

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

SB122

(Question Serial No. 2342)

Head: (30) Correctional Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): ()

Programme: (1) Prison Management

Controlling Officer: Commissioner of Correctional Services (WONG Kwok-hing)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Security

Question:

Recently, the Secretary for Security has said that some people who are anti-government have become “frequent prison visitors”, paying multiple visits to inmates jailed for the involvement in the black-clad violence with whom they have no personal connection. Through influencing inmates’ thoughts, they have been instilling anti-government messages and negative views into them, in an attempt to cause a resurgence of anti-government sentiment among young persons in custody (PICs). In this regard, would the Government advise this Committee on the following:

1. The frequency of visits and duration of each visit allowed to be paid to PICs;
2. Whether members of the public are required to prove their relationship with an individual PIC before being allowed to pay a visit; if yes, how does the Correctional Services Department verify their relationship? If no, what are the reasons?
3. The average number of PICs or visitors each correctional officer is required to supervise during a visit; and how can an officer ensure good order at the scene?
4. If a visitor is suspected to incite a PIC to act against correctional officers, or talk about something not conducive to the PIC’s rehabilitation during a visit, can the Department immediately suspend the visit, report to the Police if necessary and ban that visitor from visiting again?
5. If a PIC behaves abnormally or even commits acts of indiscipline after visits, what follow-up actions will the Department take? Can the visit arrangement for that PIC be suspended for a period of time to prevent those “frequent prison visitors” from further influencing the PIC’s thoughts?
6. Whether there are statistics on the average cost of arranging a visiting session for each PIC; in the long run, will the Department consider tightening restrictions on the visit arrangement to reduce expenditure and save manpower resources?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Wing-yan, Joephy (LegCo internal reference no.: 31)

Reply:

1. Rule 48 of the Prison Rules (Cap. 234A) stipulates that convicted persons in custody (PICs) shall be permitted to be visited by relatives and friends twice a month and each visit shall be 30 minutes, while Rule 203 stipulates that PICs awaiting trial shall be permitted to be visited by relatives and friends once a day and each visit shall be 15 minutes.
2. On admission, all PICs are required to declare the names and relationships of their visitors. During their custody, they may add new visitors to or delete existing visitors from their lists of visitors subject to approval by the institutional management. Visitors are required to produce personal identification documents to institutional staff and they are allowed to enter correctional institutions for visits only after their identities have been verified.
3. The Correctional Services Department (CSD) does not maintain the relevant statistics. Due to the security and operational needs of a prison, visits by relatives and friends are video and sound recorded, and are conducted in the presence of a correctional officer so as to ensure good order and prevent any illicit and indiscipline acts during visits.
4. The institutional management will immediately suspend a visit if any visitors have committed misconduct or are suspected to have said something unlawful or committed unlawful acts. Such incidents may be reported to the Police if necessary. The institutional management may also ban the visitor in question from entering all correctional institutions for visits for 7 days or 14 days having regard to the circumstances of each case.
5. If a PIC is found to have abnormal behaviours, the institutional management will refer the PIC to staff of the Psychological Services Section or Clinical Psychologists for follow-up according to the established mechanism. If a PIC has committed any acts of indiscipline, the institutional management will take disciplinary actions according to the law and impose appropriate punishment. However, a visit ban is not one of the punishments that could be imposed on PICs under the Prison Rules.
6. As the visit arrangement for PICs is part of the daily management work of CSD, it does not maintain a breakdown of the relevant expenditure. Since the number of visits a PIC is allowed to receive and the time allowed for each visit are stipulated under the Prison Rules, CSD shall make appropriate arrangements in accordance with the statutory requirements.

- End -