

Opening remarks by S for S at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 16):

Thank you, Chairman. In the draft Estimates for the new financial year, allocation under the Security Bureau (SB)'s responsibility will be \$54.3 billion, accounting for 7.5 per cent of the total government expenditure. The allocation is 5.6 per cent less than last year.

In the interest of time, I would like to briefly introduce our work in several key areas.

Firstly, on law and order, the Hong Kong National Security Law has considerably suppressed the acts of violent riots, "Hong Kong independence" and colluding with external forces that prevailed in 2019-20, and restored normal lives for Hong Kong's residents so that they can live without fear and threat to their safety. However, the violent riots have seriously tarnished the law and order and law-abiding awareness of Hong Kong.

In the four decades or so before the violent riots, Hong Kong has witnessed a steady decrease in its crime figures. The trend, however, was disrupted and reversed by the violent riots. The number of crimes increased by 9 per cent in 2019 and continued to increase by 7 per cent in 2020. Crimes recording more significant increases in 2020 include deception cases, blackmail, as well as vice, gambling activities and drug-related offences. We will therefore closely monitor the crime trend and take strict enforcement actions. We will also have to rebuild the law-abiding awareness through promotion and education, and inform the public about common criminal tactics so that they will be more vigilant. In this regard, the Government, the Police and different sectors in society will have to work together to rebuild positive values and the law-abiding awareness of society.

While order in the community has broadly resumed, security risks still prevail. I would like to remind everyone of three areas.

Firstly, people who endanger national security still leverage on the media, arts and culture, and publications etc, to continue to disseminate the idea of "Hong Kong independence" and destruction, and shamelessly fabricate heroic stories for those violating the law;

Secondly, there are risks of local terrorism lurking in the community, and we have to beware of self-radicalised people pursuing "lone wolf" terrorist acts; and

Thirdly, agents of foreign countries are still present in Hong Kong and

external forces are still exploiting every opportunity to interfere and damage the city.

We need to stay vigilant and equip ourselves with the ability to deal with contingencies any time.

In respect of control points, the HKSAR Government will continue to closely collaborate with the Shenzhen Municipal Government to enhance the clearance capability of the land boundary control points between two places, which help facilitate the realisation of the "East in East out, West in West out" planning strategy for cargo traffic. We opened the cargo clearance facilities of the Liantang Port/Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point in August 2020 and have provided round-the-clock cargo clearance services at the Shenzhen Bay Port starting from December 2020.

Regarding the redevelopment of Huanggang Port Control Point and the implementation of the co-location arrangement, I moved on March 24 this year a government motion at the Legislative Council which was supported by all attending Members for us to press ahead with the corresponding work in collaboration with the Shenzhen Municipal Government. I would like to express my gratitude for your support.

Various measures of handling non-refoulement claims have achieved positive progress. The number of non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants has dropped by over 80 per cent from the peak, and the number of new non-refoulement claims received has also dropped by about 80 per cent from the peak. The number of appeals pending the Torture Claims Appeal Board's handling has also dropped significantly to 1 600, which are expected to be completed within this year the soonest.

To handle non-refoulement claims more effectively, we have earlier introduced the Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2020 (the Bill) with a view to further strengthening our measures and the legal basis. The Bills Committee has largely completed the scrutiny. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Bills Committee. Taking into account the Bills Committee's comments, we will introduce committee stage amendments to the Bill, including further specifying whether the person concerned is likely to pose a security risk to the community should be taken into consideration when assessing whether the detention period is reasonable and lawful. Subject to the agreement of the House Committee, we will resume the second reading on April 28 this year.

In respect of fire safety in old buildings, the Government agrees that there is a need to consider empowering the Fire Services Department and the Buildings Department to assist in carrying out fire safety improvement works for owners of old buildings who are incapable of complying with the requirements of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance, and to recover the costs incurred from such owners upon completion of the works. The Security Bureau will make reference to a similar mechanism under the prevailing Buildings Ordinance and take into account the experience of the Buildings Department in the work of building safety, and will do our best to resolve

the legal and enforcement issues involved. It is expected that a public consultation will be launched in the second half of this year in order to formulate a suitable mechanism and amend the legislation to empower relevant departments to carry out the related work.

Lastly, I would like to talk about the anti-epidemic work. In addition to the work reported to the Committee just now, the disciplined services and auxiliary forces under the Security Bureau have fully dedicated themselves to duties and actively participated in the work of the Government in fighting the epidemic, including increasing face mask production in correctional institutions in the early stage of the epidemic, preparatory work for the operation of the quarantine facilities, and assistance rendered to Hong Kong people stranded overseas in returning home. Recently, we have been providing assistance in strengthening contact tracing of close contacts, and stepping up enforcement actions against contravention of the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance. At the peak, over 3 000 personnel from the disciplined services were deployed on a daily basis, especially participating in various work during the operations in "restricted areas".

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the colleagues from the disciplined and auxiliary services for their hard work.

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

Thank you, Chairman.