

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

Following is the English translation of the opening remarks by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, on security policy areas of at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 9):

Chairman,

In the draft Estimates for the new financial year, allocation for the policy areas under the Security Bureau (SB)'s responsibility will be \$57.5 billion, accounting for 7.9 per cent of the total government expenditure.

On law and order, the operational priorities of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) for 2020-21 are to combat violent crimes, triads, syndicated and organised crimes, dangerous drugs and "quick-cash" crimes; to promote cyber security and combat technology crimes; and to ensure public safety and step up counter-terrorism work. In view of the occurrence of over 1 400 public order events since last June, many of which turned into illegal acts of serious violence, the HKPF will enhance its readiness, combat all illegal acts of violence and safeguard public peace. We are also very concerned that violent extremists were involved in a number of bomb cases in recent months. Their behaviour was very close to terrorist attacks commonly seen overseas. The Government will be fully prepared, and will enhance public awareness of counter-terrorism and an emerging "homegrown terrorism" threat that severely endangers the personal safety of the general public.

On control points, in response to the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government has, since the end of January 2020, implemented a series of measures to reduce passenger flow between Hong Kong and overseas. At this point, passenger clearance is only available at the airport and two land-based control points (i.e. Shenzhen Bay and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge), and the operating hours of passenger clearance at the two land-based control points have also been shortened to 10 hours. At the airport, we restrict the entry of non-Hong Kong residents coming from overseas countries and regions.

After implementing a series of immigration restrictions and compulsory quarantine measures, the total number of arrivals on April 7 was 992 and on April 8 was 1 576, representing a decrease of 99.5 per cent in comparison with the figure of around 236 000 prior to the implementation of the measures.

Concerning the construction progress of the Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point, its building works were largely completed in 2019 and the control point is ready for commissioning. The Government will continue to

liaise with the Guangdong authorities on the arrangement for commissioning the new control point such that the law enforcement departments can get themselves ready for the commissioning.

On non-refoulement claims, since the commencement of the comprehensive review of the strategy of handling non-refoulement claims in 2016, various measures have yielded considerable results. The number of non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants has dropped by over 80 per cent, and the number of new claims has also dropped by over 80 per cent. The Immigration Department (ImmD) has basically completed the screening of the backlog claims. The number of appeal cases pending the Torture Claims Appeal Board's handling has also dropped significantly to below 3 000, which are expected to be completed in the first half of next year at the soonest. ImmD will also expedite the removal of unsubstantiated claimants from Hong Kong.

The Government consulted the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Security on the proposed amendments to the Immigration Ordinance in 2018 and 2019, and exchanged views with relevant stakeholders (including the two legal professional bodies). Meanwhile, we also commenced drafting of the amendment bill. Taking into account the situation of the LegCo's operation, the Government will review the timetable for taking forward the relevant work.

On fire safety improvement works, the Government, in partnership with the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), implemented the \$2 billion Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme in 2018 to assist owners of old composite buildings to carry out improvement works for compliance with the enhanced fire safety requirements under the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance. The URA received over 2 400 applications that met the basic requirements. Since the response was positive, we have proposed to allocate additional funding of \$3.5 billion, increasing the total subsidy funding from \$2 billion to \$5.5 billion so as to benefit more eligible owners of old composite buildings.

On combating the drug abuse problem, the number of reported drug abusers has continued to decrease. The total number of reported drug abusers decreased by 17 per cent in 2019 compared with that in the previous year, and by around 40 per cent compared with five years ago (i.e. 2014). This represents the achievements made as a result of the Government and various sectors of the community in fighting drugs together under the existing policy. However, the median history of drug abuse has increased from 4.6 years in 2017 to 5.5 years in 2019 (i.e. seeking help for the first time after taking drugs for 5.5 years). As such, the problem of hidden drug abuse requires our attention. In addition, the number of cannabis abusers has also increased. We will continue to take strong enforcement action and carry out publicity, and monitor the legalisation of cannabis in overseas jurisdictions.

On custody and rehabilitation, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) will continue to proactively develop "Smart Prison" through application of innovation and technology and modernising correctional facilities, so as to enhance the efficiency of penal management, the level of security and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes.

On tasks taken up by the disciplined and auxiliary services in fighting the coronavirus, in addition to the work directly relevant to security policy areas mentioned above, in view of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, under the co-ordination of the SB, the disciplined services and the two auxiliary forces have actively participated in the work of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government in fighting the epidemic.

The tasks concerned include providing different types of practical assistance to Hong Kong people outside Hong Kong; assisting in the preparation for the setting up of quarantine centres and temporary accommodation, as well as operation of these facilities; provision of emergency ambulance services or hospital admission/transfer services for persons requiring isolation or suspected/confirmed cases; assisting the Department of Health in issuing and enforcing quarantine orders; participation in the patrol and enforcement work relating to the requirements of prohibiting group gatherings; carrying out inspection of the quality of surgical masks sold; and participation in the expansion plan on mask production initiated by the CSD. Apart from serving colleagues, the participants also include volunteers who are retirees from disciplined forces. In particular, for the expansion plan on mask production initiated by the CSD, with the participation of around 2 000 serving and retired CSD officers as well as persons in custody, the mask production volume has increased in phases from a monthly average of 1.1 million pieces in January, and is expected to reach 5 million by mid-April. We estimate that the production volume may further increase to 7 million pieces per month in mid-May. The CSD will also explore the feasibility of producing other protective equipment.

I thank colleagues and volunteers of various forces for their hard work and readiness to contribute in participating in the above work.

Chairman, my colleagues and I are pleased to answer questions from Members.