

LCQ8: Improving law and order in rural areas

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (September 29):

It is learnt that as rural areas are extensive in area and sparsely populated, burglaries occur there from time to time. There were 28 more burglary cases involving village houses in the first half of this year as compared with the same period last year, giving rise to worries that the law and order in rural areas shows a deteriorating trend. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of burglary cases which occurred in rural areas received by the various police districts as well as their detection rates, in each of the past three years;
- (2) of the new measures put in place by the Police to combat burglary crime committed in rural areas;
- (3) of the measures put in place by the Police to enhance communication and cooperation with the residents in rural areas, so as to detect and prevent burglary crime; and
- (4) whether the Police will consider increasing the manpower of the Rural Patrol Team; if so, of the relevant target establishment and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Police have been paying close attention to burglary cases. A three-pronged strategy integrating law enforcement, prevention and education has been adopted to curb and combat criminal activities. At the same time, the Police closely co-operate with the community and make concerted efforts with the public to combat crimes in the rural areas. My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

- (1) 973 burglary cases were recorded in Hong Kong from January to August 2021, representing a decrease of 484 cases, a drop of 33.2 per cent when compared with the same period of 2020. During this period, the Police detected over 280 burglary cases in total across the territory and arrested more than 280 persons. The detection rate has increased by 10.1 per cent to about 29 per cent.

The Police maintain a breakdown of burglary cases by type of building.

From 2018 to August 2021, the number of burglary cases involving village houses are as follows:

	2018	2019	2020	2021 (as at end of August)
Number of Cases	276	285	245	179

The Police do not maintain the other statistics requested in part (1) of the question.

(2) and (3) The Police have been committed to combating burglary in the rural areas. On the enforcement front, the Police have been making on-going efforts to carry out high-profile patrols, strengthen intelligence exchange with the Mainland law enforcement agencies, analyse intelligence with respect to crime trends, and undertake proactive enforcement. Apart from deploying uniformed officers to step up high-profile patrols in the rural areas, the Police mobilise the Regional Rural Patrol Unit, Police Tactical Unit and Police Dog Unit as appropriate to take part in enforcement actions, and carry out joint operations with relevant departments such as the Government Flying Service to intercept suspicious persons and conduct anti-burglary operations. In an anti-burglary operation recently conducted in Sheung Shui, the Police intercepted and arrested two illegal immigrants and found on them housebreaking instruments such as crowbars, hoods, suspected pepper spray and flashlights.

In terms of preventing burglary, the Police have proactively established communication channels with various stakeholders. For instance, through regular visits to rural committees and village offices in the districts, social media platforms, talks, the Police maintain close contact with village representatives and local residents, exchange views with them on the crimes and security issues in village areas, and timely disseminate information on crimes and crime prevention.

As regards the dissemination of crime prevention messages, the Police share with local residents information on crimes and common typologies of crimes, encourage installation of closed-circuit television system at major roads inside villages, distribute to villagers tools for burglary prevention (e.g. intruder alarm, sensor lights, window locks), invite villagers to become Fight Crime Ambassadors and organise talks on prevention of burglary. Besides, the Police conduct risk assessment of high-risk villages and rural housing estates, and make recommendations on the prevention of burglary to village representatives and property management staff. These communication channels also help various stakeholders provide burglary-related intelligence to the Police (e.g. information on suspicious characters), effectively expanding the criminal intelligence gathering network in rural areas and assisting the Police in taking enforcement actions.

The Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police, in collaboration with six Regions, has launched a territory-wide publicity campaign "Safe Living" in August and September this year. Through a series of publicity activities including a promotional truck, crime prevention publicity clips, thematic talks and roadshow, the campaign aims to disseminate anti-burglary and other crime prevention messages. It also encourages the public to install smart security systems and report to the Police if they notice any suspicious characters or vehicles.

(4) The Police will continue to mount intelligence-led operations and deploy resources flexibly to step up patrols with a view to further combatting street crimes. The Police will closely monitor the trend of such crimes, and deploy resources and manpower to enhance the effectiveness of enforcement actions where warranted.