

For discussion
on 7 December 1999

Legislative Council Panel on Security

State of Crime and Detection Rate

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the overall crime situation and the detection rate in Hong Kong. It also sets out the Administration's response to a recent press report on the possible causal relationship between the overtime expenditure incurred by police officers and the detection rate.

State of crime

2. The overall crime rates, i.e. the number of crimes per 100,000 population, in 1997 and 1998 were the lowest and second lowest in the past 25 years respectively. The overall crime rate, the violent crime rate and the number of reported crimes for the first ten months of 1999 were compared with the figures for the same period in 1998 as follows -

	<u>1998 (Jan.- Oct.)</u>	<u>1999 (Jan. – Oct.) (% change)</u>
Overall crime rate	880.2	925.9 (+5.2%)
Violent crime rate	180.7	189 (+4.6%)
Reported crimes	58,758	63,357 (+7.8%)

3. The crime rate is affected by a number of complex factors including the economic situation, the vigilance of the community and the public willingness to report crimes. Under the current economic climate, for the first ten months of 1999, notable increases were seen in a number of quick cash crimes, including miscellaneous thefts (+11.4%),

snatching (+14.5%), pickpocketing (+23.3%), theft from vehicles (+26.4%), deception (+32.7%), robbery (+13.7%), and crimes associated with debt-collection activities such as criminal intimidation (+42%) and criminal damage (+30.2%). However, in spite of the increase in the overall crime rate, a number of serious crimes have continued to decrease. For example, serious narcotics offences had decreased by 18.9%, indecent assault by 13.5%, bank robbery by 13%, homicide by 9.8% and arson by 15.8%. The overall crime rates for the past 25 years outlined at Annex has clearly demonstrated that overall, there has not been any noticeable deterioration in the law and order situation in Hong Kong and the general crime situation is considered stable.

Detection rate

4. The detection rate is based upon the proportion of reported crimes which are solved when the Police make an arrest for an offence. The crime rate and the detection rate are separate indicators of different aspects of the law and order situation and the former has no bearing on the latter. Detection of a crime depends on a wide range of factors, including available evidence, co-operation of the public/victims/witnesses, and confessions of offenders, most of which are beyond the control of the Police. The detection rate can only serve as an indicator of the extent of Police success but not as a precise reflection of the efforts that went into the prevention and detection of crimes.

5. The average detection rate over the past five years was as follows -

<u>Year</u>	<u>Detection Rate</u>
1995	52.0
1996	51.5
1997	51.4
1998	46.1
1999 (up to Oct.)	40.8

The decreasing trend in the average detection rate can be mainly attributable to the changes in the crime pattern over the years. As

mentioned in paragraph 3 above, there has been an increase in quick cash crimes and debt collection related crimes which are comparatively more difficult to solve because usually the victims rarely discover and report the cases promptly and no other witnesses can be identified. On the other hand, a number of serious crimes such as indecent assault, homicide and serious narcotics offences, of which the detection rates are well above the average, have decreased. The changing crime pattern and the increase in the numbers of difficult-to-solve crimes, when combined, effectively reduced the average detection rate.

6. It should also be noted that detection rates vary among different categories of crimes. In the first ten months of 1999, the detection rates of 45 out of a total of 64 categories of crimes are above average for the period and 36 of these saw detection rates of above 75%. In addition, the detection rates of a number of serious crimes including rape, indecent assault, homicide, wounding and kidnapping, blackmail and manufacturing/trafficking in dangerous drugs have remained relatively high, ranging from 60.3% to 99% since 1990.

7. Given the change in the pattern of crimes committed, the decline in the average detection rate is understandable. However, seen in the context of the crime figures, the changing crime pattern, and the continued good detection rates maintained for key crimes, it is incorrect to say that the overall law and order situation in Hong Kong is deteriorating.

Reduction in overtime expenditures

8. Some Members have expressed concern about a recent press report alleging that the reduction in overtime expenditure of the Police might have led to less effective policing and thus resulted in a drop in the detection rate. The report is totally unfounded. The Police provide round-the-clock services to combat crimes and to protect members of the public against any threat to their personal safety and property. When overtime work is required, Police officers will perform such duties and will always be compensated by either time-off later or overtime allowance.

9. There are established procedures and guidelines in the Police Force to properly manage overtime work and the granting of time-off and overtime allowance. Time-off will normally be granted in lieu of overtime payments and only when it is impractical, or when time off cannot be granted within one month, will overtime allowances be paid. The procedures on overtime work and granting of time-off and overtime allowances were last revised in mid-1998 to consolidate a number of existing Police orders to strengthen resource management and to enhance accountability. The current procedures have been working effectively. The criteria for claiming overtime allowance were not among the changes made in 1998, and are set out as follows -

- (a) the duties to be performed at that time are essential;
- (b) the duties must be performed at that time and cannot be deferred; and
- (c) the duties concerned cannot be performed by another officer who will not be required to perform overtime.

10. Through resource re-deployment and more effective management, the overtime expenditure incurred by the Police Force have decreased over the years. The actual expenditure in the period of 1996/1997 to 1999/2000 (up to 31.8.99) were as follows -

<u>Year</u>	<u>Expenditures (million)</u>
1996/97	\$401.9
1997/98	\$366.08
1998/99	\$170.0
1999/2000 (up to 31.8.99)	\$37.9

Part of the reduction is achieved by the amalgamation of the Field Patrol Detachment with the Border District and improving the shift arrangements of the Marine Police launch crews. Where possible, overtime expenditure within crime formations have been reduced by the phased compensation of officers who work additional hours by corresponding amounts of time off rather than financial payments.

11. We should note that both the establishment and strength of the Police, as set out below, has increased over the years -

<u>Year</u>	<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Strength</u>
1996	27,584	27,705
1997	27,709	27,673
1998	28,263	27,903
1999	28,690	28,631

A combination of streamlining and civilianisation measures have enabled the release of additional number of officers to front-line duties. In fact, between October 1998 and October 1999, the number of officers deployed on operational front-line duties has increased from 23,669 to 24,587 (i.e. an increase from 84% of Force strength to 86%). The Police now have adequate manpower to maintain law and order in Hong Kong, which in turn has some impact on overtime expenditure.

Conclusion

12. The reduction of the overtime expenditure incurred by the Police Force over the recent years is mainly due to the implementation of a number of improvement measures relating to resource management and deployment. Neither the level nor the quality of services provided to the public has been adversely affected. The average detection rate may fluctuate when the crime pattern changes. But it is important to note there has been no upsurge in serious crimes and the general law and order situation of Hong Kong remains stable.

Overall Crime Rate

No. of cases per 100 000 population

