

LCQ7: Combating "quick money-making" crimes

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kuok and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

It has been reported that following the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland as well as the rest of the world, various types of "quick money-making" crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, snatching, burglary and deception) have been on the increase in Hong Kong in recent months. Some Mainland tourist victims have criticised that the law and order of Hong Kong has deteriorated. Suspecting that some people have targeted Mainland tourists when committing crimes, such tourists have called upon Mainland tourists to be cautious and have even advised Mainland residents not to visit Hong Kong. On the other hand, some members of the public have claimed that some of these offenders are non-Hong Kong residents and are even tourists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics to see if the aforesaid "quick money-making" crimes or other types of crimes have increased significantly since January this year, and set out in a table the number of relevant crimes by month;

(2) among the victims of the crimes mentioned in (1), of the respective numbers of Hong Kong residents and non-Hong Kong residents (with a breakdown by place of origin);

(3) of the detection rate of the crimes mentioned in (1); among the people arrested, the ratio of Hong Kong residents to non-Hong Kong residents; whether the non-Hong Kong residents include refugees and asylum seekers stranded in Hong Kong; if so, of their numbers and proportion; and

(4) whether measures are in place to enhance the protection for the safety of tourists and combat the aforesaid "quick money-making" crimes (including reminding tourists to stay alert of suspicious persons and increasing the number of patrols at relevant crime blackspots), and whether it will release on a regular basis the number of relevant crimes committed by tourists, so as to avoid deliberate dissemination of unproven information by some people to stir up conflicts between members of the public and tourists?

Reply:

President,

There is no definition of "quick cash" crimes legally. However, these

crimes generally share the following characteristics: opportunistic in nature; committed in public places; and the stolen properties are usually cash or other items that can be easily sold for cash. Combating "quick cash" crimes is one of the operational priorities of the Police in 2023. The Police will strategically deploy resources to problematic areas and take proactive measures against emerging trends of "quick cash" crimes.

In consultation with the Police, the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) to (3) With the society gradually resumed to normalcy as the COVID-19 pandemic eased, in the first five months of 2023, various types of crimes registered an increase compared with the same period of 2022. This is mainly due to the extremely low number of traditional crimes recorded in the same period last year when the fifth wave of pandemic was at its peak, during which stringent social distancing measures were in place and social activities were largely reduced. In fact, when compared with the same period in 2019 before the pandemic outbreak, apart from the significant increase in deception cases, the numbers of other types of crimes related to "quick cash" have remained similar or even dropped slightly in the first five months of 2023.

To monitor the situation and trend of "quick cash" crimes, for statistical purposes, the Police consider the situation of eight crimes with more characteristics of "quick cash" crimes, namely shop theft, pickpocketing, miscellaneous theft, snatching, street robbery, taxi robbery, "head bashing" robbery and street deceptions as indicators. A comparison between the numbers of these crimes and burglary mentioned in the question from January to May 2023 and in the same periods in 2019 and 2022, the relevant detection rates and the number of people arrested are at Annex. The Police do not have a breakdown of the victims of the crimes by place of origin.

(4) The Police strive to combat crimes related to "quick cash" such as robbery, snatching. To this end, the Police have been mounting intelligence-led operations and have deployed resources flexibly to step up patrols so as to enhance the deterrent effect. Since mid-June this year, the manpower of uniformed officers has been increased in various districts. Insofar as permitted by work arrangements, plain clothes officers are assigned to high profile patrols on the street, especially in crowded places, to stop and search suspicious persons. In addition, the Police have been actively conveying anti-crime messages to the general public and tourists through anti-crime promotional activities, encouraging them to take good care of their personal belongings and report any suspicious persons or vehicles to the Police without hesitation.

On May 16 this year, the Police also launched a brand-new one-stop website "SafeCity.HK" (www.safecity.hk) to provide the public with information and knowledge about crime prevention, including prevention of theft, and advise them of the ways to seek help. Besides serving Hong Kong citizens, the website also offers "Tips for Tourists", providing practical

information and anti-crime messages for tourists to travel safely in Hong Kong.

The Police's website has been regularly releasing crime statistics, which include the number of visitors from the Mainland or other places who are arrested for having committed offences.