

LCQ4: Situation of Lantau after the rainstorm last month and assistance provided by the Government

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Yiu-chung and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (July 2):

Question:

The rainstorm on the seventh of last month caused serious destruction to a vast area on Lantau, especially the area around Tai O, and brought about disastrous consequences to the road traffic, fresh water supply as well as the dwellings of the residents. Many residents criticised that the Government's contingency and relief measures were extremely inadequate. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of what time on that day and through what channels the Government learnt of the extent of the damage caused to various facilities on Lantau and the situation of the affected residents; and the specific contingency measures immediately taken by the Government to support the affected residents when it learnt of the situation of the disaster; and

(b) whether it has assessed if the contingency and relief measures taken by the authorities on the day of the rainstorm were adequate and effective; of the experience learnt and improvements to be made by them?

Reply:

Madam President,

On June 7, Hong Kong experienced the highest rainfall within an hour since we have started maintaining such record. We received 130 landslip and 622 flooding reports that day. Landslide Potential Index, which keeps track on slope safety, has also recorded the highest score since its introduction. The situation in Tai O where suspension of telecommunications network, land transport, and water supply occurred at the same time was rare. Regarding the Hon Leung Yiu-Chung's questions, I would like to reply as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Observatory issued landslip warning and black rainstorm

warning in the morning of June 7. The Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC) of the Government Secretariat and the emergency coordination centres or control centres of various emergency service departments activated the emergency response system in accordance with the established “Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters” to collect information from the concerned departments and to assume overall monitoring of the situation and the provision of the required emergency services. Serious flooding causing the closure of North Lantau Highway, and landslips, road closure and disruption to telecommunications and water supply in Tai O came to the notice of the Government on the morning of June 7.

The departments concerned carried out emergency relief works under the emergency monitoring and coordination mechanism on the day in many parts of Hong Kong. In Tai O, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) assigned a vessel to provide water to the residents in the afternoon of the same day. The Police deployed additional officers to the Tai O Pier and Lung Tin Police Post by sea to provide Tai O residents with emergency support. Through the officers on site and the use of police communication equipment, the Government maintained close contact with the Tai O Rural Committee and the residents to ascertain their condition and needs and provide them with relief information. Moreover, the Transport Department implemented temporary transportation measures starting from that day, and provided extra ferry services between Tai O and Tung Chung. The Office of the Telecommunications Authority also asked the telecommunication companies concerned to carry out emergency repair works on the damaged communication facilities.

Having regard to the difficulty faced by Tai O residents in the aftermath of the rare heavy rainstorm, the Government adopted a multi-pronged approach to assist the residents in restoring their normal lives, in addition to the above emergency measures. Firstly, the Islands District Office (IsDO) coordinated with the Government Flying Service and the Marine Police to send daily necessities to residents in remote villages by air and sea. After assessing the situation in Tai O and the needs of its residents, the Government enlisted the service of the Civil Aid Service (CAS) to reinforce the relief work of disciplined forces. The CAS sent officers to Tai O and the neighbouring villages to assist in removing the debris from the residents’ houses, clearing blocked paths and village walkways and distributing relief supplies. IsDO also made arrangement to help residents of remote villages to tap hill water for use. In addition, the Civil Engineering and Development Department completed the inspection of all slopes affected by landslips in Tai O on June 11; IsDO and the concerned departments assisted residents of Tai O affected by potentially

unstable slopes and other people in need in moving to temporary accommodations provided by the Government on June 13.

With the concerned government departments' efforts, public services in Tai O have been returning to normal: telecommunications service was gradually restored by noon of June 8 and fully restored by the evening of June 9; WSD completed the resumption of water supply in Tai O on June 10; Highways Department reopened Tai O Road on June 14 and bus service between Tai O and Ngong Ping resumed limited service in the afternoon of June 15. On June 20, emergency repair works on Keung Shan Road was completed and Tai O's land transport was fully restored.

(2) The emergency coordination or control centres of various government departments as well as EMSC of the Government Secretariat activated the emergency response mechanism in accordance with the "Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters" in the morning of June 7, and the relevant departments provided emergency services in accordance with the existing mechanism. Nevertheless, the Government is aware that the provision of prompt and effective emergency services is vital for residents to restore their normal lives. The Government will learn from the incident and conduct a review on the ways to further improve its emergency response system. For example, apart from enhancing coordination work, information collection and impact assessment, consideration will be given to improving communication among departments. In doing so, the Government will be able to grasp more accurately the situation of individual districts and improve the emergency response and relief systems, so as to ensure that prompt and effective assistance will be provided to the affected residents.

Ends/Wednesday, July 2, 2008