

Singapore company helping China beat crime

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THE booming economy of China is causing record levels of crime, but one Singapore company is working with the Chinese government to help lower it.

Seatro International, a firm which specialises in organising conferences on security and safety, held an exhibition and conference in Shanghai in January.

Called Securex China '94, the show was the first by the firm in China. It was supported by the Public Security Bureau of Shanghai Municipality, a branch of the government.

With 60 participating firms from 12 countries, the exhibition featured alarm systems, riot equipment, computer security and armoured vehicles.

Seatro's managing director, Major (NS) P. Kalastree, has also been holding talks with officials from the bureau on ways for private security firms to help fight crime.

"Factories and foreign investment projects are coming up everywhere and they asked me about high-tech ways of protecting them," he said.

Despite the low cost of labour, the government prefers high-tech equipment because human guards "can be tempted by wealth," he said.

"On the other hand, electronic alarms and television monitors are always honest," he added.

Serious crimes like murder and drug trafficking in China rose by 23.4 per cent last year.

But white collar crime, unheard of five years ago, is also a growing source of concern. The number of fraud, embezzlement and smuggling cases in China

jumped by 93 per cent last year, with almost 30,000 such offences being uncovered.

Major Kalastree said he had brought several private security companies in touch with the Chinese authorities. "The Chinese want to stop copyright piracy by tracing an item back to the factory. They are also interested in smart-card access for factory zones like what Batam has."

Since the Tiananmen incident in 1989, Chinese officials have also sought more effective ways of quelling civil unrest, he said. They have realised that you can't use tanks against rioters. They want body armour, tear gas and water cannon.

Such methods of breaking up riots cause fewer casualties compared with the army's normally lethal methods, he said.

So far, he has helped a Taiwanese and a Yugoslav company enter into joint-venture agreements with the Chinese to manufacture riot gear for domestic use and for export.

Encouraged by the success of the last show, Seatro plans to hold another conference in Shanghai this November.

Major Kalastree, 47, a former army officer with 10 years' service, started the Mainguard private investigation and security company in 1971 before launching Seatro in 1983.

Seatro has done over 90 per cent of its business outside Singapore since it was set up. Its past shows and conferences have been held mostly in South-east Asian capitals like Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

The firm also ventured into India for the first time last November, with an exhibition in Bangalore, capital of Karnataka state and the site of India's "Silicon Valley".

The next Indian exhibition will be held in New Delhi this December.

Major Kalastree said he found that Indian officials were interested in learning how to deal with riots and other forms of communal violence.

For a country with an abundance of computer know-how, there was also little knowledge on data security, an area which the Indian government was concerned about, he said.

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Major NS P. Kalastree