

As soon as the problem of illegal migration started to boom in the early 1980s, the Special Investigation Section (SIS) of the Immigration Department was set up to specialise in the investigation against organised immigration offences, including smuggling activities occurring in or involving Hong Kong. The SIS works closely with other law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong, Mainland China and other countries, including the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (USINS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Japanese Police, with a common aim to combat organised smuggling activities.

2. The SIS has been constantly enhanced throughout the years through training and acquisition of specialised equipment, e.g. the WATSON computerised intelligence analysis system, surveillance gear and cars and mobile communication systems.

Intelligence Collection and Dissemination

3. The latest trends and movements of smuggling as well as the modus operandi adopted by illegal migrants are closely monitored by the Operational Research Search (ORS) of Immigration Department. The ORS is responsible for collecting, collating and disseminating the statistics, intelligence and information relating to illegal migration and other immigration offences. It maintains close liaison with local representatives of foreign counterparts for relevant intelligence and trends. The front-line officers would be alerted by the ORS whenever new trends of forged travel documents and illegal migration are observed.

Co-operation with Foreign Counterparts

4. Close liaison and co-operation with foreign counterparts is maintained. Through the meetings with the local consulates (e.g. SCAN Meeting attended by the representatives of US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and British consulates in Hong Kong) and the international conferences (e.g. Pacific Rim Immigration Intelligence Conference and International Organisation of Migration (IOM) Conference attended by officers specialised in coping with the problem of illegal migration from various countries around the world), the

Department has established very good working relationships with its foreign counterparts and plays a pro-active role in tackling the problem of illegal migration.

5. On top of these established channels, the Department is always prepared to co-operate with any foreign authorities to combat illegal migration activities. Special operations were jointly conducted with foreign counterparts in recent years. Highlights include “Operation Snakehead” in 1994, “Operation Over Rainbow” in 1996 and “Operation Ideogram” in 1998. These operations targeted at forgery/human smuggling syndicates and resulted in arrest of over 70 persons at different places in the world. Details are as follows -

(a) Operation Snakehead

In 1994, Immigration Department conducted a joint operation code-named “Operation Snakehead” with USINS and the German authorities against a US-based forgery syndicate smuggling Mainland Chinese to New York via Hong Kong. A total of 39 persons were arrested and a large number of forged travel documents were seized in Hong Kong, US and Germany respectively. 18 main syndicate members were convicted in Hong Kong and 21 in US and Germany, with sentences of up to 18 months’ imprisonment imposed.

(b) Operation Over Rainbow

“Operation Over Rainbow” was a successful enforcement operation against a major international syndicate smuggling Mainland residents to Canada via Hong Kong. It was jointly conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the USINS and Immigration Department in 1996. A key syndicate member, who was a Canadian citizen of Fujianese origin, was arrested in Hong Kong. Sixteen more racketeers and illegal migrants, including the head of the syndicate were also arrested in Canada and USA in the same operation.

(c) Operation Ideogram

“Operation Ideogram” was jointly conducted by the Immigration Department, the Commercial Crime Bureau of Hong Kong Police,

the Public Security Bureau in Guangdong and the Japanese National Police Agency in 1998. In this operation, Mainland Public Security officers arrested the mastermind of a forgery syndicate smuggling Mainland residents into Japan during a raid at the forgery workshop in Guangzhou which produced various types of forged travel documents. 16 Hong Kong residents and 3 Mainland illegal migrants were also arrested in Hong Kong.

Co-operation with Mainland Authorities

6. With a view to tackling the major problem at the sources, Immigration Department maintains close contacts with its Mainland counterparts in Beijing and other provinces and counties, especially Guangdong. Regular feedback on Mainland illegal migrants intercepted in Hong Kong are provided to the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration of the Public Security Bureau in Beijing. This has resulted in arrest of syndicate members in the Mainland. A recent case for illustration occurred in May 1999 in which 11 Mainland residents were intercepted at Hong Kong Airport for being suspected to travel on forged PRC documents to sneak into European countries via Hong Kong. Later an active syndicate member was also intercepted in Hong Kong. After consolidated all the available information, the alien smuggling syndicate was believed to be based in the Mainland. The relevant information was passed to the Guangdong Province Public Security Bureau (GDPSB) for action through established liaison channel. As a result of the investigation by GDPSB, 3 key syndicate members were arrested in Guangzhou. The operation also uncovered a forgery workshop with hundreds of forged passports, blank visas and French and Spanish resident cards seized.

Co-operation with Local Law Enforcement Agencies

7. The Department also keeps close connections with other law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong, especially the Commercial Crime Bureau (CCB) and the Organised Crime and Triad Bureau (OCTB) of the Police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). There have been many successful operations jointly conducted with the departments which serve deterrent effects against illegal migration in or through Hong Kong.