

LCQ5: Recovery work of super typhoon Mangkhut

Following is a question by Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

Last month, super typhoon Mangkhut caused serious damage to Hong Kong. However, the majority of members of the public had to go to work at a time when the storm had not completely subsided and the transport services had not resumed normal, resulting in chaos. Regarding the follow-up work after the onslaught of the typhoon, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as some members of the public have relayed that the factors contributing to the damage of many vessels in Sai Kung during the onslaught of the typhoon include: insufficient berthing spaces at typhoon shelters, typhoon shelters being remotely located making vessel owners unwilling to berth their vessels there, inadequacies of the breakwaters and wind protection facilities, and the disorderly berthing of vessels, of the Government's measures to solve these problems;

(2) whether it will improve the resilience of the areas near Tseung Kwan O seafront against typhoons, such as by reinforcing the seawalls, constructing breakwaters, replacing the pavement slabs and seats of the waterfront promenade with more sturdy ones, and installing additional flood prevention facilities for the housing estates concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will set up a mechanism whereby the Government may declare a certain period after a natural disaster to be "a period of special circumstances", within which the work arrangements for employees should be in line with those during the time when the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is in force; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Mangkhut was the most powerful super typhoon affecting Hong Kong over the past few decades. It reached a peak sustained wind speed of 250 kilometres per hour. While Mangkhut hit Hong Kong, it brought severe storm surge to the territory, which led to inundation in low-lying areas and caused widespread damage to Hong Kong. Over 54 000 reports of fallen trees and 500 reports of broken windows were received by government departments. The recovery work of Mangkhut requires more time and resources than did previous typhoons, and needs prioritisation.

ã€€ã€€In fact, every government department has been sparing no effort in the recovery work of Mangkhut. Given the unprecedented destruction and widespread damages, however, some recovery work is still on-going and the relevant government departments will continue to follow up vigorously.

ã€€ã€€I have consulted the relevant bureaux and departments and my consolidated reply to the questions raised by Dr Hon Quat's question is as follows:

(1) As in mid October, the Marine Department (MD) received altogether 220 reports of accidents in relation to Mangkhut in Sai Kung District, and handled 125 stranded, listed or capsized vessels. Over the past weekend, MD obtained consent from the shipyard owners to start clearing the sunken vessels off the shipyards in Pak Sha Wan. Should the owners of those sunken vessels agree to apply for parting with the ownership of the vessels, MD will arrange clearance of the wreckages as soon as possible.

ã€€ã€€As for constructing additional breakwaters and typhoon shelters to increase the sheltered space, MD's observation is that only 3 among the 14 gazetted typhoon shelters, namely the Rambler Channel, To Kwa Wan and Tuen Mun Typhoon Shelters, reached a 100 per cent occupancy rate during the passage of super typhoon Mangkhut. The remaining 11 typhoon shelters, including the Yim Tin Tsai Typhoon Shelter in Sai Kung, still had sheltered space available, indicating that sufficient sheltered space can be found in Sai Kung district and within the waters of Hong Kong for local vessels to use during typhoon. Regarding the provision of more private mooring buoys, representatives of MD attended a Sai Kung District Council meeting in March this year to brief the councillors on the proposal of designating a new private mooring area in Yim Tin Tsai and expanding the private mooring area in Tso Wo Hang. With the general support from the councillors, MD is now devising a detailed plan in consultation with the local stakeholders.

(2) Based on the experience gained from Mangkhut, the Government will examine the applicability of different flood prevention strategy, together with assessment of the practical effectiveness, technical feasibility, land constraints and cost-effectiveness, etc. of various measures.

In Tseung Kwan O Waterfront Park, strong wind and backflow of seawater caused damage to the facilities. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department, together with the Architectural Services Department and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, carried out on-site assessment and restoration, including connection to temporary power sources for night-time lighting and repaving part of the pedestrian ways. In order to complete the repairs concerned as soon as possible, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department will actively discuss with various government departments on ways to improve the facilities in Tseung Kwan O Waterfront Park, including looking into a change in paving material and park benches, as well as exploring the feasibility of relocating power cubicles with the Architectural Services Department. Relevant departments are now reviewing the overall layouts of the Park to formulate improvement measures with a view to mitigating potential damage to the park facilities under typhoon in future. After the completion of the design plan, departments will consult with the relevant stakeholders

as soon as possible.

The Civil Engineering and Development Department will thoroughly examine the situation of coastal and low-lying areas or exposed places, and conduct studies on storm surge, and wind and wave to evaluate the effects of inclement weather on those locations arising from climatic changes. Based on the findings of studies, it will formulate measures, including improvement works and management measures, to cope with and withstand such weather.

To alleviate the flooding problem in the housing estates along Tseung Kwan O seafront, the Drainage Services Department can render technical support in respect of the affected building facilities like car parks. For example, additional floodgates may be installed at the entrance to stop seawater from flooding into the building which may result in damage to the facilities, and special devices may be added to the drainage system and manhole covers.

(3) The Government attaches great importance to the safety of employees at work, as well as on their journey to and from work, whether during the effective period or upon the cancellation of typhoon or rainstorm warnings. On the other hand, the Government also understands the importance of early resumption of social services and economic activities as soon as possible after typhoons or rainstorms. Taking into account the general interests of employers, employees and the community, the Labour Department has formulated the "Code of Practice in Times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" (the Code) which provides advice and practical guidelines on work arrangements in times of typhoons and rainstorms; resumption of work arrangements after cancellation of typhoon and rainstorm warnings; as well as wage computations and leave arrangements. The Code also advises the employers to take prime consideration of employees' safety in the workplace and during the journey to and from work. Employers are also advised to be flexible in handling cases of employees facing genuine difficulties.

Given the diversity in nature and requirements of different jobs in various trades and industries, it is crucial to maintain different degrees of operation under inclement weather conditions for some essential services, such as public transport, public utilities, medical services, homes for the elderly or persons with disabilities, hotels and security. Moreover, the circumstances of employees commuting from home to workplace in different districts are as varied as the impact of inclement weather on public transport and road systems there. The preliminary view of the Labour and Welfare Bureau is that it is not practical to introduce a piece of legislation to govern the work arrangements of employees under specific circumstances, otherwise the operational needs of different industries and the community as a whole will be overlooked, and the flexibility in the work arrangements between the employers and employees will be affected.

The Security Bureau is co-ordinating a review on the emergency response and recovery in respect of handling super typhoons. We are also aware of the comments from different Members on post-typhoon work arrangement. We will take account of the Mangkhut experience and examine ways to enhance the plans and systems for response and recovery.

Thank you President.