

Upper echelon of Government's steering of bulwark against Typhoon Saola shows coping and aftermath handling capabilities

A Government spokesman said today (September 4) that with the concerted efforts of the Government and all sectors of the community, the impact and destruction brought by Super Typhoon Saola were kept to the minimum. The community has largely returned to normal functioning. The arrangements of the first school day were generally smooth. The Government will continue to strive to complete the residual relief work to ensure the safety of citizens.

The Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, said, "In order to guard against the serious damage and destruction that Super Typhoon Saola might bring, prior to Saola hitting Hong Kong, I instructed all departments to make full preparations to deal with the worst possible situations, and appointed the Chief Secretary for Administration to lead, and the Secretary for Security to co-ordinate responses across government departments. I would like to thank the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Secretary for Security and various departments for their full commitment to their work, including strengthening preparations for early warning, dissemination of information, reduction of damage, reminding citizens to take precautions, and going all out to respond, rescue and handle the aftermath. Teamwork and synergy were given full play to minimise the damage caused by Saola's attack on Hong Kong.

"After Saola gradually moved away from Hong Kong, I approved for the first time the activation of the 'government-wide mobilisation' level. Led by the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB), a quick response unit comprising over 100 civil servants from different departments provided support and carried out relief work in several districts in the past two days.

"I would like to express my sincere gratitude to colleagues of different departments, government contractors, providers of public transportation and other services, volunteers of all districts and members of District Services and Community Care Teams (Care Teams), media workers and so on, whether they were in the front line, in the back office or on call, for performing their duties with dedication during the storm."

"Apart from the full strength of preparation and the response by staff members of different departments and organisations, the full co-operation of public members is equally important. I thank the public for supporting the Government's appeal to take early prevention measures to protect themselves," Mr Lee added.

Mr Lee extended his sympathy to injured citizens and rescuers affected by the powerful Saola and wished them a speedy recovery. A total of 86 people

including rescuers sustained injuries, mostly slight injuries, during the typhoon. Some residences, shops and buildings were damaged, with electricity supply affected in some places. As at yesterday (September 3), relevant government departments received about 3 700 reports of fallen trees, two of landslides, 21 of flooding, and about 40 that involved scaffoldings, signboards and windows, etc.

The Hong Kong Observatory had been monitoring the movement and intensity of Saola as it hit Hong Kong, and once issued Hurricane Signal No.10. The Government and all sectors of the society have been working together from the preparation to the aftermath stages in a rigorous manner. Early in the preparation stage, the Government set up a cross-departmental steering committee, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, together with the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre under the Security Bureau, to fully monitor and co-ordinate relevant government departments and organisations in the preparation, response and rescue works, including mobilising all the manpower and resources required to take decisive responses. Moreover, to alert the public to making early preparation, Mr Chan led representatives from relevant government departments in a joint press conference to brief the public on the latest situation of the typhoon, and announce in advance the timeframe of hoisting No. 8 Gale or Storm Signal and the suspension of all school classes in Hong Kong. They also explained the Government's preparation in response to the typhoon, including strengthened prevention measures at districts with high risk of flooding and strong wind, advance opening of temporary shelters in various districts and the assistance to citizens seeking temporary shelter in safe places.

On the transport front, the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre of the Transport Department maintained its operation throughout the typhoon to monitor the traffic conditions of major roads, tunnels and bridges in Hong Kong, and communicate with the relevant government departments and public transport operators in real time to cope with emergencies. After the typhoon weakened, in order to bring the city back to normal as soon as possible, the relevant government departments immediately inspected road conditions, cleared collapsed trees and debris blocking the roads, dealt with road blockages caused by flooding and landslides, and carried out urgent repairs to damaged road surfaces so as to ensure that important roads were free of obstruction. All bus routes in Hong Kong have resumed services today, including the Citybus routes which were affected by fallen trees or obstruction on roads in Southern District.

In addition, the Development Bureau activated the Emergency Command System during the storm to compile and prepare comprehensive information on the resources of a total of 43 public works contractors, so that individual works departments can flexibly mobilise and deploy resources in a very short period of time to deal with emergency works brought about by the storm, including the clearance of road obstacles and fallen trees.

After the wind subsided, departments under the Development Bureau including the Buildings Department (BD) and tree management departments have mounted large-scale inspections as soon as possible to identify and deal with

signboards, trees, scaffoldings, etc affected by the typhoon that carried potential risks, in a bid to ensure public safety. As of yesterday, the BD had identified 36 cases involving loose signboards, scaffoldings, windows or damaged structures that required follow-up actions due to potential safety hazards. The BD immediately made arrangements for government contractors to follow up or requested owners and their contractors to do so. The BD also contacted the contractors of 102 private construction sites. Of these, 12 sites had minor damages, and repair works have been completed or are being carried out by the contractors. At the same time, tree management departments had handled over 6 000 trees affected by the typhoon, including the removal of about 2 000 hazardous trees based on the principle of prioritising public safety, and the stabilisation and trimming of dangling broken branches for the remaining ones.

In terms of district support, the 18 District Offices had been rendering full assistance to help residents take precautions against the storm, liaising with government departments to deal with various accidents, arranging for residents of lowland areas to evacuate, and taking post-typhoon follow up actions. A total of 36 Care Teams from Tsuen Wan District and Southern District mobilised more than 300 members to assist in various tasks of the District Offices. These included helping residents take precautions against the storm, using their community network to support the elderly and socially disadvantaged persons in need during the typhoon, providing assistance at temporary shelters, inspecting the ground situation in the districts, referring emergency incidents to relevant government departments, and assisting in clearing up streets and visiting residents after the typhoon to help the community resume normalcy as soon as possible.

Moreover, the HYAB obtained the approval of the Chief Executive to activate the "government-wide mobilisation" level to enhance the post-typhoon relief work. A total of about 100 members from different departments arrived at Sha Tau Kok, Tung Chung, Lei Yue Mun and Tai O to provide various kinds of support. These included assisting elderly members who had stayed in temporary sheltering facility to return to their elderly homes, removing garbage, fallen branches and leaves on roads, helping residents remove sandbags, and cleaning pavements and temporary shelters.

Regarding the arrangements for school commencement, schools had immediately inspected their facilities following the passage of the typhoon. Having ensured that the conditions were safe, schools opened smoothly this morning. In addition, the Education Bureau, the Transport and Logistics Bureau and relevant schools sent staff to the control points to inspect the boundary crossing situation of cross-boundary students. The entry and transport arrangements this morning were generally smooth.

The Government spokesman said, "Although Hong Kong has largely resumed normal functioning through the concerted efforts of the Government and all sectors of society, Saola has impacted the city to varying extent. The Government will continue to press ahead with inspections and other post-typhoon relief works, and we appeal to the public for their understanding and co-operation."

The spokesman reminded the public that as trees and structures, especially signboards, may become unstable after the typhoon and heavy rain, members of the public should always remain vigilant when going outdoor, and avoid staying under trees or signboards for long periods of time. Land owners and property management staff should complete inspections of structures and trees under their management as soon as possible and carry out appropriate risk mitigation work to avoid accidents. For assistance or enquiry, members of the public can call the Police or the 1823 hotline.