

**Speaking Notes for the Secretary for Security
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee on 18 April 2024**

Chairman,

- In the draft Estimates for the new financial year, allocation under Security Bureau (SB)'s responsibility will be \$58.9 billion. The allocation accounts for 7.6% of the total government expenditure, which is similar to the figure last year. The draft Estimates represent an increase of 7.1%, or \$3.9 billion, from the revised Estimates last year.
- The increase in expenditure can be mainly attributed to –
 - The increase in personnel-related expenses due to filling of vacancies and increment;
 - One-time expenditure for procuring equipment. For instance, replacement of self-contained open-circuit breathing apparatus sets and portable radio transceivers; procurement and replacement of ambulances, fire appliances, fire boats and police launches; installation of closed-circuit televisions in preventing violent and serious crimes, etc.; and
 - Short-term expenditure for strengthening existing services. For instance, for enhancing the capacity in handling the upsurge in applications for Hong Kong Identity Cards due to COVID-19.

Law and order

- As regards safeguarding national security, an important milestone this year is the enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO). The SNSO complements with the Hong Kong National Security Law and other relevant local legislations and establishes a complete and effective legal system, serving as the strongest defence for safeguarding national security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
- After the enactment of the SNSO, it is essential to provide for public education and introduce the legislation to external parties. In addition to continuing the existing national security education initiatives, efforts will be made to promote the SNSO to the general public. Relevant information will also be incorporated into our online virtual exhibition, with a view to encouraging the public to gain a better understanding of the legislation.
- Apart from education, our law enforcement agencies will continue to take investigatory and law enforcement actions against acts and activities suspected of endangering national security, and enhance collection and analysis of intelligence, in order to prevent, suppress and impose

punishment for acts and activities endangering national security.

- As regards crimes, the overall crime in 2023 increased by 28.9 per cent as compared with last year. This is mainly due to the fact that fraud cases, which account for more than 40% of all crimes, recorded an increase of approximately 40%. As we were still amid the epidemic in the first half of 2022, a number of traditional crime figures dropped to a particularly low level. As the society resumed normalcy in 2023, most traditional crimes recorded an increase when compared with 2022, but quite a number of them registered a fairly significant decrease when compared with 2018 (such as robbery and assault), the year before the outbreak of the “black-clad violence” and the epidemic.
- We will closely monitor crime trends, flexibly deploy resources to intensify efforts to combat crimes, in particular against deception. Police will continue to step up enforcement and enhance prosecution efficiency. In order to rigorously combat the use of stooge accounts by deception syndicates in committing crimes, applications for enhanced sentencing will be made. Approaches such as interception of fraudulent payments and upstream scam intervention will be adopted to minimise victims’ losses. Furthermore, Police will continue to raise anti-deception awareness of members of the public through online and offline publicity and actively seek to maintain close cooperation with stakeholders from various sectors so as to create synergy in combating deception cases.

Enhancing the cyber security of critical infrastructures

- Enhancing the cyber security of critical infrastructures is conducive to strengthening Hong Kong’s favourable business environment and position as an international financial centre. In view of the increasing risk of global cyber attacks, we will enact legislation to clearly define the statutory cybersecurity obligations for operators of critical infrastructure. We plan to consult the Panel on Security and stakeholders in around the mid-year and aim to introduce the draft legislation by the end of this year.

Promotion and education on counter terrorism

- On the counter-terrorism front, apart from strengthening intelligence gathering and enhancing departmental response capability, the Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit will continue to focus on promoting public education and encouraging members of the public to provide information relating to terrorism and violence.

Non-refoulement claims

- With the update of the removal policy by the Government in December 2022, the efficiency of removal has been greatly enhanced. In 2023, nearly 1 800 unsubstantiated claimants were removed from Hong Kong, representing a significant increase of 63% compared to 2022. Although there was a substantial upsurge in the number of non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants (NEC IIs) in the second half of 2023, as a result of the strengthened joint enforcement actions by law enforcement agencies of Guangdong and Hong Kong, the numbers of NEC IIs arrested and new claims received in February 2024 have decreased by nearly 90% and 70% respectively from the peak.

Facilitating the flow of people between the two sides

- Normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong has fully resumed since 6 February 2023. Boundary control points (BCPs) have been operating smoothly and orderly. We will continue to provide efficient clearance services for travellers, and review the need of extending the operating hours of clearance services.
- In developing new BCPs in the future, we will actively explore the adoption of new clearance mode to enhance passenger clearance efficiency, including implementing the “collaborative inspection and joint clearance” mode in new land BCP projects.

Facilitating the flow of talents

- The Government maintains an open immigration policy to proactively attract talents and facilitate business, while upholding effective immigration control. The Government has relaxed the visa policy for Vietnamese talents to come to Hong Kong for employment with effect from October 2023. Besides, we have relaxed the criteria for Vietnamese applying for multiple-journey “visit visa”. Following the implementation of the new measure, the average monthly number of the aforementioned visa applications approved is about six times the number in 2019.
- We have also relaxed the visa policy for Laotian and Nepalese talents for employment, training and study in Hong Kong, with a view to promoting exchanges on various fronts with talents from these places.

Fire Safety in old buildings

- The Government is stepping up the work of amending the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance to empower the Government to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners and to recover relevant fees from them afterwards. Our target is to submit the amendment bill to the Legislative Council for scrutiny this year. We will also expedite our work with a view to advancing the submission of the amendment bill by two months.

Custodial work and rehabilitation of persons in custody

- The Correctional Services Department (CSD) will continue to proactively introduce technologies to improve the efficiency and security level of prison management. Besides, CSD will strive to enhance its rehabilitation programmes to help persons in custody rebuild positive values, and seek wider support for the rehabilitation work from all sectors of the community.

Promoting Youth Development

- SB has been committed to raising the number of active members of its youth uniformed groups. The aim is to cultivate young people's physical and mental health, positive thinking, law-abiding and national security awareness, patriotism, and sense of discipline and team spirit. Last year, the active membership of youth uniformed groups of the six disciplined services departments increased by 30%, to over 7 400 members.

Combating Drugs

- In view of the upward trend on cocaine use, the Government launched a TV Announcement in the Public Interest in January 2024 to combat cocaine use, and will strengthen support for drug treatment and rehabilitation services. Law enforcement agencies will continue to closely monitor the global trend and spare no effort in combating drug offences.

Chairman, the representatives from Departments and I are pleased to answer questions from Members.

Thank you, Chairman.

Security Bureau
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