

MACAO IS SAFER THAN HONGKONG

Since Mr Edmundo Ho Hau Wah was installed as the Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), suggestions have abounded, with some justification, no doubt, that law and order had partially broken down in the former Portuguese, 6.70 square-mile enclave, just 40 miles southwest of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the PRC.

In fact, statistics point to the opposite situation: Law and order is far from breaking down.

If anything, it is as safe, if not safer, to live in the MSAR than it is to live in the HKSAR, in terms of an individual's personal safety.

According to The Statistics and Census Service of the Government of the MSAR, serious crimes – murder, kidnapping, etc – have fallen from the 1999 grand total of 9,262 incidents to 8,925 incidents in the 2000 year, ended December 31.

Mr Ho Hau Wah was installed as the Chief Executive on December 20, 1999 so that it could be said, in regard to serious crimes, that his Administration is doing a fairly decent job.

This point is drummed home with a certain amount of celerity when one sees that, under the successive Portuguese Governmental Administrations, which held onto the reins of power from 1557 to 1999, a period of about 442 years, in all, serious crimes were, very much, on the increase, especially between 1997 and until the last Portuguese Governor left on December 20, 1999.

In 1997, a total of 8,162 incidents of serious crime were documented.

In 1998, a total of 8,487 incidents of serious crime were documented.

Therefore, there had been an increase of about 3.98 percent in the number of this category of crime, being reported, year-on-year.

In 1999, a total of 9,262 incidents of serious crime were documented.

Therefore, there had been an increase of about 9.13 percent in the number of this category of crime, being reported, year-on-year.

Construction Stalls

The population of Macao has remained fairly static over the past 3 years, at about 437,600 residents, 90 percent or more, being ethnic Chinese, the latest statistic, as reported by the MSAR Government for the fourth quarter of 2000.

With such a relatively small, permanent population, the building boom, leading up to the assumption of sovereignty by the PRC Government, left a great number of brand new structures, half empty, or even less than one quarter occupied, in many cases.

In 1997, there were a total of 15 commercial edifices constructed.

In 1998, the number of new commercial structures, completed, fell to 8 buildings.

In 1999, the number of new commercial structures, completed, fell to 7 buildings.

For the 2000 year, the number of new commercial and office structures, completed, dropped to just 5 buildings.

During Mr Edmundo Ho Hau Wah's first, full year as Chief Executive of the MSAR, there have been no industrial buildings constructed in the MSAR.

In the residential sector, during the 2000 year, a total of 3,146 new flats were completed.

This statistic compared unfavourably with the number of new flats, constructed in the private sector in the 1999 year – 5,289 units – which was, of itself, a 35-percent drop on the 1998 figure of 8,321 new flats, having been constructed.

This is not to suggest that things have come to a complete standstill in the little enclave, now part of the PRC, where the Portuguese language is widely spoken, as one of the 2 official languages, and where the Chinese-controlled Government continues to use the Portuguese language in nearly all of its correspondence, within the 6.70 square miles.

In the 2000 year, applications were approved for the construction of 34 new buildings with a gross floor area of about 202,776 square metres.

In the 1999 year, applications were processed and approved for the construction of 55 new buildings, with a gross floor area of about 417,225 square metres.

The MSAR Government admits, openly, that all the statistics, relating to the 2000 year, still have to be compiled and analysed, fully, but it seems clear that the economy of the enclave is far from being, what one could consider, vibrant.

The Gross Domestic Product (the total value of goods and services, produced in a country over a period of time) has fallen since 1995, as the following table illustrates:

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
	All Figures are Denominated in Millions of Macao Patacas				
Gross Domestic Products (GDP)	55,526.30	55,293.50	55,139.10	52,579.90	51,074.50
Percent Rate, Year-on-Year	3.30 %	-0.40 %	-0.30 %	-4.60 %	-2.90 %

However, private consumption has remained fairly stable, during the past 5 years, from 1995 to 1999, between the 1995 figure of about 19,423,000 patacas and the 1999 figure of about 20,643,100 patacas (the pataca is fully exchangeable with the Hongkong dollar on a one-to-one basis).

Macao, in many respects, is far behind the HKSAR with regard to its civil service, which still appears to adopt the lain-back attitude, reminiscent of the time that the Portuguese residents were used to taking afternoon naps – and woe betide he who would awaken a Portuguese Government official from his afternoon siesta!

Passing through the handful of immigration queues, on landing in Macao, whether or not one is an ethnic Chinese or a foreigner of any nationality, with or without The Right of Abode in the HKSAR, can take anywhere from 15 minutes to 30 minutes -- while the entire sea journey from the HKSAR to the MSAR takes all of one hour.

In contrast, passing through the slick, well-proportioned HKSAR Immigration Department's arrival hall takes almost no time at all: It is just a case of producing an Identification Card, proving that one has The Right of Abode, or producing a valid travel document.

Once in the former Portuguese enclave, however, one can wander through the older parts of the little town and 'smell' the flavour of those nearly 4-and-a-half centuries of political rule by the once, European power of Portugal.

Governmental Shortsightedness?

On the negative side of the ledger, however, the Government of Mr Edmundo Ho Hau Wah appears to be terribly short-sighted in that the territory still sees itself as having just one, major industry: Gambling.

Tourism, one would have thought, logically, could have been promoted much more vigorously, and in myriad ways.

But there is little evidence of any determined inclination on the part of the MSAR Government to promote the many attributes of the territory, to any great degree.

That excludes, of course, other than luring gamblers to the territory to lose money on the many gaming tables. This is odd, to say the least, since the territory is full of history, such as the little known fact that a relative of the late Prime Minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill, is buried in Macao.

Also, it was a favourite haunt of the world famous artist, Charles Chinnery.

Yet the many charming, little squares in the centre of the town, and in little alcoves, up the back streets, are a delight to the eyes, with their 18th Century appearances, surrounded as they are by little shops and restaurants, some of which restaurants, spilling out into little courtyards.

Many of the little squares are covered in mosaic tiles, hand lain, giving credence to Portugal's colonialist history, and acting as a reminder that this was, after all, the last permanent European outpost in Asia.

For Macao to lose its history would be to akin to depriving the world of poetry.

There is no helicopter service between the little Macao Airport and the highly sophisticated airport of the HKSAR; and, when TARGET asked the reason that a service had not been laid on, the answer was that there was no requirement for it.

At the same time, there is a helicopter shuttle service between the HKSAR's Central Business District and the MSAR for those gamblers, who would like to speed up travel time to just 15 minutes.

Of course, if there is no helicopter service between the tiny MSAR Airport and the ultra-modern, HKSAR Airport, at Cheklapkok, on the Island of Lantau, there could hardly be a requirement to have one.

So travelers to the HKSAR, all 2 million of them, monthly, could hardly be expected to consider Macao as a stop-over point on the southern tip of China because it is not particularly convenient to travel from Cheklapkok to the HKSAR Central Business District, and then spend another 3 hours, or more, in order to cross over to Macao.

TARGET attempted to obtain a comment from the Chief Executive of the MSAR with regard to the future of the territory, but was told that such a thing '*is never done*'.

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