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Vigilance at Checkpoints and Enforcement Actions to Continue Despite Improved Immigration Offender Situation

Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) is pleased to announce that the immigration offender situation has improved in 2003 when compared to 2002. The number of immigration offenders arrested last year fell by about 13 per cent to 11,850. However, there would be no let-up in the fight against the illegal immigration problem here. On 22 Feb 2004, Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officers mounted an island-wide operation against immigration offenders. They arrested 57 immigration offenders at eight premises that ran the gamut from lodging houses to HDB flats to landed properties.

2 The 57 immigration offenders (6 females and 51 males) nabbed were from the People's Republic of China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and aged between 30 and 50. 41 were suspected to have entered Singapore illegally while 16 of them had overstayed here. The majority of them (about 38) were arrested at two lodging houses in Geylang. They were woken up from their slumber in the crowded rooms and greeted by the sight of our officers at the doorway.

3 ICA takes a serious view of attempts by foreigners to overstay or enter Singapore illegally. Under the Immigration Act (Cap 133), the penalties for overstaying or illegal entry are a jail term of up to six months plus a minimum of three strokes of the cane.

Immigration Offender Situation 2003

4 ICA would also like to take this opportunity to share the immigration offender situation in 2003, which has improved compared to 2002.

Illegal Immigrants

5 A total of 5,510 illegal immigrants were arrested in 2003. This is a drop of 30 per cent compared to 7,860 illegal immigrants arrested in 2002. The majority of illegal immigrants arrested were from India, Myanmar and the People's Republic of China. Together, they accounted for 73 per cent of total illegal immigrants arrested. However, compared to 2002, the total number arrested from these three countries has fallen by 33 per cent.

6 Stepped-up enforcement actions and security checks at the various checkpoints have deterred the smuggling of illegal immigrants in and out of Singapore. This has, in turn led to the fall in the number of illegal immigrants arrested. Over the last 3 years, the number of vehicles seized for the commission of smuggling offences has also fallen from 43 in 2002 to 17 last year. Since the 9-11 incident, security checks at the various checkpoints have been stepped up. The mobile x-ray machine (also known as the MOBIX) has been deployed at the land checkpoints to provide x-ray screening of goods-carrying vehicles. In addition, the Police Coast Guard has made its presence felt by increasing its patrols around Singapore territorial waters.

Overstayers

7 The rigorous efforts against overstayers have resulted in an 11 per cent increase in the number of overstayers arrested. Of the total of 6,340 overstayers arrested, 73 per cent are from India, People's Republic of China

and Thailand. Most of the overstayers were here to seek illegal employment, mainly in the construction sector, food and beverage outlets, vice or entertainment industries.

Harbourers and Employers of immigration offenders

8 The efforts of the authorities to create greater awareness of the immigration offender problem and the penalties for employing and harbouring immigration offenders have, once again, paid off. In 2003, the number of persons arrested for harbouring and employing immigration offenders fell by 3 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. In fact, the number of harbourers and employers arrested has been falling since 2001. (See Annex.)

9 Although the number of immigration offenders arrested in 2003 has declined, ICA, Police and the other Home Team agencies will not let up on eliminating the presence of immigration offenders in Singapore. "The island-wide operation on 22 Feb 2004 and the arrest of 57 Immigration offenders is an example of our resolve to further reduce the population of immigration offenders in Singapore," said Mr Lock Wai Han, Commissioner, ICA.

10 ICA would also like to remind the public that it is an offence to offer shelter and employment to immigration offenders. Homeowners can make use of ICA's online checking system, called "VERIFI" (or Verification of Foreigner Immigration Status) to verify the immigration passes of their prospective tenants. VERIFI can be accessed through ICA's internet website: <http://www.ica.gov.sg> and allows users to receive an instantaneous reply on the validity of the immigration passes presented to them. Similarly, MOM has a system to allow the checking on the validity of work passes at its website: <http://www.mom.gov.sg>. Everyone has a part to play in keeping Singapore safe and secure. We would urge members of public with information regarding immigration offenders to call ICA at Tel: 1800-391 6150 or contact the Police.

11 As our country's first line of defence against terrorist threats, the checkpoints have a vital role to play in ensuring the security and safety of Singapore. ICA have and will remain vigilant when conducting security checks on all passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband. ICA also leverages on technology in its enforcement checks. Besides MOBIX, we make use of Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS) and fibre scopes to sieve out contraband and illegal immigrants hidden in vehicles.

END OF NEWS RELEASE

Immigration & Checkpoints Authority
23 Feb 04

Annex

Number of Immigration Offenders Arrested from 2001 to 2003

Year	Illegal immigrants	Overstayers	Total number of Immigration offenders
2001	10,400	5,600	16,000
2002	7,860	5,690	13,550
2003	5,510	6,340	11,850

Number of Harbourers and Employers Arrested from 2001 to 2003

Year	Harbourers	Employers	Total
2001	380	480	860
2002	340	410	750
2003	330	270	600

Number of Vehicles Seized from 2001 to 2003

Year	Number of Vehicles Seized
2001	56
2002	43
2003	17

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