

Overall law and order situation remained stable in 2018 (with photo)

The overall law and order situation of Hong Kong continued to improve in 2018, according to the Commissioner of Police, Mr Lo Wai-chung.

Speaking at a press conference today (January 29) to review the law and order situation in Hong Kong last year, Mr Lo said the overall crime figure dropped to 54,225 cases, a decrease of 1,792 cases or 3.2 per cent when compared with 2017. The figure was the lowest since 1974. The crime rate measuring by number of crimes per 100,000 population stood at 728 cases, representing a new low since 1970.

A total of 8,884 cases of violent crime were recorded in 2018, a drop of 202 cases (down 2.2 per cent) when compared with 2017.

Majority of the crime categories were registered with decrease, including robbery, burglary, theft, rape, serious drugs offences, criminal intimidation, arson, criminal damage, triad-related crimes, etc. Major crimes on increase included homicide, deception, blackmail, indecent assault and domestic violence crimes.

There were 48 cases of homicide in 2018, a rise of 24 cases from 2017. All the cases were detected. The surge was due to the serious traffic accident in February 2018 in which a bus side-turned on Tai Po Road and tragically claimed the life of 19 victims. The driver had been charged with manslaughter. Majority of the remaining 29 cases involved disputes among couples, family members, relatives, neighbours and residents in residential care homes.

In 2018, 8,372 cases of deception was recorded, a rise of 1,281 cases or 18.1 per cent. There were 615 cases of telephone deception in 2018, being a drop of 38 per cent when compared with 2017. The pecuniary loss was \$60 million, a decrease of over \$160 million.

Significant increase was noted in social media deception, online business fraud, email scam and investment fraud.

In 2018, social media deception totalled 2,064 cases, a rise of 1,001 cases or 94 per cent over 2017. The pecuniary loss increased by 2.5-fold to \$500 million. Among them, 596 cases were "romance scam", which was a 1.5-fold increase from 2017. A loss of \$450 million (up 3.2-fold) was recorded.

Police have been maintaining close cooperation with overseas law enforcement agencies. In October last year, the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau (CSTCB) mounted a joint operation with Singapore and Malaysia police. A "romance scam" syndicate based in Malaysia was neutralised, and 52 syndicate members, including the mastermind, were arrested. The syndicate was related to over a hundred "romance scam" cases

that took place in Hong Kong.

Online business fraud totalled 2,717 cases in 2018, 721 cases more than 2017, involving a loss of \$56 million. E-shopping fraud accounted for most of the cases. Majority of them involved trading that took place on online trading platforms.

There were 894 email scams in 2018, a rise of 201 cases compared with 2017. Most of them were corporate level email scams, which recorded 887 cases, a rise of 204 cases, incurring a loss of \$1.71 billion. Majority of the victimised organisations had no connection with Hong Kong, but the scammers received money through Hong Kong bank accounts.

As for investment fraud, there were 212 cases in 2018, a rise of 75 cases. The loss increased by \$1.61 billion to \$1.77 billion. Half of the loss involved Loco London Gold fraud.

In 2018, there were 15 cases of Loco London Gold fraud, a drop of four cases compared with 2017. However, the number of victims increased 8-fold to 299 persons, resulting in relatively greater loss of \$800 million (up 31-fold). The fraudsters acquainted citizens from different social circles through social media, and subsequently the relatives of the victims in a short period of time, causing more victims to fall into traps.

Last year, Police enhanced law enforcement against Loco London Gold fraud and e-shopping fraud. Multiple enforcement actions were conducted with over 250 and 120 persons arrested respectively. Financial investigations are in progress to seek confiscation of over \$400 million criminal proceeds.

As for interception of payment, through close cooperation with banks, the Anti-Deception Coordination Centre has managed to intercept payment of over \$1.4 billion made by victims in 551 deception cases and prevented 254 would-be deception cases since its establishment in July 2017.

Most deception cases involved the application of social media or information technology, and therefore, Police will step up efforts in preventing and combating deception through strategies including conducting crime prevention campaigns, strengthening law enforcement, intercepting payments and enhancing cyber security.

Publicity and education is one of the most effective strategies in combating deception. Considering the changes of the citizens' habit of getting information, it becomes more important to carry out crime prevention work by utilising social media.

"The Force will further develop platforms to communicate with members of the public, including the Police Weibo and Twitter, which are officially launched today, so that the anti-crime messages can be reached out to citizens, new arrivals and tourists on different social media platforms," said Mr Lo.

In 2018, 635 cases of blackmail were recorded, a rise of 56 cases from 2017. The increase in number of cases was mainly due to the emergence of a

new modus operandi in mid-2018. Scammers sent out emails to victims claiming that their computer had been hacked, and blackmailed them for money or virtual currency. Such modus operandi accounted for 109 cases and only one case incurred loss. Upon analysis, CSTCB believed that the scammers sent out a large number of phishing emails to cheat and no ransomware was involved.

A total of 1,099 indecent assault cases was recorded in 2018, a rise of two per cent. The increase was mainly driven by cases that took place on public transport or transport stations.

There were 1,413 domestic violence crime cases, up by 1.4 per cent. Most cases involved wounding and serious assault, criminal intimidation and criminal damage.

In 2018, 147 cases of robbery were recorded, a drop of 16 cases over 2017. The figure marked a new low since record was first kept in 1969. No case involved genuine gun in 2018. There were five goldsmith and watch shop robberies involving substantial amount of loss last year. All cases were detected with 20 persons arrested and majority of the lost property recovered.

There were 1,575 burglaries in 2018, a drop of 15.9 per cent over 2017. The number also marked a new low since the record was first kept. However, increase was noted for villas burglaries, which totalled 115 cases, a rise of 53.3 per cent. In the light of the rising trend, Police will step up patrol in relevant areas to raid potential hideouts of the culprits. Since some of the burglars were from the Mainland, Police will enhance intelligence exchange with the Mainland law enforcement agencies to prevent the burglars from entering the territory to commit crimes. Police will also enhance crime prevention work against villas burglaries.

There were 1,399 serious drugs cases in 2018, a drop of 9.9 per cent when compared with 2017. Despite the drop in the number of cases, the amount of seizure (including cocaine, "Ice", heroin and ketamine) has risen. The increase in the seizure amount was attributed to a number of successful intelligence-led operations mounted by Police and the Customs & Excise Department. Police will continue to strengthen intelligence exchange and operation collaboration with the Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies, and keep combating drug trafficking by intercepting drug inflows and tracking relevant proceeds.

In 2018, 1,715 triad-related crimes were recorded, a drop of 83 cases compared with 2017. Majority of the offences were wounding and serious assault. From December last year to early January this year, several wounding cases arising from conflicts among triad factions happened in Tseung Kwan O, Yau Ma Tei and Kwun Tong and aroused public concern. Police was highly concerned with the cases. The Organized Crime and Triad Bureau together with the Regional Anti-Triad Unit conducted various intelligence-led operations which resulted in the arrest of 58 persons for wounding, possession of offensive weapons, etc. The Force tolerates no triad-related violence crime and will further enhance enforcement efforts in combating triad-related activities.

Last year, 28,966 persons were arrested for crime offences, down by 1,400 persons over 2017. Among them, 4,021 were non-ethnic Chinese (NECs), down by 426 persons. A total of 1,150 NEC Form 8 holders were arrested for crime offences, representing a drop of 25 per cent. The NECs were mainly arrested for shop theft, miscellaneous theft, wounding and serious assault, etc.

A continuous downtrend was noted in the number of NEC illegal immigrants. There were 639 persons in 2018, a decrease of 254 persons over 2017. Police will continue to combat human-smuggling syndicates through intelligence-led actions.

In 2018, the number of youths arrested for crime offences was 2,769, up by 1.4 per cent over 2017. Most of them were arrested for wounding and serious assault, miscellaneous theft and shop theft.

In conclusion, the crime figures in 2018 further decreased, which was the lowest since 1974. Most major crimes, such as robbery and burglary, hit their record low since record was first kept in 1969. The law and order situation remained stable.

“The level of confidence and comments of the public towards the Force saw continuous improvement. The Police Service Satisfaction Survey and the Public Opinion Survey in 2018 showed that we have attained the highest rating ever in many items. A number of international researches and reports rate different indexes, including the ‘reliability of police service’, level of law and order, etc. Among over 100 countries and areas, Hong Kong ranks high globally and our position ascended in 2018 compared with the previous year in the same researches,” said Mr Lo.

“It is very encouraging for the management team and me seeing the achievements last year. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my fellow colleagues for their commitment and dedication to serving members of the public in every position, fulfilling their pledge made when joining the Force.

“Not to be missed is the citizens’ support for the work of the Force and their efforts in fighting crimes together with the Force.

“Despite the satisfactory law and order situation, in the face of the ever-changing external environment and modus operandi, Police will continuously strengthen our capabilities, meet the challenges, improve our services and maintain the law and order of Hong Kong,” Mr Lo concluded.

Also attending the press conference were the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Management), Ms Chiu Wai-yin and the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), Mr Tang Ping-keung.

