

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

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, on security at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 14):

Chairman,

In the draft Estimates for the new financial year, allocation under Security Bureau (SB)'s responsibility will be \$57.7 billion, 6.3 per cent more than last year. The allocation accounts for 7.2 per cent of the total government expenditure.

As regards safeguarding national security, the enactment and implementation of the National Security Law has restored order from chaos in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

Over the past year, the HKSAR Government successfully prevented and suppressed many acts endangering national security and the security of Hong Kong. The enforcement actions included :

(1) arresting Jimmy Lai, the leading figure of those endangering national security, and his accomplice; and Apple Daily, the propaganda machine which endangered national security, also ceased operation;

(2) arresting multiple persons suspected of conspiring to rig the election, with the intention to paralyse the HKSAR Government in performing the duties and functions in accordance with the law through the "35-plus" plan. Among those arrested, 47 have been prosecuted for the offence of "conspiracy to commit subversion";

(3) making an all-out effort to combat local terrorism, including detecting "Returning Valiant", a radical organisation advocating "Hong Kong independence". The organisation planned to deploy explosives at court buildings and public transport, with a view to endangering national security;

(4) reviving existing legislation, including invoking sections 9 and 10 of the Crimes Ordinance to proactively combat acts of a "soft resistance" nature; and recommending the Chief Executive in Council to strike the "Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China" off the Companies Register pursuant to the relevant power under the Companies (Winding Up and Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance; and

(5) proactively invoking the power under the Implementation Rules for Article 43 of the National Security Law, including freezing offences related to

property of over \$1.1 billion.

In future, we will continue to take resolute enforcement actions, step up the collection and analysis of intelligence concerning national security and counter-terrorism; and continue to raise national security awareness through promotion and education.

As regards legislation, we have already pushed forward the work in respect of legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law, with a view to conducting public consultation before the end of the current term of the Government and introducing the Bill to the Legislative Council for scrutiny by the end of this year. However, in view of the new wave of the epidemic, we are currently assessing the impact on the relevant work.

In 2021, crimes that had significant rising trends included deception, blackmail and serious drug offences. We will closely monitor crime trends, flexibly deploy resources to intensify efforts to combat crimes, and raise public awareness through targeted publicity and education.

As regards cybersecurity, the Government is making preparatory work for a legislation to clearly define the cybersecurity obligations of operators of critical information infrastructure, with a view to strengthening the cybersecurity of such infrastructure. Our target is to conduct public consultation within this year.

Regarding non-refoulement claims, we have made positive progress in the handling of non-refoulement claims with the various measures in place. The number of non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants dropped by about 80 per cent from the peak and the number of new claims received also dropped significantly by about 50 per cent. Despite the impact of the epidemic, the Immigration Department (ImmD) managed to work down the number of pending claims to 455 from the peak of over 10 000. The number of appeals pending handling by the Torture Claims Appeal Board also dropped to around 2 600 from the peak of over 6 500.

To handle the claims more effectively, the Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 came into effect on August 1, 2021. It helps further enhance the screening efficiency of the ImmD, prevent delaying tactics and improve the procedures and functions of the Torture Claims Appeal Board.

On enhancing the fire safety of old buildings, the Government agrees it is necessary to consider empowering the Fire Services Department and the Buildings Department (BD) to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners of old buildings who are incapable of complying with the requirements under the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance, and to recover relevant fees from them upon completion of the works. The SB is drawing reference to a similar mechanism under the prevailing Buildings Ordinance and the BD's experience in the work of building safety, and will do our best to resolve the legal and enforcement issues involved, with a view to launching a public consultation this year.

Concerning custodial work and rehabilitation of persons in custody, to promote the modernisation of correctional facilities, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) will continue to proactively develop a "Smart Prison" system, applying innovative technologies to improve the efficiency and security level of prison management. The CSD will also strive to enhance its rehabilitation programmes to assist persons in custody involved in serious crimes and with radical thinking to re-establish positive values.

In respect of combating drugs, with concerted efforts from different sectors of the community, the drug problem in Hong Kong is generally under control. However, the increase in reported drug abuse (especially cannabis, cocaine and ketamine) and the number of persons arrested for drug offences in the past two years or so warrants attention.

Chairman, the representatives from the departments and I are pleased to answer questions from Members. Thank you, Chairman.