

LCQ2: Use of emergency ambulance service

Following is a question by the Professor Hon Joseph Lee and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

A large group of demonstrators surrounded the Police Headquarters (PHQ) for the whole day of June 21 this year, barring entry and exit of vehicles and persons. At night of that day, some persons inside PHQ reported feeling unwell and called emergency ambulance service. The Police subsequently accused that the demonstrators' blocking the roads had delayed the rescue work. However, it has been reported that the Police refused to clear the way for the ambulances which had arrived in the vicinity of PHQ, and only after a protracted period of time did they open the eastern entrance gate of PHQ for entry of the ambulancemen. Furthermore, some of the persons who had been conveyed to the accident and emergency (A&E) department by ambulance left without receiving diagnoses and treatments. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the reasons why the Police refused to clear the way for the ambulances;

(2) of the respective durations between the ambulances' arrival in the vicinity of PHQ and their departure upon picking up the various persons who reported feeling unwell; and

(3) whether it has assessed, among the aforesaid persons who were conveyed to the A&E department by ambulance, the number of those who had a genuine need for receiving emergency diagnoses and treatments, and if emergency ambulance service had been abused?

Reply:

President,

At about 10.50am on June 21, there were demonstrators blocking the vicinity of Harcourt Road, Arsenal Street and Gloucester Road and further besieging the Police Headquarters (PHQ) in Wan Chai. Their acts seriously affected the work of the Police, including the provision of emergency services to the public.

At around noon that day, the Police informed its civilian staff that they might opt to leave PHQ early. Up to 3.30pm or so, except for an entrance for the physically challenged at the east of PHQ was remained unblocked, all other vehicular and pedestrian accesses had been blocked with numerous objects by the demonstrators and were inaccessible. When the said entrance

for the physically challenged was also blocked at around 4.45pm, all staff members still in PHQ then were unable to leave. The Police tried repeatedly to ask the demonstrators to give way for PHQ staff to leave but failed. When besieging PHQ, the demonstrators blocked the entrance gates with mills barriers and sundries, threw eggs at PHQ, drew graffiti on the façade, and covered the closed-circuit television cameras on the outer wall with adhesive tapes. They also splashed paint on police officers and pointed laser beams at police officers' eyes.

As some staff members being trapped in PHQ, including a pregnant woman, chronic patients, severely ill patients and certain older staff, indicated that they were feeling unwell and required emergency ambulance service, the Police called for the emergency ambulance service at about 9.30pm.

The Fire Services Department (FSD) sent altogether five ambulances, a multi-purpose vehicle and a rapid response vehicle to PHQ in response to the call that night. With obstacles on Gloucester Road and crowds in the streets nearby, the ambulances could not approach the west gate of PHQ at Gloucester Road and had to be parked at the junction of Jaffe Road and Fenwick Street. Meanwhile, the on-scene ambulance personnel tried to drive the ambulances slowly through the crowds of demonstrators but in vain. The ambulance personnel also considered moving the road blocks aside but found it impractical in light of the amount of obstacles and circumstances at the scene. FSD had also discussed with the Police on the feasibility of transferring the emergency patients to hospitals for treatment from the rooftop of PHQ by helicopter. Having studied the situation, they considered it not suitable for a helicopter to land there for transferring patients given the constraints in technical aspects and operational arrangements.

The first batch of ambulance personnel, together with ambulances, arrived at Fenwick Street at around 10.30pm. However, the ambulances could not enter PHQ as the road was blocked by demonstrators. At around 11.11pm, the ambulance personnel walked to the west gate of PHQ from the junction of Fenwick Street and Jaffe Road, bringing along with them stretchers and rescue equipment. As there were a large number of obstacles on the road outside the west gate, the ambulance personnel had to walk through the crowd in order to get to the east entrance of PHQ instead. They reached the staircase of the east entrance at about 11.27pm. As the electric gate of the east entrance of PHQ had ceased to operate due to the protest, time was needed for the key to be fetched to open the gate so that the ambulance personnel could enter PHQ and reach the patients inside. Subsequently, the first batch of ambulance personnel reached the patients inside PHQ at around 11.51pm and sent them to hospitals by batches.

On the night of June 21, there were 13 staff members who felt unwell inside PHQ. Together with two persons accompanying them, all the 15 persons were brought to Queen Mary Hospital and Ruttonjee Hospital by ambulances respectively.

Citizens have the right to peaceful expression of views but they have to abide by law. Blockage of the entrance of PHQ and malicious obstruction of the free access and exit of police staff, which delayed the treatment to be

received by staff in need inside PHQ, had gone far beyond the bottom line of peaceful expression of views. On the night of June 21, the Police kept liaising with the ambulance personnel via the Fire Services Communication Centre such that the staff members feeling unwell could receive emergency ambulance service as early as possible. This is the responsibility of the Police in taking care of their staff, and also the purpose of the emergency ambulance service.

Different views of the public on the current situation cannot be solved by illicit behaviour or violent acts. The escalating violence in these four months or so, as well as incidents of setting fire and vandalism, has caused shock, anxiety and pain among all Hong Kong people. Our top priority now is to stop the violence, safeguard the rule of law, restore order and public peace. At the same time, all sectors of the society should engage in dialogues instead of confrontations, so that our society could move forward again.

Thank you, President.