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Follow-up support efforts for Tai Po fire continue

A Government spokesperson today (November 28) said that the fire-fighting and rescue operations at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po have been completed, and various bureaux and departments are focusing on stepping up follow-up support and recovery work. The Government yesterday (November 27) established a Task Force on Investigation and Regulation, a Task Force on Emergency Support and Fund-Raising, and a Task Force on Emergency Accommodation Arrangements, led respectively by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, and the Deputy Financial Secretary, to actively take forward the relevant work.

To expedite the handling of enquiries related to missing persons, the Police have activated the Major Incident Investigation and Disaster Support System (MIIDSS - supercomputer) to help identify the casualties. They will also deploy the Disaster Victim Identification Unit to systematically confirm the identities of the victims and provide evidence for subsequent investigations and follow-up work. An identification centre has also been set up to assist families in conducting preliminary identification of the deceased through photographs. Following initial identification, the Police will arrange formal identification procedures.

In accordance with the Coroners Ordinance (Cap. 504), the bodies of the victims in the fire will be transferred to the public mortuary. The Department of Health's Forensic Pathology Service is collecting evidence for the Police's Disaster Victim Identification Unit and fully assisting in the identification of the deceased. Considering that bereaved families may have difficulty providing identification documents and medical records of the deceased, forensic pathologists will exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis and provide appropriate support. They will also endeavour to assist bereaved families in applying for a waiver of post-mortem procedures according to their wishes.

To provide immediate relief for affected residents, the Government began offering an emergency cash subsidy of HK\$10,000 per affected household last night. Applications were processed for 78 households last night, with HK\$780,000 disbursed. As at 4pm today, the Tai Po District Office is processing applications from over 1 200 households, and the emergency cash subsidies will be disbursed over today and tomorrow. In addition, the Government will provide a token of solidarity of HK\$200,000 to the family members of each deceased victim, and starting next week, a living allowance of HK\$50,000 will be provided to each affected household.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will arrange dedicated staff to assist each family of the deceased in handling funeral arrangements, including body claims, cremation services, and applications for niche allocations. The FEHD will also maintain close co-ordination with social workers under the Social Welfare Department (SWD)'s "one social worker per household" initiative. The FEHD will provide extra cremation sessions and make available niches at public columbaria under the Department, enabling families to arrange cremations and post-funeral matters promptly at their preferred time and location. The Government will waive fees for cremation services and niches at public columbaria, bear funeral expenditures, and provide \$50,000 to the families of each deceased individual.

On replacements of identity documents, residents affected by the fire may visit the Immigration Headquarters during office hours without an appointment for replacements of Hong Kong identity cards or HKSAR travel documents, any Registration of Persons Office for replacements of identity cards, and any Immigration Branch Office for replacements of travel documents. Meanwhile, the Immigration Department has deployed officers to various temporary shelters to assist the affected residents of Wang Fuk Court with pre-registration and will arrange dedicated vehicles to take them to the Immigration Headquarters in Tseung Kwan O later to complete the procedures for replacements of personal documents, including Hong Kong identity cards and HKSAR travel documents (such as the HKSAR passport, the Document of Identity for Visa Purposes, and the Re-entry Permit) and the Hong Kong Birth Certificate. Relevant fees will be waived. A special service session will be arranged at the Immigration Headquarters in Tseung Kwan O outside office hours tomorrow (November 29, Saturday) to process relevant applications.

For the Hong Kong and Macao Residents Entry and Exit Permit (Home Return Permit), the Immigration Department has liaised with the China Travel Service (Holdings) Hong Kong Limited to provide a special service period to assist residents in need to apply for Home Return Permits and other travel documents issued by Mainland authorities at the adjacent China Travel Service Document Services HK Limited Tseung Kwan O Centre, after completing their relevant applications at the Immigration Headquarters.

In addition, the Government is striving to provide emergency accommodation support for residents affected by the fire. As of this morning, around 205 residents have been accommodated, through the co-ordination of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, in youth hostels/camps or hotel rooms. Another 601 residents have moved into transitional housing units provided by the Housing Bureau. Furthermore, nine shelters remain open, with around 720 residents staying overnight yesterday. An interdepartmental support station is set up at each shelter, and Care Teams across all 18 districts will take turns to be on duty to assist residents.

To accommodate the needs of residents admitted into Lok Sin Village and Good House, two transitional housing projects in Tai Po, the Transport Department (TD) has co-ordinated with KMB to enhance the service of route Nos. 72C, 73P, 74E, 75K, 75P and 275R travelling Ting Kok Road, as well as relevant operators to strengthen the service of the New Territories Green Minibus (GMB) route Nos. 20B, 20C, 20E, 20G, 20R and 20T. Starting from November 29, the GMB operator concerned will provide additional temporary service connecting Good House and MTR Tai Po Market Station.

Regarding Trackside Villas, another transitional housing project in Tai Po, the TD is working with the relevant operator and stakeholder to follow up and further enhance services to Tai Po Market Station. The TD will continue to maintain close liaison with operating organisations of transitional housing projects concerned to cater for residents' needs.

With the support from the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), the Government will provide the affected residents with Octopus cards with \$2,000 of stored credit through the SWD, with each resident receiving one card to facilitate their daily travel. The MTRCL has also set up a support desk at the MTR Tai Po Market Station to facilitate express registration for residents whose JoyYou Card, Octopus cards for persons with disabilities, and Octopus cards for students that have been lost or damaged.

Separately, the Financial Secretary convened a co-ordination meeting this afternoon with financial regulators to enhance support for residents affected by the fire. The Insurance Authority has set up a dedicated task force to co-ordinate the insurance sector's responses on the handling of public enquiries and claims. Insurers are also offering various forms of assistance, including prioritising claims processing, expediting payouts, offering premium holidays or extended payment deadlines, and providing interest relief on policy loans.

On other emergency support, the SWD has registered more than 900 households for the provision of "one social worker per household" services in order to render necessary assistance according to their welfare needs. The SWD

will continue to reach out to other unregistered households, or they may leave their contact information by calling 182 183; social workers will assist to follow up. In addition, the SWD has arranged respite services for dozens of elderly residents and persons with disabilities. Social welfare organisations were also engaged to provide burial services for residents in need.

Meanwhile, the Civil Service Bureau today mobilised more than 200 additional staff to form Quick Response Units to provide support at temporary shelters and other locations in Tai Po, including distributing supplies to affected residents. They include civil servants from the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Immigration Department, as well as staff from the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

To support schools and students to cope with the incident, the Education Bureau (EDB) will offer \$100,000 to each primary and secondary school (including special schools) and \$50,000 to each kindergarten in Tai Po District under the Special Incident Assistance Grant. If any school premises are damaged, the EDB will arrange emergency repair works. In addition, the EDB will hold five online seminars on psychological support this coming weekend to assist school personnel and parents in taking care of students or children with traumatic experiences.

Regarding fundraising and relief supplies, members of the public can visit 122 post offices across the territory (including three mobile post offices) to donate to the government-established Support Fund for Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po. A receipt will be issued upon completion as confirmation. To further facilitate the public, the Faster Payment System (FPS) channel for the relief fund has been activated (FPS Identifier: 124037276). In addition, the Government is working with the information technology sector to expedite the development of an online platform for registering donated supplies, to allow organisations and members of the public to register the items they can donate, enabling the Government to better consolidate the information and distribute the supplies to residents in need when necessary. Members of the public may provide their contact information and details of items they can donate via WhatsApp at 9213 2388 for timely follow-up by the Government.

The Government has established a dedicated website Support Services for Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po (www.taipofire.gov.hk), providing a one-stop platform for relevant information and updates on accommodation support, relief supplies, government dedicated fund, financial support, as well as medical and counselling services, to facilitate public access.

Regarding the investigations and regulation, the three personnel of the construction company arrested yesterday are still being detained for enquiries. The Fire Services Department has established an interdepartmental investigation team with participating departments including the Hong Kong Police Force, the Buildings Department, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Housing Department, the Labour Department, and the Government Laboratory. The investigation will commence shortly.

On the protective nets used at Wang Fuk Court, the contractor submitted a test report to the Independent Checking Unit of the Housing Bureau (ICU) in October 2024. Upon review, the ICU did not identify any non-compliance issues against the fire-retardant requirements as stipulated in the Buildings Ordinance and relevant practice notes/circular letters. In addition, officers of the ICU visited Wang Fuk Court in November 2024 to oversee how the registered inspectors and contractor conducted on-site sampling and burned the material of the protective nets, but no combustible feature was detected. In light of the fire incident and to conduct sampling and testing at the work sites, the ICU conducted preliminary on-site sampling of the protective nets yesterday at five Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) courts that have been issued notices under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme and are currently undergoing major maintenance works (apart from Wang Chi House of Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po, others include Sui Wo Court in Sha Tin, Ching Lai Court in Sham Shui Po, Yee Kok Court in Sham Shui Po, and On Kay Court in Kwun Tong). The preliminary results of the tests conducted by the Government Laboratory have not identified any non-compliance issues against the fire-retardant requirements of protective nets as stipulated in the Buildings Ordinance and relevant practice notes/circular letters.

The ICU has also conducted on-site sampling of the styrofoam materials used for protecting the windows at

Wang Chi House of Wang Fuk Court, which was not affected by the fire incident. Tests by the Government Laboratory confirmed that the styrofoam material is flammable. Except for Wang Fuk Court, the ICU has not identified any cases of using styrofoam boards as the protective materials for the external walls or windows at the other four HOS courts. The ICU will continue to conduct on-site sampling at the seven buildings affected by the fire incident in Wang Fuk Court. Immediate referral will be made to the law enforcement agencies for prosecutions if any non-compliance issues are found.

The Buildings Department (BD) commenced inspections yesterday in batches of existing buildings that are undergoing major external wall repairs and with scaffold nets installed for checking of records or relevant test documents regarding the fire-retardant properties of materials such as scaffold nets; and collecting samples for testing. As of 5pm today, the BD inspected 127 buildings and collected samples, which are sent in batches to the Government Laboratory, local private laboratories, and Mainland laboratories for testing. Results are expected within one to three days. The BD aims to complete inspections and sampling in batches within next week at the latest. In the inspections conducted so far, the BD has discovered two buildings with foam boards covering windows and has requested their immediate removal. The BD will notify residents by letter and seek legal advice for considering legal penalties.

The BD has issued circular letters to all registered building professionals and registered contractors, requiring them to review records or test documents for materials such as scaffold nets for ongoing works, regardless of whether the projects are new building constructions or maintenance of existing buildings. The review includes checking whether the materials are in good condition and meeting fire-retardant performance standards and requirements. Reports must be submitted to the BD within seven days, and the BD will immediately conduct audit checks for sampling and testing. The Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) has also requested the contractors of 24 public works building projects to review the records or test documents of materials, such as scaffold protective nets. A report must be submitted to the ArchSD within seven days.

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