

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Question 1: Is there an overall lack of security consciousness in the Home Team? Is our security weakened?

Answer:

Internal surveys and Red Teaming exercises show that by and large, the Home Team officers have a high security consciousness. They are keenly aware of the responsibility that they bear in ensuring the safety and security of Singapore. Their level of vigilance on the job is generally high but we have to be careful that increasing work-load and stress levels do not impair their effectiveness over time. A human factor study is being pursued by MHA to investigate this.

2. Our statistics for instance on the detection of breaches and the handling of persons in custody also indicate that the track record of the Home Team officers responsible for managing these functions remains good. For instance, the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority detected 37,800 cases of smuggling at the borders. That is equivalent to about 104 smuggling cases detected every day, in addition to clearing over 390,000 travellers daily through our land, sea and air checkpoints.

3. A high level of security consciousness is not enough. We need to also ensure that the front-line officer has the right competencies and know what to do in any operational situation or contingency which he may face in the course of his work. The challenge is that the threat and its forms are constantly evolving and we need to not only establish these early enough through intelligence and research, we also need to devise operational methods to counter them.

4. Red Teaming exercises help to establish such knowledge or competency deficits or gaps which an officer on the ground may face. Hands-on scenario based training at the Home Team Academy have been developed and the Academy has built and will continue to invest in building such facilities. Such training helps to equip our front-liners with the right competencies and reflexes.

5. Even with the best of efforts, we know that our security and safety cannot be taken for granted. This is why we view infractions by Home Team officers very seriously, and learn from each and every incident. This is also why we have been constantly working to prepare for the day when a terrorist incident does occur.

6. Our approach to security cannot be one-dimensional – we must work to prevent a terrorist incident and at the same time, work also to always prepare to deal with the consequences of an incident. Hence, the Home Team, especially SCDF, commit significant resources in developing capabilities to deal with all types of catastrophic incidents. Hence, PM also launched the Community

Engagement Programme to develop social resilience and preparedness to deal with the impact especially on communal relations that a terrorist incident can provoke.

Question 2: Do the security lapses amount to systemic weakness or failure across the Home Team? Are Home Team officers complacent and allowing security lapses to occur?

Answer:

The attempted escape at the Subordinate Courts and the passport mis-clearance at the Budget Terminal are two lapses resulting from the poor judgement or lack of alertness of individual officers. They are not indications of any widespread systemic indiscipline or a culture of complacency among the Home Team officers.

2. These two lapses must be viewed in perspective against the overall workload and their contexts. There were two attempted escapees from the Subordinate Courts out of nearly 25,000 persons in custody brought to the Courts in the first six months of 2008. The custodial arrangements in the Subordinate Courts cannot be the same as the level we have in Changi Prison where there has been no escape for decades. There was one passport mis-clearance when nearly 390,000 travellers pass through our land, sea and air checkpoints daily. Historically, we know that such misclearance occurs from time to time even as 5 cases of persons using the wrong passports are detected every day at the checkpoints. While every lapse or failure must be addressed, these statistics do suggest that Home Team officers are generally vigilant and alert, and the custody system is generally sound.

3. Nevertheless, the Home Team views all security lapses seriously, and will in all cases review what went wrong and take corrective measures to minimise the risk of a recurrence. This is also why appropriate action will always be taken against all officers involved in a lapse, with the disciplinary action taken carefully calibrated against the seriousness of the lapse on their part.

4. The Home Team continues to do well in fighting crime, preventing security incidents, and keeping our borders safe and secure. However, incidents can and will occur from time to time. The Home Team adopts a risk based approach. As our resources are finite, we place more resources to minimise the risk of major security incidents with more serious or catastrophic consequences.

5. Operational fatigue and a resource crunch are factors which are being studied at the moment. The security threat has grown significantly since 9/11. So too has the Home Team's workload. For instance, the Home Team has to prevent crime and carry out investigations and enforcement actions within a much larger population, conduct immigration checks and passport clearance on a growing number of travellers into Singapore, and ensure safety and security for many more mega events held in Singapore each year. MHA is exploring

whether we can continue to maintain our existing efficiency and effectiveness with the current level of resources.

Question 3: How useful and effective are the operational audits in preventing future lapses? Why not increase security audits and enhance compliance protocols to ensure that all Home Team officers observe Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) strictly?

Answer:

In the Home Team, we conduct frequent exercises and use scenarios to simulate situations that our officers may not encounter on a daily basis. These are intended to raise the alertness and vigilance of our Home Team officers and to condition them to be able to respond flexibly to changes in the operating environment.

2. Regular operational audits are also useful to help us identify vulnerabilities and operational gaps in our system. It is human nature that if a person has been doing a job for a long time and has not encountered any potential security threat, say, a terrorist, he is not likely to expect a terrorist. Operational audits help to guard against this mindset.

3. However, we must be careful that our officers do not feel over-stretched and over-strained by constant operational audits. Compliance with SOPs is useful to the extent that they help officers to prevent errors within the parameters defined by the SOPs. But unlike a manufacturing process, our officers operate under highly variable and often challenging circumstances and conditions, and will inevitably encounter situations not fully covered by the SOPs. Hence, SOPs cannot be over-rigid and stifle our officers' ability to think on their feet, and exercise good judgement and initiative.

4. Apart from audits, the Home Team is also exploring how we can leverage on the pool of non-security stakeholders at the airport to help spot suspicious behaviour and signs. This is similar to the behaviour detection approach that the US Department of Homeland Security has been employing at US airports. Tapping on the networks of the wider community in an environment is not new to us. Indeed, this is what we have been encouraging all along when we urge the public and the community to stay vigilant and work hand-in-hand with the Home Team to keep our environment safe and secure.

Question 4: Is ICA responsible for checking that travellers use correct travel documents? In the latest airport incident, is ICA responsible for cross-checking the boarding pass and passport?

Answer:

When Mr Ang failed to clear the automated clearance channel, the ICA officer in question correctly proceeded to vet and clear him manually. He focused on behavioural profiling and whether the passport belonged to a wanted criminal or terrorist. He wrongly assumed that the automated clearance system merely could not read the biometric data in the passport and that it was a technical glitch. He cleared Mr Ang as he was satisfied that he was neither a security risk nor a crime risk.

2. The ICA officer should have checked the boarding pass and passport. He failed to do so. Regardless of whether there are other persons who should have checked the passport against the boarding pass, there is no avoiding the fact that the ICA officer should have done it.

3. There are requirements for checks to be done by various officers at various stages of the process from check-in to boarding the plane. The ticketing officer at Changi Airport's Budget Terminal should have verified the identity of Mr Ang with his passport as part of the procedures to issue a boarding pass which obviously has to be to the right person as represented in the document. Likewise, the Swissport staff at the boarding gate should do the same before allowing Mr Ang to board the flight.

4. MHA is undertaking a holistic review of the clearance procedures and arrangements at the airport. At the same time, SPF and ICA have conducted security briefings to the airport community on the required security process. They have also stepped up Red Teaming exercises to ensure adequate vigilance and alertness on the part of all involved.

5. In the past, the Auxillary Police Officer at the gate conducted a check of passport against boarding pass before allowing the traveller to enter the Immigration Clearance Zone. However in 2003, arising from concerns and complaints that this led to a congestion at the area, this requirement was changed and the officer merely check to ensure that the person has a valid boarding pass to allow him to enter. This protocol is now currently being reviewed.

6. The volume of travellers at Changi Airport has increased sharply by 32% from 2004 to 2007. Our security personnel must strike a balance to meet the ever increasing demand for efficiency in the level of service and clearance time without compromising the level of security checks that we are expected to uphold. The right and optimum balance is a negotiated judgement which needs

to be arrived at by the various stakeholders representing different legitimate interests, one of which is security.

Question 5: What is the status of MHA's review on Home Team Departments' security systems and processes that was directed by the Minister for Home Affairs?

Answer:

MHA is currently undertaking a stock-take of critical operational areas. This is to determine that there are SOPs covering these areas, that these SOPs are sound, and that the Home Team officers are properly trained and undertake their duties in these areas in line with the SOPs. The stock take is also intended to determine if there are any potential vulnerabilities or gaps and if so, to ensure that all necessary additional measures are taken within a reasonable timeframe to close these gaps and minimise the risks of major security lapses.

2. Once this stock take is completed, operational audits will continue on a regular basis. The aim is to ensure that all related systems, processes and procedures remain relevant and minimise the risks of future security lapses.

Question 6: Are there any indicators that show how well our Home Team has fared when compared to security agencies in other countries?

Answer:

On the scorecard for crime rate, Singapore compares favourably with other countries. In 2007, Singapore's crime rate (per 100,000 population) is 1.7 times lower than Hong Kong, and about 3.5 times lower than that of New York. This was achieved with a comparatively smaller number of police officers. Singapore's police officers ratio (per 100,000 population) is 1.6 times lower than Hong Kong and 1.8 times lower than that of New York (see also Annex A for figures on police officers ratio).

2. In terms of non-crime indicators such as fire fatality, Singapore also compares favourably. Singapore's fire fatality rate (per 100,000 population) is lower than that of major cities like Tokyo, New York, London and Hong Kong in 2007. Yet, we have a much smaller fire personnel (per 100,000 population) than many of these cities.

ANNEX A

NUMBER OF POLICE OFFICERS PER 100,000 POPULATION

City	Number of police officers per 100,000 population	Year & Source of Data
Singapore Police Force	239	Source for Police Figures – SPF (2007) Source for Population Figures (2007) http://www.singstat.gov.sg This figure includes uniformed / sworn Police Officers and SPF Full-time NSmen. It excludes civilian staff and Operationally Ready NSmen (i.e. reservists).
Hong Kong Police	393	Source for Police Figures (2007) http://www.police.gov.hk/hkp-home/english/history/history_01.htm Source for Population Figures (2007) http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistics_by_subject/index_t.jsp
New York Police Department	430	Source for Police Figures - New York Police Department (2007) Source for Population Figures (2006) http://home2.nyc.gov.html/dcp/html/census/popdiv.shtml