

Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po

Evidential Hearing

**The Honourable Mr Justice David Lok
The Honourable Mr Chan Kin-por, GBS, JP
Dr Rex Auyeung Pak-kuen, GBS, JP**

**On:
Day 25
Monday, 22 June 2026**

Mr Victor Dawes SC, Mr Jason Yu, Mr SW Lee, Mr Jonathan Fung and Mr Brian Lee appeared on behalf of the Independent Committee

Mr Calvin Cheuk SC, Mr Jenkin Suen SC, Mr Michael Lok, Mr Charlie Liu and Ms Vivian Woo appeared on behalf of the Government

Mr Ross Yuen appeared on behalf of the Urban Renewal Authority

Representatives of Department of Justice

Representatives of Competition Commission

Mr Jeffrey Tam appeared on behalf of residents of Wang Fuk Court

Mr Jonathan Kwan and Mr Aaron Chan appeared on behalf of Leung Ping Kay

Representatives of ISS EastPoint Properties Ltd.

Representative of Hop On Management Company Limited

Monday, 22 June 2026

(10.00 am)

THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Before we begin the evidential hearing today, I would like to address the public. It will take quite some time, around 30 to 40 minutes.

At this stage I will make a speech on behalf of the Independent Committee. Since the fourth round of the evidential hearing on 8 May, it is the fifth round, the beginning of the fifth round, one and a half months have passed. I would like to give an account of what happened in the interim.

Concerning the terms of reference, as I've mentioned, on 8 May, to ensure the smooth progress of this case, concerning whether there is bid-rigging or collusion as well as other systematic behaviour in the industry, we plan to draw a conclusion from the reports made by different departments as well as the information received from the public. This is our basis for the ruling.

The Committee does not intend to summon individual witnesses to testify concerning this particular terms of reference. This is our decision. Because in the past we have heard evidence concerning bid-rigging behaviour and other illegal behaviours, but these are limited to

1 Wang Fuk Court itself rather than building renovation
2 work in the territory. After hearing these evidence, it
3 cannot be proved that there are bid-rigging or unlawful
4 behaviours and also, according to our terms of
5 reference, we don't have to conduct investigation
6 concerning each major building maintenance project in
7 Hong Kong or make a factual finding on these projects.
8 This is impossible and improbable in terms of time and
9 resources.

10 As I've explained before, the law enforcement
11 agencies have simultaneously conducted investigation
12 concerning these cases. We believe that with massive
13 experience these law enforcement agencies are very
14 familiar with these cases. Their reports would be
15 immensely valuable concerning whether there are
16 large-scale bid-rigging behaviours in the industry.

17 On 15 May, on our website we uploaded those reports
18 as well as other relevant information. As I have said
19 earlier, if there are any objections to our arrangement,
20 you may raise this objection to the Committee by 8 June.
21 The Committee has received no objections from the
22 public. As a result, the Committee decided that we will
23 deal with point 2 in our terms of reference according to
24 the agreed arrangement.

25 Second, over the past one and a half months we have
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1 received the final investigation report from the
2 independent task force of the government. Our own
3 experts have also submitted their reports. These
4 experts' evidence as well as the contents of the report
5 will be the focus of the fifth round of the evidential
6 hearing. Over the one and a half months in the past, we
7 have sent letters to trade associations and professional
8 institutions to request them for professional advice
9 concerning our work. And also there were some latest
10 developments, the police and the ICAC have made arrests
11 concerning certain individuals concerning Will Power and
12 also Prestige. Charges have been laid. These include
13 manslaughter, money laundering and collusion to defraud.

14 After setting the arrangements for how to proceed
15 with point 2 of the terms of reference, we think it is
16 the opportune time to make a decision on how the
17 remaining evidential hearing will proceed and also give
18 an account to the public.

19 Before that, let me highlight some principal issues.
20 First of all, the purpose and intention of the
21 Committee, the retired judge responsible for Grenfell
22 Tower investigation, Sir Martin, the purpose of all
23 public hearings is to find out why and how the incident
24 happened, that is what happened and why. Pursuit of
25 individual liability is not our work, that includes
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1 criminal and civil liabilities, as well as internal
2 disciplinary matters within the government. After a
3 massive public incident, to recover and heal our wounds
4 as soon as possible, there are three important things.
5 One, a public hearing must be held; two, an appropriate
6 accountability; and, three, reform. All these three
7 segments are closely related. According to past
8 experience, pursuing accountability and reform will only
9 take place after the hearing is concluded. Although
10 some legal procedures have commenced, normally speaking,
11 a trial will only begin in earnest after the public
12 hearing.

13 The second principal matter is about the constraint
14 of time. After the establishment of the Independent
15 Committee, the Chief Executive set a target for the
16 Committee, that is for us to complete our work within
17 nine months. The reason is simple. First, given the
18 number of victims and also the scale of the fire, this
19 is one of the most serious public incidents in Hong Kong
20 in recent years. Besides the victims' families, the
21 public also expects the Committee to find out the cause
22 of the incident as soon as possible and make
23 recommendations on how to prevent the tragedy from
24 occurring again. Second, accountability as well as
25 reform are closely related to the public hearing.

1 According to past experience, criminal or civil
2 proceedings or government disciplinary actions will only
3 take place after the report is made available by the
4 Committee. According to the media report, there are
5 some recommendations from the Competition Committee as
6 well as other insurance matter, but those will be put on
7 hold unless the report is completed. So we have to
8 complete our work as soon as possible. Thirdly, a lot
9 of large-scale building maintenance projects have been
10 put on hold pending the reform recommendations. That
11 can lead to a number of safety risks.

12 During our work, if there are tiles falling from the
13 facade causing injury, that will be big matter. So
14 besides the perspective of the victims' families and
15 those at stake, there is a public urgency to publish our
16 report as soon as possible. Dragging the hearing on
17 would lead to delayed justice. Let me give an example.

18 Over the past one and a half months' recess we have
19 heard news that the following-up work of the Grenfell
20 Tower in the UK have also made some progress. According
21 to the UK's media, the investigation authority has only
22 completed their work nine years after the fire. Only
23 now is the decision given to the law enforcement
24 agencies on whether a charge will be laid. The decision
25 will be made by 2027 and criminal proceedings will only
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1 begin in 2029. These are all reported on the media.

2 That means that the criminal proceedings will only start
3 12 years after the fire.

4 The Grenfell Tower fire took place on 14 June 2017.
5 By the end of that year the investigation Committee
6 started its work. The hearing started in June 2018
7 under statutory investigation. It was disrupted by the
8 coronavirus but finally the report was submitted in
9 April 2024. Criminal investigation continues after the
10 publication of the report. All pursuit of
11 accountability only began after the report was made
12 available, not to mention investigation into the
13 officials.

14 According to the UK's media, a lot of members of the
15 public complain of delayed justice and that the public
16 hearing took too long to complete. We would surely want
17 to avoid a repeat of this experience.

18 Compared with overseas experience and other overseas
19 cases, the scope of this investigation is extremely
20 wide, involving a large number of government
21 departments. According to the chairman of the Bar
22 Association, this investigation has involved a large
23 number of barristers and we are investigating a wide
24 scope of matters in relation to public interest. The
25 counsel have not dodged the questions. The hearing has
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1 revealed a lot of previously unknown truth.

2 Time is tight. After being appointed chairman,
3 a lot of members in the legal sector were doubtful
4 whether we could complete our work within the timetable.
5 Please understand that the progress we have made has not
6 come by easily. It is the work of a lot of involved
7 parties. First of all, I thank the efforts of the
8 counsel team. They have received 1 million pieces of
9 documents and in pursuit of their work that so many
10 problems have been revealed.

11 A second, less-known area is the cooperation on the
12 part of the government and the departments, that
13 includes testifying in the stand as well as submitting
14 information to us. From that information we learned
15 that the contractor, the consultant as well as the fire
16 services contractors, concerning their roles in the
17 project, a lot of unfavourable evidence has been
18 submitted against them. That includes videos recording
19 how the testing was done on the scaffolding nets as well
20 as internal communication of the government. Without
21 this information, we would not understand the truth.

22 Thirdly, the cooperation from all the involved
23 parties. They have kept up with our tight timetable and
24 they have submitted information in time. They have not
25 made unreasonable request during the hearing.

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1 Finally, we thank the cooperation of the residents
2 of Wang Fuk Court and the members of the public so that
3 we can achieve the greatest possible progress. On that
4 premise, after carefully considering all the factors, we
5 have decided that we will not make a
6 suggestion/recommendation to the Chief Executive to
7 upgrade the Independent Committee to a statutory
8 committee. The remaining hearing will proceed according
9 to the set arrangement.

10 As we all know, a statutory investigation committee
11 has the power to summon witnesses and call for evidence.
12 However, the law stipulates that statutory investigation
13 is a statutory procedure. As I've mentioned, it is
14 a strategic decision concerning which mode to adopt.
15 The Committee has balanced all the pros and cons behind
16 different options with public interest in mind. We have
17 considered the following five factors.

18 First, a lot of justification for establishing
19 a statutory investigation committee are made by
20 individuals who have not attended the hearing. Since
21 the beginning of our work, the Independent Committee has
22 received a large number of evidence, including the
23 1 million copies of documentations received. On that
24 basis, the Independent Committee is very clear
25 concerning the respective roles and accountability on
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1 different parties and also whether there are systemic
2 issues in the tendering process. We have gathered
3 sufficient information on these matters. We are
4 confident that we can make a finding and reach
5 a conclusion on the points mentioned in the terms of
6 reference.

7 Concerning those who have not attended the hearing
8 to give evidence or even not reply to our written
9 questions or enquiries, we consider that even if we
10 upgrade the committee to a statutory investigation
11 committee, it will not be of substantial help on
12 clearing up the matters.

13 On the other hand, even if the stakeholders have
14 given up the opportunity to testify in front of the
15 public, the Committee can still make an adverse finding
16 against them with the information we have already had.
17 In other words, even though witnesses refused or choose
18 not to attend the hearing to give testimony, this will
19 not affect our ruling in terms of roles and
20 accountability.

21 I emphasise that even though a statutory committee
22 can summon a witness to testify, we cannot force them to
23 cooperate. The witnesses may give unclear answers or
24 claim that they have simply forgotten the facts.

25 The law enforcement agencies have launched
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1 prosecution against individuals and companies; that
2 would make the matter more complicated. We can't expect
3 these witnesses to be as cooperative as the previous
4 witnesses in the hearing. At this stage, we have
5 already obtained a large amount of evidence. Besides
6 the oral testimonies, there are also communication logs
7 as well as video recordings. Based on these
8 information, we are very clear about the roles played by
9 the contractor and the consultants in the project. We
10 know who the persons responsible are. That is extremely
11 beneficial for the Committee to find how and why the
12 incident happened. The remaining work should be
13 conducted through criminal or civil proceedings.

14 According to media reports, they often use the term
15 "upgrade" to describe how the investigation or
16 Independent Committee is transformed into a statutory
17 Committee. We don't think this term is accurate.
18 It would give a false perception that the existing
19 hearing is a low-level investigation. I beg to differ.
20 This is not a low-key investigation committee. On the
21 contrary, this is a very in-depth and comprehensive
22 investigation committee. All the minute detail,
23 including the government's email communications and all
24 the 999 calls, we will not give up on the details. We
25 will examine them in detail. We find that this is an
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1 effective enquiry. In our inquiry it is happening in
2 a fair and just manner in the hope that members of the
3 public would get to the bottom of the truth. If you are
4 to say that we need to have a certain judicial procedure
5 before we can establish the truth, nothing can be
6 further from the truth. In certain ways the Committee
7 will need to have the statutory power to identify the
8 facts. But since the Government and the law enforcement
9 agencies are very cooperative, we managed to get to
10 grips with the truth. Under these circumstances, it is
11 not worth invoking the statutory power.

12 Second, this is not discussed much in the media but
13 we feel that this is a very important reason. Since a
14 statutory investigation power would lengthen the time,
15 this is a technical legal consideration and you may have
16 a good enough understanding of this. The party being
17 investigated will be compelled to attend and they have
18 different situations. They may make applications
19 through different procedures to protect their own
20 interests. You may see that for the previous four
21 rounds of proceedings, they have been very smooth and
22 you may think it's very simple to transform ourselves
23 into a statutory body and it would be easier for us to
24 compel the uncooperative witnesses to testify and that
25 they will be willing to tell us everything about what
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1 they know and the delay will not be considerable. But
2 in actual fact, nothing can be further from the truth.

3 If we turn into a statutory body, we need to give
4 notification because they are compelled to testify. We
5 need to allow them enough time to make preparation to
6 make submissions of their evidence.

7 Since there is a change of procedures, they may ask
8 the Committee to resummon those who have already
9 testified, or there will be more written submissions.
10 If we were to apply to the Chief Executive about the way
11 we operate, then we will have to adjourn until a couple
12 of months later before we can reconvene, because we
13 cannot compel -- make the witnesses cooperate with us
14 and they may submit their evidence at the hearing and we
15 may have to proceed in a fragmented way. This is not
16 the same as the way we proceed now. In turn, it may
17 cause delays.

18 In our view, it might double the time taken. Even
19 if we were to summon witnesses to do with TOR1, we may
20 have to wait until Q2 of 2027. I must emphasise that
21 this is an estimate. It is not a guarantee. It would
22 cause undesirable impact on the establishment of
23 accountability and reform. Some might say we are being
24 too conservative. This kind of worries are unfounded.
25 We don't believe this is really unduly worried.

1 It would have a high likelihood of these being delayed
2 for a considerable period of time.

3 Let me cite you a case. This is the only case in
4 which a committee was transformed from a non-statutory
5 to a statutory body. This is the Post Office Horizon IT
6 hearing. They have an independent website; you may wish
7 to have a look at this online.

8 Let me give you some background. In the UK the post
9 office in many villages and small towns, they are
10 operated by the residents themselves. The Post Office
11 upgraded the IT system and they found that in the small
12 towns the proceeds could not be substantiated. They
13 suspected someone was lining their own pocket. In the
14 criminal proceedings, they established the computer
15 system was not wrong. Subsequently, they found that the
16 computer system was wrong and 900 people's convictions
17 had to be quashed.

18 For these 900 proceedings, it caused a lot of
19 impact. You can imagine that there are many elderly
20 couples operating these kind of small post offices and
21 a lot of people were divorced, bankrupt because they had
22 to shell out money for the litigation and the legal
23 proceedings and some even committed suicide. Having
24 identified the truth, the UK government had to
25 investigate the background and the remedial measures.

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1 The terms of reference in 2020, 10 June, they were
2 promulgated, and it was in autumn of 2020 that they
3 started work. In 2021, early part of, they started off
4 being a non-statutory body. They had to open hearings.
5 On 19 May 2021, the government announced that this be
6 upgraded to a statutory investigation and a report
7 should be submitted in autumn of 2022.

8 Sir Wyn Williams, on 15 September 2021, the retired
9 judge, published a progress report saying that in 2022,
10 in a year's time, a report would be available. At that
11 time he said that for two reasons the Commission had
12 done the work during the proceedings and also all the
13 involved parties would be cooperative. They believe
14 that with these two factors, they would be able to
15 complete the report in a year's time.

16 But ultimately, in March 2023, four to five months
17 after the expected date, they submitted the interim
18 report. The inquiry continued in 2024. The final
19 report, part 1, I emphasise part 1, was submitted on
20 8 July 2025. There was a delay of two years compared
21 with the expected time.

22 Now, let's not talk about such a long time. Even if
23 a year or a year and a half, what impact would that be?
24 The Post Office Horizon IT investigation, it is not the
25 same as our investigation, but the things is the judge
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1 responsible for the inquiry believed that a statutory
2 power would enable them to complete the work within
3 a year but that didn't materialise because there are
4 some complexities involved in legal proceedings and the
5 procedures. It would not be for the chairman to control
6 the proceedings and they may lose the initiative. These
7 worries, these concerns will come to pass.

8 I must emphasise here that in some circumstances, if
9 the parties are not cooperative, the Committee will need
10 to have the statutory power to establish the truth. But
11 given the way it is happening, we have the cooperation
12 of all parties. What happened and why, we have already
13 got to grips with the facts and we believe that this is
14 the right time for us to bring in the net, as it were,
15 and we would like to maximise the result of our
16 investigation and we will submit a report as soon as
17 possible in order that the procedures will not cause any
18 delay and delay as a result the process of reform and
19 people will not be able to set down their past.

20 The third reason, first, we have got the information
21 sufficiently; second, we're worried about unnecessary
22 delays; the third consideration is turning this into
23 statutory body will have some impacts on the criminal
24 proceedings being undertaken or likely to be undertaken.
25 I've talked about the time delay already and, as I said,
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1 in terms of responsibility, we will get to grips with
2 what happened and why, and we have already established
3 the facts. And personal liability, I think we should
4 leave it to civil and criminal proceedings. If we
5 conduct investigation into personal liabilities, then it
6 would have some impacts on the criminal and civil
7 proceedings and this would introduce uncertainties in
8 terms of prosecution.

9 The criminal authorities or law enforcement
10 investigation in parallel with our statutory
11 investigation will make things more complex. The law
12 enforcement agencies may not be able to devote a lot of
13 their investigations to the statutory body and that
14 would also impinge on the work of the commission of
15 inquiry.

16 The fourth is the existing investigation does
17 present some advantages. It is non-statutory committee
18 and the Independent Committee, in terms of the testimony
19 and also the report of the inquiry and also the -- who
20 should be held responsible, the comments on this
21 outside, we would have more room for handling these. If
22 this is a statutory commission of inquiry, it would be
23 like other statutory procedures. The reporting of the
24 evidence or the testimony here and outside and the
25 interview of the witnesses or the residents outside,
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1 they would be subject to certain restrictions. I'm sure
2 those reporters who have been covering the hearings
3 would understand that in order not to undermine the
4 legal proceedings the interviews cannot be reported, but
5 in relation to the seriousness of the Wang Fuk Court
6 case, 1,900 families suffered financial losses, they
7 lost their homes, they lost their family members. The
8 Independent Committee is of the view that we should have
9 more room and more flexibility to make the arrangement
10 more humane, more human and we should allow more open
11 and fair and impartial proceedings, and that would be
12 more appropriate.

13 The fifth consideration is specifically whether we
14 should have the statutory commission of inquiry to
15 investigate whether there is any bid-rigging or
16 irregularities. The Committee did say that TOR2
17 requires the Committee to look at the large-scale
18 building maintenance territory-wide to see whether there
19 is such behaviour instead of just focusing on Wang Fuk
20 Court.

21 The Committee fully understands that this is
22 something of concern to the Wang Fuk residents. Because
23 of this concern, the Committee will not evade this
24 particular subject. The legal team has asked the
25 Wang Fuk residents to submit evidence and to express
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1 their views.

2 As I said, the personal liability should be rest to
3 the law enforcement agencies. For the existing cases,
4 the law enforcement agencies might find it difficult to
5 divulge too much information because the disclosure of
6 the information might impinge on their investigation and
7 also on their prosecutorial work going forward. So the
8 question is not whether we are there to conduct
9 investigation. As we said in our opening summation, in
10 terms of the terms of reference, we would be getting to
11 the bottom of the truth in terms of all the points in
12 the terms of reference.

13 The other question is whether we should investigate
14 in the course of tendering whether there was any
15 irregularities or bid-rigging in Wang Fuk Court. Our
16 view is we should carry on with the investigation
17 because in the process, if there is any bid-rigging or
18 irregularities, the parties concerned should be held
19 responsible for their behaviour. Nobody should be let
20 go.

21 In our view, we have to ask ourselves one question,
22 and that is should we use statutory means to investigate
23 into all these matters? We have weighed up all the
24 factors. Our answer is no. Mainly for a couple of
25 reasons. First, the issues may involve so many

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1 different people and under the law they have their own
2 rights. We believe that there are so many lawyers
3 involved in the hearing and there are so many legal
4 issues that should be handled. Simply put, our hearing
5 will become the criminal proceedings targeting at
6 individuals; it would be akin to putting the criminal
7 trial in this particular hearing. Things would be very
8 complicated. We believe that this kind of hearing would
9 take more than a year because in TOR1 we would have to
10 delay the report to 2027 if we have to establish the
11 personal liabilities, bid-rigging or irregularities, I'm
12 sure the submission deadline will be even longer. I
13 would imagine it would be not until the end of 2027, if
14 not later.

15 The second reason is even if it is a statutory
16 commission of inquiry, the commission does not enjoy the
17 power enjoyed by the law enforcement agencies. We are
18 aware that bid-rigging and irregularities are really
19 invisible. It is not easy to investigate. We have to
20 investigate the personal information, their dealings or
21 the bank transaction. We may summon people to submit
22 evidence and to testify. It may take a long time. We
23 may be not be able to ascertain whether the
24 documentation is true or not.

25 Third, for these illegal activities it will be hard
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1 for us to conduct investigation in an open manner. Some
2 behaviour may involve corruption. Even if some people
3 would like to submit information anonymously, in an open
4 hearing it may not be possible.

5 Fourth, if the hearing or the commission and the law
6 enforcement agencies are conducting the investigation
7 simultaneously, it may have detrimental effect to the
8 work of both parties. Even if the commission
9 establishes certain illegal behaviours, we may not have
10 the power to mete out penalty.

11 So in terms of TOR2, we should conduct the rest our
12 hearing based on this. We focus on the large-scale
13 building maintenance territory-wide. As to the
14 bid-rigging and irregularities of Wang Fuk Court, we
15 should leave it to the law enforcement agencies. In
16 fact, in the past couple of months, the law enforcement
17 agencies, including the police, the ICAC and the
18 Competition Commission, have already made arrests and
19 prosecuted in relation to Wang Fuk Court.

20 We believe that if there are irregularities
21 involving bid-rigging, the law enforcement agencies will
22 be taking that very seriously and following up on that
23 and the parties will be brought to book accordingly.

24 Indeed, according to the investigation by the
25 police, they said that they would be finding the --

1 finding out the truth for the victims and the families
2 and they have adopted that approach in dealing with the
3 investigation and the two departments would spare no
4 efforts in investigating their cases and they would not
5 rule out further arrests and prosecutions and the
6 objective is to ensure that all those who were liable or
7 culpable would be brought to book.

8 In fact, they have also said that the relevant
9 investigation is going on and they do not rule out the
10 possibility of further prosecutions or law enforcement
11 acts being carried out. Whether or not there has been
12 bid-rigging or irregularities, we agree that this has to
13 be taken up but then we believe that that should be left
14 to the law enforcement agencies to follow up on the
15 relevant issues. We believe that this is more effective
16 in terms of finding out the truth and the facts.

17 The Committee understands that whether or not there
18 has been bid-rigging or irregularities, this is
19 something that we are all concerned about and therefore
20 our decision inevitably would be disappointing to some
21 parties but then we have to emphasise that the
22 investigation has to be based on facts and fair
23 proceedings. We would to have make difficult decisions
24 but then we can assure the public here that, as an
25 Independent Committee led by a judge, every decision
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1 will be based on legal points and also public interest.
2 Politics and also public relations considerations have
3 never featured in our considerations.

4 We'd like to try our level best to explain our
5 decisions to the public. We hope that the public will
6 understand. And I truly don't want to see that by the
7 same date next year we will still have to have hearings
8 and, even if you blame me -- well, actually, I don't
9 want this to happen. Therefore, based on what I just
10 said, we will be adopting the existing approach to
11 continue with our investigation. Our objective is to
12 complete the investigation and work within nine months
13 and then, after taking the evidence from the experts and
14 so on, we will complete the evidence-taking stage, and
15 then from 15 to 17 July we are going to listen to the
16 final submissions from all the parties concerned and
17 then, after completing that, we will still need to deal
18 with a lot of written submissions and evidence and also
19 a lot of information that we have received. We will
20 also have to draft our report. In fact our time will be
21 very tight.

22 Last but not least, this Independent Committee's
23 work is still going on and therefore I'm not going to
24 give any interview to the media, so friends from the
25 media, please understand that. And therefore, in a
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1 moment, when I leave, I'm not going to give any
2 interviews at all. Thank you.

3 MR VICTOR DAWES: Counsel, chairman, as we have announced to
4 you, in the coming days we are going to listen to the
5 comments made by the experts in the next couple of days
6 and at that stage we're going to briefly talk about the
7 evidence that they're going to give and also to explain
8 briefly to the Committee as to the evidence to be given
9 by the experts, what areas will they cover. We hope by
10 adopting this approach the public will find it easier to
11 understand the evidence.

12 You might have noticed that in the past, in the
13 course of hearing conducted by the Independent
14 Committee, some experts might have given some comments
15 to the Committee on certain technical issues. They have
16 given some evidence and they have also been
17 cross-examined.

18 During the past couple of months, in fact the
19 Committee has already heard the submissions made by
20 different witnesses and we have already considered
21 different pieces of evidence given by the witnesses with
22 regard to the cause of the fire and also the way it
23 spread and also the reason why there had been such heavy
24 casualties and fatalities, so we might have some
25 understanding already but making inference on such
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1 evidence might be reasonable but then, at the same time,
2 in making our judgments, we would also have to have
3 scientific evidence and basis, and therefore worldwide,
4 when there are heavy fires and whenever there are
5 investigations, inevitably experts would be able to help
6 the authorities to restore what actually happened and
7 very often they would also be able to give valuable
8 suggestions as to how we could avoid the repeat of such
9 disasters and catastrophes.

10 In this regard the Independent Committee appointed
11 two experts. They are Prof Usmani and Prof Yuen.
12 Earlier this year they have been appointed and they
13 already started their work. As we all know, Prof Usmani
14 is from PolyU, and he is the chair professor and he is
15 also a fellow of the UK Association on Construction and
16 Engineering and he has rich experience in that. He has
17 also trained up many graduate students. They have been
18 involved in the investigation of the UK Grenfell Tower
19 fire, they also gave evidence and one of them was also
20 more widely reported, and that's Dr Barbara Lane.

21 As to Prof Jiang Liming, he is also from PolyU, he
22 is an associate professor there. Right now he is
23 a member of the technical committee of building fire
24 safety under the Fire Services Department and therefore
25 he has also got relevant experience in that.

1 Other than our own experts, the Government just two
2 days after the fire, in other words on 28 November 2025,
3 it also set up this Inter-departmental Fire
4 Investigation Task Force comprising different
5 departments' experts, including Fire Services Department
6 and also Prof Richard Yuen from CityU, and Prof Yuen is
7 responsible for supervising the work and also the tests
8 conducted in Sichuan University and also the calculation
9 of fire dynamics, and that's the CFD's computational
10 fluid dynamics simulations. He is also a senior member
11 of the relevant association in Hong Kong.

12 The two expert teams independently worked over the
13 past few months and they separately conducted their own
14 tests and used their own methods to simulate the fire on
15 that day and they separately also submitted their expert
16 reports. The purpose of them working separately and
17 independently, that's because they'd like to get
18 objective scientific results from their test to see if
19 they can corroborate with each other or to find out
20 where there are discrepancies and so on.

21 With regard to the Committee's experts, they have
22 scrutinised a lot of photos, video footage and also they
23 have also reviewed the footage from the CCTV and also
24 the plans for Wang Fuk Court. At the same time, at the
25 PolyU's fire lab, they have also taken samples from
26

1 Wang Fuk Court. They have conducted tests on those
2 samples. Those include the poly board samples and also
3 the fire-retardant materials and also non-fire-retardant
4 materials, they conducted tests on those samples.

5 Also, as we might recall, some of the bamboo sticks
6 on the scaffolding were also tested in terms of how fire
7 might spread, and also carton boards and wooden boards
8 were also tested.

9 Other than that, they also conducted some CFD
10 simulations, including, as you might notice, in the
11 investigation they also talk about the light wells'
12 chimney effect and also the re-entrance to look at how
13 the combustibles impact on the spread of fire and also
14 how the smoke got into the light well and spread into
15 the staircases and also the lift lobbies.

16 So the experts, on 17 June 2026, that's just last
17 week, they also conducted a closed-door meeting.
18 Legally speaking we call it a non-prejudicial meeting.
19 At the meeting they opened their mind in their
20 discussion and the meeting was a closed-door meeting.
21 That's also in the public interest because the purpose
22 was to find out whether or not there were areas that
23 they could agree on or whether or not there are areas
24 that they couldn't agree on.

25 So I have to say that the experts on both sides had
26

1 not only reviewed the pictures, the footages, the layout
2 plans for the buildings and so on, they also looked at
3 the submissions made by the witnesses, and also through
4 the evidence collected by the police, including the
5 debris collected and also the miscellaneous items
6 collected from the light well and also the styrofoam
7 boards and so on collected there. And Prof Lee Wing Man
8 also looked at the material samples collected. He
9 conducted analysis and altogether 10 witness submissions
10 were submitted by him. Out of those, he also looked at
11 how such samples might have affected the spread of the
12 fire. So I'm referring to Dr Lee Wing Man. That would
13 also affect how the fire spread. And as you understand
14 it, in Sichuan, they also conducted a major fire test.

15 They used a mega-scale cone calorimeter setup and
16 that simulated the actual layout of the light well and
17 the -- they also conducted some 13 major tests to
18 compare how the FR nets and also the non-FR nets and
19 also the FR windows and also the covering boards for
20 some of the access points, and also they looked at the
21 fluid dynamics and also the wind dynamics impacts on the
22 spread of the fire.

23 So that was the work done by the relevant task
24 forces in the past couple of months. Next I'll move on
25 to some of the conclusions and of course for the details
26

1 I will leave them to the experts to explain to you.

2 The IFITF and also the Committee's expert group,
3 they operated independently. But then we can see that
4 the conclusions that they reach are more or less
5 consistent and the same.

6 So, in the next couple of days they will be
7 explaining to you as to the different method they had
8 adopted to come to very similar conclusions and how they
9 used different approaches to come to the same
10 conclusions. But then what I can say is that that has
11 greatly enhanced the credibility of the conclusions.

12 First, on the use of non-FR nets, the IFITF
13 collected some samples from Wang Chi House and then they
14 conducted tests and it's found that the spread of the
15 fire would be a lot faster than the use of FR net. If
16 you look at the test results, we could see that they
17 were completely consumed.

18 The experts also looked at the samples from Wang Chi
19 House to conduct tests and it's concluded that the
20 non-FR net would melt very easily. When compared to
21 FR nets, the spread would be a lot faster. That would
22 also give out extra burning time and that would also
23 generate flaming droplets.

24 You might have noticed in our opening submission we
25 also showed you some video footage as to how the fire
26

1 spread in the early stage. You can see that there were
2 some embers, some small embers. You might have noticed
3 in some of the footages that such embers might have come
4 from one building and they might have flown to another
5 building, causing fire to break out, and the IFITF and
6 also the Committee's experts have also noticed that some
7 of the net samples had the characteristics of
8 fire-retardant. In other words, some of them were
9 actually fire-retardant. That might have been
10 a coincidence, but then we can also notice at Wang Kin
11 House, basically when FR nets were used, Wang Kin House
12 itself was not affected by the fire and there was no
13 casualty whatsoever. Whether or not this is the only
14 reason, I'll leave it to the experts.

15 Another consideration is that if they used FR
16 materials, would it have effectively prevented the
17 spread from Wang Cheong House to spread vertically and,
18 as a result, we might have been able to prevent the
19 spread of the fire causing severe casualties.

20 We might recall that on the day of the fire
21 Wang Cheong House, flats 104, 105, the light well
22 outside there was the source of fire, was the seat of
23 fire. Initially it was a small-scale fire and therefore
24 the experts looked at this small-scale fire. So at the
25 start of it, how it turned into a major catastrophe, so
26

1 they conducted very detailed analysis. The IFITF test
2 found out that the small seat of fire would make use of
3 the non-FR scaffolding surface and that also resulted in
4 some flaming droplets as the droplets increased. So
5 they went into areas that were not burned and then that
6 caused a larger fire to take place.

7 Then they also found out something which was very
8 important. As far as the conclusion was concerned. At
9 the Sichuan major test site, all the FR and also non-FR
10 canvasses, together the energy that was created was only
11 367.55 MW.

12 Compared to the non-FR scaffolding net and also the
13 FR scaffolding net, when the comparison is made between
14 the two types of materials, then the energy that would
15 be released would be very, very different, because if
16 you look at the energy released, it's over 10,155.92 MW,
17 in other words it's 27 times higher than that released
18 by the FR net.

19 The impression that was given to us was that if you
20 use non-FR materials, then the bamboo sticks and also
21 the wooden boards and all the other not-so-combustible
22 materials would start to burn. The conclusion they came
23 to was also very important to us. For the use of FR
24 nets and also canvas would effectively prevent the
25 spread of fire and the damage done to the surrounding
26

1 buildings would also be minimised, and the non-FR nets
2 and also non-FR canvas used combined would help the
3 spread of fire, resulting in severe fire and
4 smouldering.

5 As you can see, at the initial stage of the fire in
6 Wang Cheong House, that coincided with what the experts
7 say. So that's the tests and conclusions of the IFITF.

8 What about the experts of the Committee?
9 Independent examinations have been conducted. According
10 to their observations, during the burning of
11 non-fire-retardant scaffolding net, the flaming droplets
12 would ignite the carton boxes and wooden planks on the
13 ground floor. The tests also reveal that bamboo stick
14 would only be burned after a sufficiently large fire has
15 been started through the burning of carton boxes and
16 wooden planks on the ground floor. The finding is that
17 the flaming droplets from non-fire-retardant safety nets
18 would unleash the heat potential of the carton boxes and
19 wooden planks and then the bamboo sticks. Otherwise,
20 the bamboo sticks would not be burned or ignited. In
21 other words, whether the bamboo sticks would be ignited
22 is closely related to whether non-fire-retardant canvas
23 or nylon net had been used.

24 The Committee's experts reached a consensus that if
25 the safety nets and canvas used in Wang Fuk Court are
26

1 all fire-retardant, then the fire would extinguish
2 itself automatically in the initial stage and may not
3 have led to the ignition of combustible items in the
4 re-entrance. As a result, the fire may not propagate.
5 The spread of the fire of Wang Fuk Court would be much
6 less serious. There would be far fewer buildings
7 involved.

8 In other words, the experts of the Committee
9 consider that the use of fire-retardant safety net can
10 significantly reduce the possibility of secondary
11 ignition and prevent a fire of being started at the
12 re-entrance of Wang Fuk Court. That's the conclusion
13 concerning safety net and nylon net. And also the
14 chimney effect at the light well.

15 Concerning chimney effect, the experts have said the
16 following. According to the fluid dynamic model, when
17 there was a 50 joules seat of fire in the light well, it
18 may create a 100-metre-tall column of fire in a short
19 period of time, reaching to the roof. At the same time,
20 the shape of the re-entrant has turned the fire into
21 a large fire engulfing the entire building, that is
22 closely related to the design of the light well.
23 According to the videos and photos, the experts have
24 observed that after a large fire has sustained for two
25 to four minutes in the light well, the fire has reached
26

1 the rooftop, that is the 31st floor of the building.

2 The experts of the inter-departmental committee have
3 reached the same finding. Had the vertical re-entrants
4 and other light wells of similar design, which they
5 refer to as shafts, for example, lift shafts and light
6 wells, it would cause fire and smoke to rise up. The
7 chimney-like design has restricted the movement of the
8 fire and would cause the fire to engulf multiple floors
9 vertically in a short period of time.

10 Based on that reason, the experts think that it is
11 necessary to prohibit the use of combustible materials
12 in buildings with similar light well designs.

13 Concerning styrofoam boards, the inter-departmental
14 investigation committee has found that among the
15 291 submissions from the witnesses, only 14.4 per cent
16 of the respondents said that they saw the smoke and
17 found that there was a fire. So they blamed this on the
18 styrofoam boards blocking the views of the residents
19 from inside the building, and also styrofoam boards are
20 easily combustible. It has accelerated the spread of
21 the fire. Once the foam boards have fallen from the
22 windowsill, they would become new sources of fire and
23 they may drift farther apart, causing further spread of
24 the fire.

25 Our own experts have pointed out that the
26

1 inter-departmental task force has conducted a test,
2 proving that the existence of foam boards has directly
3 contributed to the impingement of the windowsills as
4 well as the cracking of the window glasses. That has
5 led to the horizontal spread of smoke and fire into the
6 inside of the building. So that's on foam boards.

7 On moveable boards or temporary accesses, the
8 inter-departmental task force has conducted a test in
9 Sichuan and according to that test, fire-retardant glass
10 panels can effectively lower the temperature of the
11 building when there is a fire and stop the spread of
12 smoke in the stairwell. In the test, the task force has
13 used the same materials, that is the wooden materials
14 and the aluminium plastic materials for -- as moveable
15 boards in Wang Fuk Court. It is proven that they would
16 be completely burned within several minutes' time.

17 And for windows using fire-retardant panels, the
18 windows have been kept intact during the test.
19 According to the Sichuan experiment, there is a huge
20 difference in terms of temperature between the
21 windowsill and the light well when fire-retardant boards
22 are used. If the same materials used in Wang Fuk Court
23 are used as moveable boards, the internal temperature in
24 the building would reach 1,061 degrees Celsius. If
25 fire-retardant glass panels had been used, the
26

1 temperature in the stairwells would only be 56 degrees
2 Celsius. The difference is remarkable and shocking.
3 When foam boards are used as moveable boards, the
4 temperature of the stairwell would rise to 605 degrees
5 Celsius.

6 Fluid dynamics calculation have been conducted to
7 simulate the situation assuming that there is moveable
8 boards or temporary access every five floors, and if the
9 temporary accesses are completely unobstructed, then in
10 several minutes' time the smoke would engulf all the
11 stairwells. That has corroborated the factual
12 witnesses' statements.

13 Now, we have considered the testing results and the
14 experts agreed that if wooden boards or aluminium
15 plastic boards are used to cover the temporary accesses,
16 even before they are completely burned, smoke and fire
17 can seep in through the stairwells through the gaps.

18 The test results show that wooden boards and
19 aluminium plastic boards are not up to standard as
20 coverage for the temporary accesses in the staircases.
21 That's on temporary accesses.

22 On the deactivation of the fire alarms, the
23 inter-departmental task force thinks that the
24 extraordinary spread of smoke and fire in the stairwells
25 and also the failure of stairwell as an effective means
26

1 of escape have significantly shortened the time allowed
2 for residents to escape, so during the evacuation of
3 Wang Cheong and Wang Chi House and Wang Kin House, the
4 time for evacuation has been greatly shortened. During
5 14:57 and 15:05, the front entrance have already been
6 blocked by fallen burning objects. That is only six
7 to 14 minutes from when the fire was first reported.

8 At 15:20 and 15:30 the buildings' entrances have
9 been completely blocked. Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai
10 House, for residents on lower floors, 12 victims have
11 been found in the staircase. Those residents are
12 actually from upper floors. Now, the experts considered
13 that it is likely that because burning objects blocked
14 the stairwells, as a result those residents on the upper
15 floors could not be saved.

16 What made the evacuation more difficult is that the
17 fire alarms of the eight buildings had been deactivated.
18 The experts consider that residents were not alerted in
19 a timely manner, leading to a delay in evacuation. When
20 they were alerted, the escape routes had already been
21 compromised by high temperature and smoke.

22 After some chronological analysis, the experts have
23 reached the following critical conclusion. Because of
24 the deactivation of the fire alarm system and also that
25 foam boards had blocked the views from inside the
26

1 building, the majority of the residents were not alerted
2 of the fire. The escape routes, the time allowed for
3 escape have been greatly truncated. The conclusion is
4 that on many occasions the effective time for escape was
5 zero.

6 Now, our own experts have also built computational
7 model to show after the fire has started, the means of
8 escape have been engulfed in smoke in a few minutes'
9 time. And both teams of experts have analysed the cause
10 of death for the 168 victims and the deceased's
11 locations. 91 of them died of inhaling smoke, and among
12 the 81 victims in Wang Cheong House, 24 were found in
13 the staircase. Among the 82 in Wang Tai House, 38 were
14 found at similar locations.

15 Our experts pointed out that these locations were
16 not strewn with combustible items so it can be assumed
17 these victims died of inhalation of smoke rather than
18 flames.

19 Flats 1202 and 2602 of Wang Cheong House, these
20 flats were not affected by fire, but there are residents
21 who were killed by smoke in these units. The 26 bodies
22 found in the staircases, the cause of death was
23 inhalation of smoke. So the experts' opinion is that
24 the tragedy was caused because combustible materials
25 were used as moveable boards to cover the accesses,
26

1 causing smoke to enter and kill the victims.

2 Now, 114 victims were elderly people aged 65 years
3 old or above. Elderly residents are more fragile and
4 they would have learned about the fire later than others
5 and it might have reduced their possibility of survival.

6 At the beginning of this hearing we mentioned that
7 on the day of the fire almost all fire services
8 installations to protect life had failed because of
9 human errors. The experts' opinions have corroborated
10 with our statement. It has revealed there were a number
11 of human negligences causing the massive death. In
12 other words, it is the experts' opinion that the great
13 spread of fire and smoke as well as the massive
14 casualties caused could have been avoided.

15 Having listened to the experts' opinions, we hope
16 that the Committee would have a scientific basis to
17 understand the cause of the fire and consider what
18 measures can be adopted to prevent the same from
19 happening again.

20 Chairman, members, the above was my brief summary of
21 the experts' opinions. A large amount of experiments
22 and tests have been conducted by the experts. The
23 members of the public might think that these are
24 expected results, but as I've said, to lay a scientific
25 basis for these assumptions, we need to listen to the
26

1 experts carefully and that's what we seek to achieve in
2 the next few days. Thank you.

3 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Thank you, Mr Victor Dawes.

4 We will take the morning break now. We will take
5 a 15-minute recess.

6 (11.15 am)

7 (A short adjournment)

8 (11.31 am)

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: Chairman, the first witness is Mr Lam Kin
10 Kwan.

11 Good morning, Mr Lam. There is a declaration in
12 front of you. Please rise to your feet and read it out.

13 (11.32 am)

14 MR LAM KIN KWAN (affirmed)

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: Please be seated.

16 Mr Lam, you are deputy chief fire officer, NT South.

17 You also are the deputy head of the Inter-departmental

18 Fire Investigation Task Force.

19 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes.

20 MR VICTOR DAWES: Please explain to us, in preparing the
21 final report, what role did you play?

22 MR LAM KIN KWAN: My role is on 28 November the government
23 set up this committee and we have been on the site for
24 investigation, I've been involved in this, and regarding
25 the evidence submitted by the members, I also was

26

1 involved.

2 MR VICTOR DAWES: Regarding this fire investigation report,
3 you must be familiar with the content there and you also
4 were involved in the compilation of part of the report?

5 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes.

6 MR VICTOR DAWES: My understanding is that you will be
7 briefing us on the work of the IFITF and also the
8 details of the first five chapters.

9 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Right.

10 MR VICTOR DAWES: I know that you have ER4/2424, there is
11 a brief. My understanding is that you are going to be
12 taking us through the content then.

13 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes.

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: Please go ahead.

15 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Thank you. I will be briefing you on this
16 today regarding the work of the IFITF. I will be
17 talking about the composition, terms of reference, the
18 methodology of investigation, the background and some
19 key figures. Parts 5 and 6, they're about the findings
20 and analysis and conclusions. The experts will be
21 further elaborating on this. For the conclusions, the
22 head of the IFITF will be briefing you on this.

23 For the composition, on 28 November, the Government
24 set up the IFITF, led by the FSD. Other departments are
25 involved, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Government
26

1 Laboratory, Buildings Department, Housing Bureau, Labour
2 Department, EMSD, and we've also appointed two experts
3 from the two universities to be part of the task force.

4 For the terms of reference, there are three areas.
5 The first one is to gather different evidence to
6 identify the cause of the fire and we'd like to
7 ascertain why the fire spread like that and also, in
8 terms of fatalities and casualties, we'd like to
9 establish the circumstances leading to the heavy
10 fatalities and casualties.

11 As to the methodology, we have had regard to two
12 international standards. The first one is X/FT
13 812-2008, guide for fire cause investigation. Also
14 National Fire Protection Association, NFPA, this is the
15 guide for fire and explosion investigations. These two
16 guidelines are international guidelines. They cover
17 four different areas.

18 The first one is scene examination. On 28 November
19 the members went to the scene to look at the marks of
20 burning and the impact of the fire and smoke, the doors,
21 the windows, how they were damaged. We've gathered
22 a lot of photographs to record the fire scene.

23 Second is about the evidence collection. On the
24 scene we've collected a lot of involved materials, some
25 burned, some partially burned, and there are some ashes
26

1 resulting from the burning, and we've also gathered
2 a lot of documents and also CCTV footages. We've also
3 taken them from the scene. It is a little bit different
4 from previously because the members of the public had
5 recorded some videos or taken some pictures. We've
6 gathered them together for analysis as well.

7 Third, witness interviews. We covered different
8 people, residents of Wang Fuk Court, people who were
9 working in Wang Fuk Court, those who have been rescued
10 and those involved in the rescue operations. For those
11 important evidence like videos, we also collected them.

12 The other one is laboratory and expert analysis. We
13 have chemical testing report and autopsy reports and we
14 also have the CFD simulation. In Sichuan we have
15 conducted a real fire testing.

16 For Wang Fuk Court, let me introduce the background,
17 and later on the members will be giving you further
18 analysis. There are eight blocks in Wang Fuk Court,
19 with 31 floors each. It was completed in 1983. This is
20 the layout plan of Wang Fuk Court. There are eight
21 blocks, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H. Wang Yan, Wang Tao,
22 Wang Sun, Wang Kin, Wang Tai, Wang Cheong, Wang Shing
23 and Wang Chi. The place where the fire started was in
24 Wang Cheong House, on the podium of units 4 and 5.

25 Let's go into greater detail about the Wang Fuk
26

1 Court floor plan and the configuration there. Taken
2 Wang Cheong House, for instance. Each floor has eight
3 floors, 1 through to 8. The different blocks have
4 different orientations but basically there are eight
5 units. There is a U shape here. There is a U-shape
6 public corridor linking up with two scissor staircases
7 at the end of the U-shaped area.

8 By scissor staircases it means that within the same
9 floor the staircase would only lead you to another floor
10 and if you'd like to go to another staircase you will
11 have to make use of the U-shape communal corridor before
12 you can access the other staircase. Between the two
13 staircases, they cannot be connected and they would only
14 be connected by way of the communal corridor. At the
15 lobby, that can be connected to the rooftop all the way.
16 Another one cannot connect to the rooftop so that can
17 only go to outside of the block.

18 So within the U-shape communal corridor, other than
19 the staircases, there are also three lifts and
20 they would stop every three floors, that is 1, 5, 8 and
21 so on, so they would be going to different floors and
22 then there are also four other light wells and this is
23 the re-entrance. So that's the part that is concaved
24 within every building and that's where we call the light
25 well.

1 If you look at the fire scene, between flat numbers
2 4 and 5, that would be connected to the staircase of the
3 building. And then opposite there is another light well
4 that is connected to the corridor of the floor. It will
5 not be directly connected to the corridor, it will be
6 connected right to the meter room and then down here it
7 would be connected to the garbage collection room.
8 That's the layout of every floor of each of the blocks
9 in Wang Fuk Court.

10 On this occasion the main cause of fire is it
11 involves a major renovation work, that's the external
12 wall repair works and that started in July 2024. The
13 repair works involve the putting up of scaffolding and
14 then, if you look at it from outside, there are several
15 major materials that are involved. First is the bamboo
16 scaffolding. A lot of bamboo sticks would be used and
17 in between the bamboo sticks you can see the nylon
18 strips. We call that polypropylene strips. There are
19 also safety nets and there are also canvasses. The blue
20 and white materials are the canvas materials.

21 Outside of the canvas there are a lot of wooden
22 planks. Some of them are paved. Some of them would
23 just be placed horizontally. Then on the external wall
24 we can also see some catch fans. At an interval of
25 about 15 metres there would be a catch fan. There are

1 also toe-boards and the design of such features are all
2 safety features to ensure that different materials and
3 also small debris would not be falling from height to
4 the lower floors. That's to prevent objects from
5 falling from height. And there are also some safety
6 features on the ground, including a covered walkway;
7 that's here. So in all projects with scaffolding, there
8 would also be covered walkways.

9 Then there are also construction materials,
10 including some used materials. For example after the
11 mosaic tiles have been paved, there would also be
12 backing papers and therefore you could find them at
13 different locations. Some would be found on the
14 scaffolding, some would be found in the light wells.
15 And then at the scene, other than the scaffolding, as
16 I said, near some windows, some styrofoam covers would
17 also be adhered, so that's some of the installations
18 that we have found at this court during repair works.

19 We have also found something that is less likely to
20 be seen, that is once every five floors there would be
21 some planks that have been removed and they have been
22 replaced by some aluminium -- by some access points or
23 moveable boards.

24 So you can see there are some plastic materials in
25 between and there are also some wooden panels. In fact,

1 for every five floors, the original -- because they are
2 also replacing the windows and as a result all the
3 windows with FR properties would be replaced either by
4 aluminium composite panels or by wooden panels and as
5 a result that would also being the access points. After
6 they have opened it, then the workers would be able to
7 make use of that access points to go outside to continue
8 with some of the works on the scaffolding or carry out
9 the renovation works of the building.

10 If you look at Wang Cheong House as an example, that
11 is within Wang Fuk Court, and also if we can use
12 Wang Tai House as an example, because in some cases it
13 might not be once every five floors but it can be four
14 floors and they would have this access point. Taking
15 Wang Tai House as an example, between 5th and 6th floors
16 and between 15th and 16th floors and between 25th and
17 26th floors, at the back stairs they have opened this
18 access point, and then they can have direct access to
19 the ground floor lobby and also the rooftop from there.

20 Between 10th and 20th floors and also between 20th
21 and 30th floors they have also got such access points.
22 As a result of that, during the fire, because as
23 I briefly said about these access points, the smoke,
24 some of the materials, even if they were not burned,
25 through the gaps, they would also be able to go into the
26

1 fire escape staircase and therefore during the initial
2 stage, both the front stairs and the back stairs,
3 through such access points the smoke would also get into
4 the staircases, affecting residents who were evacuating.

5 If you look at the fire development, in the course
6 of collecting evidence, we have collected different
7 information and we also had interviews and we confirm
8 the chronology of some of the events. The first time
9 when people smelled smoke, it was already 2.30. That's
10 because of the report from the residents, he was living
11 on higher floors and at the time we did not have images
12 or video clips to prove that that indeed happened. But
13 then the earliest time when that happened was 2.43 pm
14 through a CCTV footage -- well, we were able to see that
15 from Wang Cheong House, 104 and 105, outside of the
16 platform there was a bicycle parking lot and then at
17 2.43 pm there were some embers that were noted.

18 So in the circle you can see the light reflecting
19 point. They were the embers that were seen. So that's
20 the earliest time when the spread of fire was detected.

21 And then when we received report or people saw naked
22 fire, that was 2.51. A passerby saw this. So you can
23 see at the scene. That's between 104-105 platform and
24 then the passerby noted the fire. He immediately
25 reported the case to the police. So the first time of
26

1 the first call was made at 2.51, and then by 2.55 you
2 can see that the fire already spread from the light well
3 to the 4th floor.

4 By 2.57, two minutes later, it already reached the
5 8th floor and then one minute later fire intensified and
6 engulfed the entire east re-entrant of Wang Cheong House
7 all the way up to the rooftop. So by the time when the
8 fire services people arrived, that was 2.56. So within
9 two minutes of arrival by the Fire Services
10 firefighters, the fire already reached the rooftop and
11 then it was escalated to No. 3 alarm by 3.02.

12 So there are two brief conclusions here. First, at
13 2.43 we received the report. The fire broke out between
14 2.30 and 2.43 and by 2.58 the fire already spread from
15 the first floor all the way up to the rooftop. But then
16 when we went there ourselves, after it reached the
17 rooftop, the earliest time that we could see the CCTV
18 footage simultaneously, I was referring to 2.55, it went
19 up to the rooftop of Wang Cheong House, and then at the
20 same time, at 2.58, at Wang Tai House, at rooftop, we
21 already saw some fire spreading there. And then by 3.20
22 Wang Shing also caught fire. 3.25, Wang Kin and
23 Wang Sun also caught fire and by 3.39 Wang Tao also
24 caught fire and by 4.04 Wang Yan was also affected.

25 So you can see from 2.43 it spread to seven other
26

1 blocks, so it was around 4 o'clock. So it took about an
2 hour's time for the fire to spread to seven blocks.

3 Now, to summarise what has been done by the FSD in
4 the face of this fire, there are some statistics here.
5 Number 1 alarm, that was on 26 November at 2.51, and as
6 I said, number 3 alarm, it was escalated to number 3 at
7 3.02. And then by 3.34 it was upgraded to No. 4 and
8 then by 6.22 it was upgraded to No. 5.

9 And then by around 9.31 on the 27th, fire was
10 surrounded and then it stopped at around 10.18 on
11 28 November, a total of 581 fire appliances were sent
12 and 217 ambulances were deployed and 3,531 fire services
13 personnel were sent, including 2,643 firefighters and
14 also 224 fire officers and 585 ambulance people and then
15 79 ambulance officers.

16 In the course of our investigation we also noticed
17 that it is somewhat different from the practice by the
18 FSD in terms of deployment or command structure. There
19 were special arrangements put in place. One of the
20 arrangements was that at the command level, at a very
21 early stage it already activated the DCP, the director's
22 command post, and also directorate-grade officers were
23 also deployed to different positions. Two deputy
24 directors were deployed to the scene. One was the
25 commander at the scene and the other was sent to the
26

1 emergency command centre at the security bureau and also
2 the deputy chief fire officer was sent as rescue officer
3 and safety officer. On previous occasions more junior
4 officers would be deployed. Senior officers were also
5 sent to each block, including the assistant divisional
6 officer and also senior station officers were also --
7 and also chief fire officers were sent there.

8 Another point is about the use of resources. The
9 FSD also additionally deployed 10 search and rescue
10 teams to the scene to carry out rescue operations, and
11 also it's the first time that they had set up this
12 support centre with 80 uniformed members to respond to
13 help calls and there was also a special function so that
14 they would call back the people awaiting rescue to talk
15 to them.

16 Special relief arrangements were also carried out
17 and coach services were also used to take officers to go
18 to the scene so that they can work on shifts. That's
19 also to make sure that the rescue operations can
20 continue without any gaps.

21 Another summary. In terms of damage and also
22 casualties and fatalities, at the scene a total of 924
23 flats were affected by the fire. There were 79 people
24 who were injured and they were sent to the hospitals and
25 72 were sent by ambulances and six were able to go to
26

1 the hospital on their own and 168 people died. So they
2 lost their lives. One was a frontline fireman. 115
3 were rescued by FSD people and some 250 residents were
4 evacuated by the police or FSD personnel.

5 On the cause of fire, within the terms of reference
6 this time, first we had to find out the cause of fire
7 and we used a lot of scientific tests and scientific
8 evidence to find out the -- where the fire started.
9 That's on the platform of flats 104 and 105 at Wang
10 Cheong House.

11 Secondly is about the cause of fire. In the course
12 of our investigation, with regard to the evidence we
13 have collected and also the testimony by the witnesses,
14 we also conducted tests on different materials. We have
15 also ruled out some of the artificial factors and also
16 power installations damage causing the fire to break
17 out.

18 At the scene they also used Towngas and we have also
19 tested the centralised gas tubes to make sure that it
20 was not the cause of fire. We will be referring to
21 Dr Lee from the Government Laboratory who will also be
22 elaborating more on this as to the cause of fire. As I
23 said just now, on the scaffolding many materials were
24 used, including the scaffolding net and also the bamboo
25 sticks, canvas and also styrofoam panels and also the --
26

1 at the access points they were also using some of the
2 corrugated plastic boards and so on. On different
3 materials, on the fire-retardantness and also the
4 combustibility and so on, we conducted tests and later
5 on we will be acting Mr Lee to explain further to you
6 about these materials.

7 With regard to our terms of reference, on the spread
8 of fire, we also conducted different analyses on the
9 rapid spread of fire because of the chimney effect
10 within the light well and also it started on the 1st
11 floor. Within a matter of minutes it already spread
12 very rapidly.

13 Secondly is about the fire spread or spreading from
14 the facade and how it spread to inside the units and as
15 a result it also burned from inside. And also the
16 secondary ignition, that's in between the blocks,
17 because of the flaming droplets and also the embers
18 through the scaffolding and also the nets, we had the
19 secondary ignition. So mainly we used a computational
20 fluid dynamics simulation and also we have also built
21 a real fire test on site simulating the layout of
22 Wang Fuk Court to find out what exactly happened and how
23 that fire spread. So later on we will be referring to
24 Dr Lee and also Dr To who will also be explaining to you
25 the details.

1 Finally, we will be analysing the reason and also
2 the circumstances leading to heavy casualties. So we
3 will leave it to the leader of the IFITF, who will be
4 explaining to you how on different floors in different
5 blocks at different locations why there were casualties.
6 He would also be making a conclusion to that.

7 That concludes my evidence today.

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: Mr Lam, may I trouble you to assist us in
9 several areas. If you look at the final investigation
10 report, page 19 of the report.

11 If you look at paragraph 4.1.2, Wang Fuk Court is an
12 HOS housing estate. In terms of building structure, it
13 is not regulated by the Buildings Ordinance. In
14 designing HOS buildings, the Housing Authority has made
15 reference to the then prevailing ordinances as well as
16 the relevant practical directions issued by the Building
17 Authority.

18 Given that the design of Wang Fuk Court is not
19 subject to the regulation of the Buildings Ordinance,
20 that is subject to the then prevailing ordinances. On
21 that basis, our experts in the expert report dated
22 15 June mentioned the following. If you refer to
23 document 2241. ER3/2241.

24 Paragraphs 5.3.5, 5.3.6 and 5.3.7, all the way down
25 to point 8 in the table, "Staircase door lobby". It
26

1 stipulates that subject to the then prevailing
2 directions, Wang Fuk Court is largely in compliance with
3 the then prevailing requirements. But there is a
4 remark. The relevant requirement is that there must be
5 a staircase door lobby between the staircase and the
6 corridor. Item 8, the comment is that between the lift
7 lobby and the staircase there was a requirement that
8 there must be two doors between the areas. But in
9 Wang Fuk Court there is only one door separating the
10 two.

11 First of all, concerning the then requirements of
12 having two doors between the two areas, do you agree?

13 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes, we do.

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: Now, in Wang Fuk Court, if there were two
15 doors between the two areas, as the experts have
16 mentioned smoke entered through the temporary accesses,
17 so it wouldn't make a large difference, even if there
18 were two doors; do you agree?

19 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes, we do.

20 MR VICTOR DAWES: If the smoke did not enter through the
21 temporary accesses, according to the then requirements
22 for HOS housing estates, there was a purpose behind the
23 requirement that there must be two doors and it seems
24 that the then design of Wang Fuk Court was not in
25 compliance with the prevailing requirements.

1 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Allow me to supplement. A task force
2 comprised the Housing Authority and the Buildings
3 Department. Wang Fuk Court layout was submitted in
4 1980s. It followed the 1976 MOE code. So a task force
5 view is that Wang Fuk Court was in compliance with the
6 then requirement. Besides, at the code of practice
7 requirements, I believe that the Building Authority has
8 also issued other circular letters for the industry to
9 follow. We did not study those circulars. However,
10 according to the relevant departments, their opinion is
11 that the design was in compliance with the then
12 requirement.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: But you did not consider the relevant
14 circulars and codes of practice?

15 MR LAM KIN KWAN: We did not.

16 MR VICTOR DAWES: Another area requiring your assistance.
17 Light well played a key role in the fire and very often
18 light wells are located right next to the kitchens in
19 the flats. So on many occasions fire entered the flats
20 in Wang Fuk Court through the kitchen. In terms of
21 building design, the Fire Services Department has fire
22 safety standard for the fire resistance of the door.

23 Some flats have been modified. What is the impact
24 on the fire?

25 MR LAM KIN KWAN: After the fire, we have investigated all
26

1 the buildings and have taken photographs. However,
2 concerning modifications to individual flats, that is
3 not our main mission. Whether there was modification or
4 not, in this ultra-scale fire, it seemed that it
5 wouldn't make a large difference. That's why we did not
6 conduct analysis on the modification to the kitchen door
7 in individual flats.

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: If you refer to item 7 in the table, it
9 says many kitchen doors have been replaced by non-FR
10 doors or left open during the fire. Based on your
11 previous answer, you have not conducted analysis on the
12 individual kitchen doors in the flats, but have you
13 noticed this situation during your investigation?

14 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes, we have.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: But your conclusion is that it is not
16 a major factor behind the fire?

17 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Fire did not just enter through kitchen
18 but through other locations in the flats as well.
19 That's the temporary accesses in the staircases. And
20 also there were a large amount of combustible items in
21 the light well, so we believe that these are more major
22 factors leading to the fire and the massive casualties.

23 MR VICTOR DAWES: Moving on to another area, if you look at
24 the final report, ER1/26, paragraph 4.3.2, it says that
25 according to the code of practice there was no
26

1 requirement for fire resistance for the windows in the
2 staircase in Wang Fuk Court. So the window glass panels
3 in the flats and in the staircases are not
4 fire resistant?

5 MR LAM KIN KWAN: There was no fire-retardant design.

6 However, it said wide glass. Back then, for most
7 housing estates, wired glasses have been adopted for a
8 lot of buildings. When these wired glasses are burned,
9 the glass panels would not fall off. The wire would
10 hold the glass panels in position even if they were
11 burned.

12 In the industry, these wired glass panels have
13 a fire resistance period of 45 minutes.

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: Some of the windows can be opened on the
15 top for ventilation purpose. Is that in compliance with
16 the then law?

17 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes.

18 MR VICTOR DAWES: On the very day of the fire, the window at
19 the staircase at the lobby, if you look at the
20 photograph on ER1/23 -- we have looked at these
21 photographs before, these are windows which can be
22 opened for ventilation purpose. That's the lift lobby
23 window. For the windows in staircases, one of the minor
24 works projects in the building maintenance project is to
25 replace the glass panel with fire-retardant panels.

26

1 Page 29 of the same document, 4.5.5.4, this has been
2 mentioned. Every five floors there is a temporary
3 access concerning the replacement of the glass panels,
4 if you look at page 24. It says "Photo 4-3 ...
5 Staircase Window (Photo Taken After the Fire)".

6 Besides converting the windows to temporary
7 accesses, can you tell us, according to your
8 investigation, on the day of the fire, the staircase
9 windows, have they all been replaced with fire-retardant
10 window panels?

11 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes, that's according to our observation.

12 MR VICTOR DAWES: So besides the temporary accesses on every
13 five levels, all the other panels have been replaced
14 with fire-retardant panels?

15 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Allow me to supplement here. For the
16 lower floors, some fire-retardant panels were broken.
17 They were not damaged because of the fire. They were
18 broken by firefighters to fan the smoke.

19 MR VICTOR DAWES: Thank you. Now, besides actively breaking
20 the window panels by the firefighter, were other
21 fire-retardant glass panels damaged by the fire?

22 MR LAM KIN KWAN: None, to our understanding.

23 MR VICTOR DAWES: You said that some panels were broken to
24 vent the smoke. Can you explain more? What was the
25 purpose of doing this and when was this done?

26

1 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Normally speaking, when the staircase is
2 engulfed with smoke and when firefighters could not
3 proceed, that's the case for the lower floors. The fire
4 has been extinguished so we would break open those glass
5 panels to vent the smoke.

6 These fire-retardant windows cannot be opened so we
7 broke them to vent the smoke and enhance the visibility
8 for us to conduct our rescue work.

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: Concerning the seat of the fire, the start
10 of the fire as well as the spread, ER1/40, chapter 5.1,
11 "Discovery of Fire" and how it started. 5.1.3, you have
12 considered the statements from various witnesses. The
13 first report of fire was received at 14:51. However,
14 there were some discrepancies between the witnesses.
15 You said the fire was discovered between 14:30 and
16 14:48. If you look at the eight calls made, the
17 earliest discovery of the fire -- the earliest report
18 was made from Mr Yip Fai. However, number 7 witness,
19 Ms Suen, she said the fire was discovered at about
20 14:30. If you look at her statement, that's ER2-1/574,
21 according to Ms Suen's statement, she lives in flat 2102
22 of Wang Cheong House. An elderly lady knocked on her
23 door saying she smelled smoke. We have reason to
24 believe that the time reported was incorrect. She lives
25 on the 21st floor. Also her flat is not in the
26

1 direction of the fire. So 14:20 is just the approximate
2 time. So the timing from other reports would be more
3 accurate than Ms Suen's statement.

4 Going back to the previous table, witnesses 1 to 6,
5 those were construction workers working on the
6 scaffolding. We have played some CCTV footages before.
7 It was around 14:45 when they first discovered a fire.
8 In other words, am I correct to understand that the
9 timing when the fire starts was very important, so 14:43
10 should be the time.

11 MR LAM KIN KWAN: We have decided that 14:43 was the time
12 the fire started because we found some embers on the
13 bicycle parking space, so we presume that the fire had
14 started before 14:43.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: If you look at page 41 of the same report,
16 paragraph 5.1.7, please read the paragraph briefly.

17 MR LAM KIN KWAN: That's when we received the first report.
18 That's 14:51.

19 MR VICTOR DAWES: Now, if a report is made between 14:30 and
20 14:48, then the Fire Services Department could have
21 handled the fire more effectively and earlier. If
22 a call had been received a few minutes earlier, it would
23 critically affect the efficiency of the firefighting
24 mission as well as the survivability of the residents.
25 So the earlier you get the report, the earlier you can
26

1 deploy the fire trucks and take actions earlier.

2 But can you tell this. Even if you had received the
3 report earlier, at 14:55, through 999, if you had been
4 notified a few minutes earlier, what would be the
5 difference? Would there be a huge difference? Can you
6 clarify on this?

7 MR LAM KIN KWAN: There are a number of factors at play. At
8 the last few minutes, from the 4th to 8th floors and the
9 rooftop, the fire spread within a span of a few minutes,
10 according to the PowerPoint. Now, it was the
11 smouldering effect. Before a large amount of
12 construction materials had caught fire on the 1st floor
13 of the light well, before the spread of the fire, if we
14 could have arrived at the scene earlier, we could have
15 done better.

16 MR VICTOR DAWES: But can you explain the concept of
17 smouldering in the first few minutes? Can you explain
18 to us what that's like and how did it affect the
19 development of the fire?

20 MR LAM KIN KWAN: I will defer to Dr Lee for more
21 explanation. I will just explain the situation briefly.
22 We believe it was -- the fire was caused by a lighted
23 cigarette butt. Some sundry items had caught fire and
24 there was a smouldering effect. Heat began to build up.
25 If there were not a large amount of combustible items on
26

1 the rooftop, the fire might not have developed so
2 quickly.

3 So according to the table just now, within a matter
4 of four minutes' time, fire had spread from the 4th to
5 8th floor.

6 MR VICTOR DAWES: Just a moment, please. ER5/2596. That's
7 the slide you are referring to?

8 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes. At 2.43 there were only some embers
9 or flames. At 2.51 the fire began to develop. But it
10 was in the subsequent minutes when the fire developed
11 quickly. At 2.55 it reached the 4th floor and then in
12 two minutes' time it reached the 8th floor and it only
13 took one minute to reach the 31st floor. It was an
14 exponential accumulation of heat rather than a linear
15 one.

16 MR VICTOR DAWES: Is this understanding correct: so if you
17 became aware of this a couple of minutes earlier, you
18 could have made preparation and you could have stopped
19 the fire developing?

20 MR LAM KIN KWAN: It might help.

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: Thank you. Yes. Chapter 2 analyses the
22 fire spread. Perhaps you might wish to help us.
23 Wang Cheong and Wang Tai Houses, the fire spread to
24 other blocks. I will be playing some clips to jog your
25 memory. If you feel disturbed, please bear with us.

26

1 ER1/60, 5.2.4.1. According to the evidence of the
2 frontline officers, between 15:20 and 16:04 it spread to
3 Wang Shing, Wang Sun, Wang Tao and Wang Yan Houses.
4 That's the timetable.

5 Perhaps you can help us. Under what circumstances
6 would you say that the fire has spread to other blocks?

7 I would like to have a consensus here. There is
8 information to show that Wang Shing and Wang Kin or
9 Wang Sun, perhaps earlier there were some embers
10 drifting over there, ie 15:10.

11 This photo, Mr Chan Chuen took this photo at 15:09.
12 On Day 4 of the Committee we examined this situation.
13 On the left-hand side, there are some sparks on the
14 left-hand side of the block. So was it 15:20 or
15 10 minutes earlier that the fire started. For the fire
16 to be spread, can you tell us the standard, the
17 criteria?

18 MR LAM KIN KWAN: On the scene there is a lot of different
19 information. First we saw embers happening there.
20 There are different embers drifting all over the place.
21 It was east to southeasterly wind at that time.
22 Wang Cheong House is situated to the east. A lot of
23 embers were drifting. Some drifted to the FR scaffold
24 nets and they self-extinguished. We can call this the
25 spread. We had regard to the frontline officers who
26

1 were monitoring the fire and we decided on the time that
2 the fire spread.

3 MR VICTOR DAWES: In other words, if you look at this photo,
4 on the left-hand side some nets are catching fire. In
5 your definition, would you say that the fire has spread?

6 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes. To Wang Shing House.

7 MR VICTOR DAWES: So you base on the frontline officers?

8 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Yes.

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: At that time, there was a lot of evidence.
10 You may not be able to tell us whether the frontline
11 officers consider a certain photo or whatever. We try
12 our best to consider the situation.

13 There was a footage, A2, part 1, 21, Wang Shing
14 House CCTV footage from the rooftop. Bear with us.
15 It's being loaded.

16 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Part 20 or 21?

17 MR VICTOR DAWES: 21. There seem to be some glitches in the
18 computer. We need some time. Perhaps we take a break
19 for a couple of minutes.

20 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Let us know when you're
21 ready.

22 (12.26 pm)

23 (A short adjournment)

24 (12.40 pm)

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: Yes, Mr Lam. Just now we were inviting
26

1 you to look at a footage from the rooftop of Wang Sun
2 House. We can see that at 15:12. Okay. Let's take
3 a look.

4 (Video played)

5 According to what you just said, when we saw the
6 embers flying around, so you might not think that fire
7 had already spread to this block.

8 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Okay.

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: This is what happened at Wang Sun House.

10 Okay. Next, let's take a look at another file;
11 that's provided by a resident of Wang Kin House at
12 15:20. That's when the fire broke out.

13 (Video played)

14 VIDEO RECORDING: Speaker 1: Do we need to escape?

15 Speaker 2: I don't think so, because we are so far
16 away from the block there.

17 MR VICTOR DAWES: Let's look at this frame. We can see that
18 the fire already broke out. That's what happened at
19 15:20. I understand there were different pieces of
20 information available, but then if you look at the
21 footage here, in terms of deciding on when it spread to
22 the other blocks, you might need to make some
23 modifications; right?

24 MR LAM KIN KWAN: Well, when we talk about the timeline
25 here, we were sure when the fire already spread. And
26

1 then when we received other pieces of information, we
2 could only say that in terms of the fire spread, there
3 is different evidence to show indeed when the fire broke
4 out in other blocks. But then definitely that would not
5 be later than the time that we just said.

6 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: This is --

7 MR VICTOR DAWES: This is Wang Kin House at 15:20.

8 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: So what's the reference here?

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: A2, part 1, number 22.

10 Thank you, Mr Lam. I don't have further questions.

11 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: What about other parties, do
12 you have questions to put to Mr Lam?

13 If none, there is no re-examination. Okay. Thank
14 you, Mr Lam.

15 (The witness was released)

16 (12.43 pm)

17 MR VICTOR DAWES: Chairman, another witness is Dr Lee Wing
18 Man.

19 Good afternoon. Like other witnesses, please read
20 out the declaration.

21 (12.44 pm)

22 DR LEE WING MAN (affirmed)

23 MR VICTOR DAWES: Thank you. Please be seated. Let's deal
24 with some of the basic issues. Before we proceed to
25 your investigation report, we understand that you are

26

1 the chief chemist from the Forensic Science Division of
2 the Government Laboratory and I understand that the
3 information that you provided -- you joined the
4 Government in 1998, so you were the chemist at the
5 Forensic Science Division of the Government Laboratory,
6 and on different occasions you testified as an expert to
7 assist the committee or the court in looking into
8 certain cases.

9 On this occasion, before the fire, can you tell us
10 what your experience was?

11 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, after joining the Government
12 Laboratory, starting from 2003 I started investigating
13 into fires, and therefore within -- well, I had
14 accumulated more than 10 years' experience in terms of
15 fire investigation, and after 2005 I went to Edinburgh
16 University to join fire investigation and relevant
17 training, and in 2019 and 2024 I also received some
18 exchanges and further training in the mainland.

19 MR VICTOR DAWES: With regard to the Inter-departmental Fire
20 Investigation Task Force, I understand that you were
21 involved in the work, so can you tell us your role in
22 that task force?

23 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, the Government Laboratory, on the
24 request by the police and also the task force, we got
25 involved in the investigation of the fire. With regard
26

1 to my role, that's about the cause of the fire. At the
2 scene, if certain materials needed to be tested, they
3 would be handed over to the Government Laboratory for me
4 to test them.

5 With regard to the cause of fire investigation,
6 that's on the basis of my observation at the scene,
7 including the burning marks and also the soot and
8 we would find out where it started, and on the scene
9 we would also carry out some excavation to identify
10 whether or not something might have been left over to
11 find out what exactly had happened before the start of
12 the fire.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: We understand that after the fire you
14 submitted more than 10 witness statements to the police,
15 including one on the analysis of the cause of fire, and
16 then six would be on the scaffolding nets and also test
17 results, and also two would have to do with polystyrene
18 boards and also the planks tests, and they were accurate
19 results; right?

20 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: And you are going to tell us the content
22 of chapter 6, cause of fire, of the report, and also at
23 the site you also collected some materials. You'd like
24 to explain to us the special properties of those
25 materials. So would you like to start with your
26

1 briefing or would you like to wait until after lunch?

2 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: I think it's better for us to
3 start after lunch so that we can do it in one go because
4 we don't want to interrupt her in the middle of her
5 briefing.

6 We will start at 2.15, so we should have enough
7 time; right?

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: Yes.

9 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Thank you. We will resume at
10 2.15.

11 (12.48 pm)

12 (The luncheon adjournment)

13 (2.15 pm)

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: Dr Lee, your presentation is at page 43 of
15 the document. Please begin your presentation.

16 DR LEE WING MAN: I will now present my report on the
17 investigation results. The topics include the cause of
18 fire and examination of temporary protective materials
19 found at the scene. I published a series of reports,
20 and those in relation to the cause of fire is included
21 in the report dated 29 December 2025.

22 As shown on this slide, from left to right, that's
23 the scenario anticlockwise to Wang Cheong House. The
24 seat of the fire is on the flat roof of no. 4 and 5
25 light wells in Wang Cheong House. The scaffoldings in
26

1 flats 2 and 3 are still here but on some parts even the
2 concrete has spalled, for example, flats 4 and 5.

3 We have observed that at three light well locations,
4 the damage was particularly severe. Mr Lam has
5 explained the layout of the light well. This is the
6 front entrance of Wang Cheong House. It is between
7 flats 1 and 8 as shown by the red dot on the screen.
8 That's the front entrance to Wang Cheong House.

9 This is the light well's flat roof. This is the
10 front entrance. Right on top, on the 1st floor, that's
11 the light well flat roof between flats 1 and 8. There
12 is a metal gate or grille for security reason. On that
13 side of the metal grille there is a gate. It is burned
14 to a degree that there is rust.

15 Now, on the other hand, light wells between flats 2
16 and 3, despite the collapsed scaffolding, we can still
17 see that there are some -- there's some white paint on
18 the metal grille.

19 During the fire, the white paint would have been
20 burnt away and the metal would have been exposed and
21 become rusty. Further burning would cause it to bend
22 and also the concrete would spall because of the heat.
23 If you compare the situation of the light well between
24 flats 2 and 3, it is rather unaffected.

25 The flat roof between flats 1 and 8 and 4 and 5,
26

1 from the photo you can see which one is the most heavily
2 and most seriously damaged.

3 That is the metal grille between flats 4 and 5. The
4 metal grille has deformed.

5 On the left it is flat 5 and on the right-hand side
6 is flat 4.

7 Closer to flat 5, the metal grille is more deformed
8 and also there is more collapsed concrete. It aligns
9 with the theory that the seat of the fire is on the flat
10 roof of flats 4 and 5.

11 The screen shows the view of the surrounding areas
12 of flat roof 4 and 5. There are a lot of fallen bamboo
13 sticks. There are also construction materials that
14 include the area I'm pointing with the red dot.

15 The right-bottom-corner photo, if you zoom in, they
16 are boxes of mosaic tiles.

17 On the left-hand side we can see the plastering
18 materials. If you zoom in, it is on the top right-hand
19 corner. The collapsed items include not just the bamboo
20 but also the toe-boards in orange, and foam boards and
21 there are bits and pieces of green materials. That's
22 the torn safety nets.

23 If you look upward from the light well, here, in the
24 middle, it is flat 05, the facade of 05. The window
25 closest to the light well is actually the living room
26

1 window of 05. Further along here, it is the -- these
2 are the windows of the bedrooms of 05.

3 The closer it is to the light well, the more serious
4 the concrete spalling. If you look upwards, there is
5 concrete spalling but there is no mosaic tile until the
6 4th floor.

7 Here, you zoom in. Here on the left we can see some
8 mosaic tiles boxes. The boxes might have been burned
9 down. Further up to the 5th floor, on the top left-hand
10 corner you can see that the mosaic tiles have been
11 paved. The paper is still there. So from the ground
12 floor to the 5th floor, this area, the mosaic tiling was
13 actually going on. I think it was up to level 5. You
14 can see the extent of the damage. Closer to 05 there is
15 some concrete spalling which is pretty serious.

16 Under the light well, it is the rear entrance of
17 Wang Cheong House. This is leading to one of the
18 scissor staircases. Next to it is the parking area for
19 bicycles. Here, from this photo, we can see the wall
20 there, the paint remains intact. Near the light well,
21 bottom left-hand corner, near the light well there is
22 very serious concrete spalling. It corroborates with
23 the fact that the fire started there first.

24 Further in -- we're not sure whether the fire spread
25 out from further in, so we conducted further
26

1 investigation. This is the layout plan. This is the
2 light well, this space there, it's like a trapezium or
3 triangle without the tip. It is surrounded by the
4 concrete wall of 105 and 104. The only place for
5 ventilation is where the gate is.

6 To go into this light well area, it is through the
7 kitchens of 105 and 104, that's the opening on to the
8 light well. On the scissor staircases there is also
9 a window opening into the light well area. You can see
10 the light well from that window and this is what we call
11 the re-entrant. That's in between the two kitchens. So
12 it's like the tail of an arrow, this tiny little space
13 is the re-entrant area.

14 So 105, going to 104, you have to go via a U-shaped
15 corridor. Let's go into 105. That's an aerial view.
16 You can see the window there. It is warped. The area
17 indicated, there is concrete spalling here as well.

18 Flat 104, from the living room, looking at the
19 kitchen and also the main door, the left-hand side is
20 the kitchen entrance, the right-hand side is the
21 entrance to the unit. We can see that the frame of the
22 door has become warped as a result of the burning. If
23 you look at the main door, some of the areas have been
24 burned down. The photo on the right-hand side, the blue
25 dotted lines, that's the frame that has been burned
26

1 away. So this area suffers more burning than the other
2 side. So the fire is actually spreading all the way
3 from the kitchen.

4 Let's go into the kitchen of 104. The window is
5 opening on to the light well 04/05. If you look at the
6 window, I mentioned the seriously burned part but still,
7 you can see some tiles attaching. Outside it's more
8 serious, the burning is more serious than the inside.

9 105, similar observation there. And 105 suffers
10 more serious burning than 104. That's the window, near
11 the foyer, more serious than 104.

12 As I said, in 105 there is a window next to the
13 light well. This is the window. As you can see, part
14 of the window has been burned and become warped, so it
15 shows that the fire spread from outside in. So we can
16 rule out the possibility of the fire spreading from 104
17 and 105 outwards. So the investigation focuses on
18 Wang Cheong House.

19 We go in, we can see that the top has been burned
20 severely. This is the U-shaped corridor. On the
21 right-hand side it's closer to 104/103, that end there.
22 This is the end and there is a smoke stop door leading
23 the escape staircase. This is 105/106. Again there is
24 a smoke stop door.

25 As we can see, this is completely charred so the
26

1 smoke has been spreading here, charring the entire
2 corridor. This is 104, outside 104, up there 105. So
3 outside 105, other than being charred, there is concrete
4 spalling from the ceiling caused by the fire; 105
5 suffered from more serious burn.

6 There are two smoke stop doors. For these doors, on
7 the right-hand side we can see that closer to 105, the
8 top area has been charred. Near the staircases it is
9 pretty much intact. The vast difference means that this
10 smoke door was actually shut, protecting the escape
11 staircase. So you can see there is no charred marks on
12 that staircase. Same situation with 104.

13 This is the means of escape, and there is
14 a transparent diagram to make it easier to understand.
15 Wang Cheong House, 04/05, at the bottom is the rear
16 entrance leading to one of the scissor staircases. On
17 the 1st floor it is close to 05 and second floor, close
18 to 04, and on it goes along the green part.

19 Here is the front staircase, the grey one, taking
20 people to 104, 105, and on it goes.

21 You can see a window that we discussed a moment ago
22 near the light well. This is the light well, 04/05.
23 Here you can see the window frames until 05. There are
24 no window frames. You can see the two concrete walls as
25 the concrete wall separating the two staircases. It is
26

1 charred. It is pitch dark inside.

2 The left-hand side is walking up on the green
3 staircases from the 3rd to the 4th floor. You see this
4 window. Not much charring by the smoke although the
5 window has been broken.

6 As you progress further to the 5th and 6th floor,
7 you see the charring there. The window is missing. You
8 can still see the wooden slat.

9 Looking from another angle, you can still see the
10 wooden slat there. Here in the middle, this is the 6th
11 floor looking down to the 5th floor. This is the area
12 where there is a window but up there the ceiling is not
13 just charred by the smoke but also subject to intense
14 heat. So not only did the smoke penetrate, the heat
15 also was really intense.

16 The same situation further up. So it is pitch
17 black. So is it possible that the smoke went in from
18 the staircase? In fact, the smoke door was shut. Here
19 in the middle, looking from the staircase to the door,
20 if you go to 104, here, this is the hinge of the smoke
21 door. Now, looking at the hinges, it is charred by
22 smoke but the hinges seem to be intact. So when the
23 door was shut, the smoke couldn't go in so it is still
24 clean there, so it shows the smoke door was actually
25 shut.

26

1 Over to 104, the smoke door and the staircases,
2 similar observation.

3 So we can confirm that the fire didn't spread from
4 inside out. So it was actually the light well at 04/05
5 that the fire spread. So we gathered more information,
6 more evidence there. In the course of burning, for a
7 fire to burn you need the fuel and the heat and the
8 oxygen.

9 As the fire spreads, things collapsed from above and
10 the things down there were protected by the collapsed
11 materials. So it was like archeological excavation, we
12 managed to find some of the materials there protected by
13 the fallen objects. So we were trying to ascertain what
14 actually happened in that space.

15 Here on the screen, the blue box, we found these
16 materials on the left. These are the plastic boards,
17 9mm foam boards. Here, from this area, we found what
18 I call a rubbish bag because inside the bag there were a
19 lot of mosaic tiles and the backing paper was torn and
20 it was put inside this bag. So we found this rubbish
21 bag there.

22 I omitted to say that this pitch black area, sitting
23 here, 04/05 light well looking out from the gate. So on
24 the right-hand side, here, it is close to flat 105 and
25 here, this is closer to 104. And 105, this space, when
26

1 we did the excavation we found a lot of carton paper and
2 some of the mosaic tiles were put there as well.

3 Let's go back to the layout plan of the light well
4 and summarise what we find from the excavation.

5 These brown squares show that there were some boxes
6 of mosaic tiles there, put there. The grey area is the
7 seat of the fire. That's where we found a lot of carton
8 paper. Rubbish bag contained backing paper and mosaic
9 tiles was found here. Foam boards, here. These are the
10 fuel for the fire. It may not be relevant to the fire
11 but I must point out in the middle area we found some
12 tools, the trowel for the wall, and there is a drinking
13 bottle, a number of drinking cans and some disposable
14 utensils here as well.

15 It is really a horrendous condition. We found two
16 cigarette butts. One around here, at the bottom here.
17 We are standing in the middle, looking at the wall, at
18 104, here. Let's zoom in a little bit. This white bit
19 is actually a cigarette butt. Here between the kitchens
20 further out, in this space we saw another cigarette
21 butt. We are taking a photo of that. We zoom in and we
22 find that this white bit here is also a cigarette butt.
23 So on the podium we found all these items to show what
24 activities could have been taking place there.

25 We did excavation. We found what we found and there
26

1 were also materials and the ashes that were taken to the
2 Government Laboratory for examination in order to find
3 out whether there are any accelerants or whether it
4 could have been arson. We dug all the way to the floor
5 boards. We didn't find any combustible liquid that
6 caused that, but in the lab we couldn't find any
7 flammable liquid or traces of flammable liquids there.

8 We dug up the area. We don't have any direct
9 evidence to pinpoint the exact cause, but from the
10 scene, from the surroundings, we found a number of
11 things. The seat of fire was actually the light well
12 area. This is an area inaccessible to ordinary folks.
13 Probably it was where the workers go to.

14 From the outside or from the wall or from the podium
15 we see that in the light well the mosaic tiling was
16 going on there and that wouldn't cause any source of
17 fire. As Mr Lam said, we rule out any possibility of
18 any electrical problems. We found a lot of carton boxes
19 and carton paper. We found cigarette butts and we ruled
20 out the possibility of any source of fire at work and we
21 found here, another podium, the cigarette butts there.

22 Whether or not cigarette ends will start the fire in
23 the surrounding area, because there are a lot of paper
24 materials here, and such paper materials could also
25 generate smoulder. This morning we also discussed at
26

1 length as to what what's meant by "smoulder". In fact
2 it's a fire without actually seeing naked fire. So it's
3 like going for barbecue and then when you start the
4 fire, the coal might turn red, yet you might not see any
5 naked fire at first but then, once you see the redness,
6 that means it's already starting to burn.

7 So sometimes you can see that -- without anybody
8 noticing, the smoulder could continue for a while, until
9 when there's wind blowing. Then it could become flame
10 and start burning. Then if there are combustible or
11 ignitable materials nearby, then it could start the fire
12 growing.

13 As I said, we didn't find any ignitable liquid
14 residues in the area but then we kept going back to
15 locate or look for things. So we managed to find this
16 cigarette end here, and at the same time I also found
17 a cigarette end that was burning, that must have been
18 burnt rather seriously, so the cigarette end was found
19 here. So other than the on-site investigation, we also
20 checked some video footage that was shorter in the
21 inception stage, and we discuss those video clips.
22 That's near the back door of Wang Cheong House. That's
23 near the bicycle park.

24 So at around 2.40-something, on the upper right-hand
25 side we can see a lot of flaming droplets. That's near
26

1 the 04/05 light well. That's the flaming droplets that
2 were seen. One of the footages show initially that when
3 residents noticed the fire started at Wang Cheong House,
4 you can see vaguely that on the right-hand side, within
5 the blue box area, so that's where the bicycle lot was,
6 and this also coincides with the footage showing the
7 bicycle lot. This is also close to 105. The flames
8 were rather obvious. And then for the green safety
9 nets, the damage was rather serious, and that also
10 coincided with what we observed on site.

11 Then another footage for reference is just now we
12 were discussing that within a very short space of time
13 the fire spread very rapidly vertically. So this is a
14 very simple diagram to show how the chimney effect
15 worked. So you can see that there is a fire starting
16 here, and then the smoke would go up and they would also
17 need to be fueled by air. So it's concrete all over but
18 then you can see that one of the areas where there can
19 be wind going in, and that's where the metal fence was,
20 so the hot air and fire would be boosted and it went up
21 very quickly.

22 So from here you can also see a lot of falling
23 objects. There are several things I'd like to
24 highlight. The bamboo sticks falling down, that's very
25 common because you can see them all over the place.

1 Other than the bamboo sticks, in fact what you can see
2 here at the higher part, that is where I'm pointing
3 here, so the shape is not a common panel. If you've
4 been looking at the footage, you'd see that it looks
5 more like a carton box. So that is one of the things
6 that we noticed.

7 Also look at the red circle here. There's no point
8 zooming in here because when you look at the footage,
9 it's not falling down vertically. In fact, it's from
10 this area and then it fell down very slowly. So it
11 moved very slowly and then it dropped vertically, and
12 then that's where I capture where it was. So it's
13 flaming and it's floating, so it's rather light in
14 weight and then it can be moved by wind so most likely
15 it's something like a styrofoam material that can be
16 found on site.

17 Finally, about the inception stage of the fire from
18 one of the footages. So you can see that the carton
19 boxes were falling. So where were they from? If you
20 look at the middle part, that's at around the 10th floor
21 of Wang Cheong House. That's flat 05. This is close to
22 flat 04. So it's around the 10th floor and that's what
23 the footage show. That's the catch fans. Then you can
24 see the safety net. You can vaguely see inside. Then
25 on the right-hand side, if you zoom in, you will be able
26

1 to see a lot of materials have been stacked up. So
2 looking in, I'd say that they must be carton boxes.

3 Then if you look at the area within the red lines,
4 the red box here, I don't know if you can see it clearly
5 here, we can zoom in further. You can see that it's the
6 shape of a carton box. So within Wang Cheong House, in
7 the work space here, a lot of miscellaneous items have
8 been placed there, including the carton boxes that were
9 used to store the mosaic tile backing papers, so they
10 could be ignited rather easily.

11 After completing my explanation on the cause of
12 fire, let me also share with you the test on the
13 temporary protective materials.

14 So you can see that there are many temporary
15 protective materials that Mr Lam mentioned this morning.
16 On the left-most side you can see at Wang Chi House in,
17 one of the light wells, in the centre, you have Wang
18 Shing House. We took these pictures on one of the
19 working platforms. And then this is what we saw in the
20 footage during the inception stage of the fire.

21 I've brought with me some samples and if chairman
22 and members would like to take a look, you can also take
23 it here. What can be easily found is the safety net
24 that is used everywhere in the court. I'm pointing to
25 the area in 1. Other than the safety nets you can also
26

1 see what number 3 is pointing at. So on the platform
2 they use this green canvas to enable them to have
3 something slide down from that because they roll it up
4 like a pipe.

5 And then there is another group of materials on the
6 working platforms. This is what we saw at Wang Cheong
7 initially. So what you saw immediately would be the
8 construction materials, but then very often they would
9 also have green canvas covering up those materials. So
10 initially you can see that it's green all over and
11 therefore it must be canvas. So this is the green
12 canvas that they use there.

13 And also on the working platform, in fact what's
14 used to surround the working platform, you can also see
15 the blue and white canvas. That's around the platform.
16 It's used to surround the entire building. So this is
17 the white/blue canvas.

18 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Legal representatives, do you
19 need to take a look as well?

20 DR LEE WING MAN: During the inception stage of the fire, if
21 we zoom in to the footage here, on the right-hand side
22 you can see the red area. That's the zoom-in footage.
23 You can also see the white/blue/white so it must be the
24 white/blue canvas. So such a canvas and nets -- such
25 materials, I define them as woven materials. And then,
26

1 when I took them back to the laboratory for testing, I'd
2 like to find out what they are composed of. Then what
3 I tried to look at, if there is a small seat of fire,
4 within a very short space of time what is going to
5 happen. For example, if a carton box is ignited, then
6 it could self-extinguish very quickly, and therefore I'd
7 like to find out whether or not it would exacerbate the
8 situation or whether or not it would self-extinguish.

9 So I adopt the approach of GB/T 5455 to conduct the
10 test. Why did I use that approach? In fact, this
11 method, you can see that is GB 5725, it mentions this
12 method. It's about safety nets. The standard is for
13 the manufacturers of safety net to make sure that the
14 safety nets that they manufacture would be able to meet
15 certain requirements.

16 So you can see that there are defined types of
17 safety nets and also there are specific requirements,
18 for example, whether or not they can resist impact
19 because something might fall on to them and also whether
20 or not it can resist, it's durable, and also whether or
21 not it's able to retard fire. Basically they will have
22 to follow the guideline under 5455 and also, after the
23 testing, both vertically and horizontally the smoulder
24 must not exceed four seconds.

25 So what do we mean by vertical and horizontal?
26

1 Because when it's woven, you have the vertical area and
2 also the horizontal weaving. And therefore, in
3 conducting the test, we would also have to look at it
4 from vertical and horizontal directions.

5 And then once it's manufactured, if the batch can
6 meet the specifications, then for each batch you will
7 also have to take a certain amount of samples for the
8 testing and only when all the samples pass the test will
9 it be treated as up to standard.

10 So I use that method to test these materials. I'd
11 like to find out if there is a small fire or small
12 source of fire igniting such materials how long would it
13 burn and whether or not they are able to meet the
14 standards and whether or not they have got the
15 certificates. But then in the laboratory there were
16 restrictions because when we took samples back to the
17 laboratory for testing, in fact they've been used and
18 they might also have been weathered and they have
19 already been through a fire and therefore their
20 condition might not be as good as when they were first
21 manufactured.

22 Also, when you say a material passes the test, upon
23 manufacturing, you would also have to have
24 representative samples for testing before you can see
25 whether or not it's safe to say they are up to standard
26

1 and therefore the materials that we have on hand might
2 not meet those requirements and therefore this is not
3 very desirable. But then, out of the samples there were
4 also two conditions we have to meet in conducting the
5 tests. These are the parameters. I'm not going to
6 bother you with the details. What I'd like to directly
7 show you is the way we conducted the test. First I will
8 show you a footage on the safety nets test.

9 (Video played)

10 What you can see here on the video, the net is
11 within the testing container to ensure that there would
12 not be any airflow affecting it and also the source of
13 fire would also be fixed. So we have this sample that
14 has been hung vertically here and then we had the
15 ignition and then it has to burn for 12 seconds.
16 We would watch it throughout the 12 seconds and then
17 afterwards the source of fire would be taken away and
18 then we'd see whether or not the smoulder would
19 continue.

20 Okay. As soon as the fire has been taken out, it
21 continues to burn. That's called the continuous
22 burning. You can see that there are flaming droplets
23 dropping down. So that's what we call the flaming
24 droplets.

25 So we don't just stop here. Afterwards, the safety
26

1 net would also have to have five locations whereby
2 we would conduct a test horizontally and vertically and
3 then we would get the average result before we finish
4 with the test. Other than taking samples from the
5 safety nets, in fact, the canvas, whatever the colour
6 is, in fact the performance of the canvas was similar.
7 This is a representative sample. So that's the
8 white/blue canvas. You can immediately that it's placed
9 horizontally, very similar to the way it is placed on
10 the working platform. So the source of fire is fixed,
11 so the source of fire would be moved there.

12 And then as soon as the ignition started, you can
13 see that even when the source of fire has been taken
14 away, it continued to burn, and then it spread to the
15 side and upward. In fact, this is what we see within
16 the testing container. So when the real test is
17 conducted or when a normal test is conducted, that's how
18 it looks. So you can see the reflection on the glass is
19 rather serious and two colleagues were helping with the
20 timer.

21 Okay. You can see that it's like what we did with
22 the last sample. It's the same sample. You are just
23 looking at it from another angle so that you can see it
24 is spread, it's burning upward and basically it's
25 spreading upward and then you can see the flame and
26

1 droplets coming down all the time until the time when
2 it's completely consumed.

3 Similarly, I would also have to say that we have
4 done five times both vertically and horizontally before
5 we completed the test, and the original sample, in fact
6 all the five samples were burned out before the fire
7 stopped. So you can see that other than the sample we
8 looked at, for the other samples apparently there wasn't
9 any continuous flame or ignition.

10 But then for the continuation of the ignition, that
11 continued for more than four seconds. So that's about
12 the material testing.

13 In terms of the material testing, I'm not going to
14 bore you with the technical names. Whatever the colour
15 of the canvas or the -- well, it's plastic and
16 therefore, as long as the source of fire is there, they
17 would continue to burn. But then for canvas, as you can
18 see, it's burning more seriously than the safety nets.

19 And then at the seat of fire you can see the
20 corrugated plastic panel and so on. At Wang Chi House,
21 in the units that were not burned, on the right-hand
22 side you can see what the living room is like. And then
23 here is the bedroom. If you look out you can see the
24 windows were not transparent or not -- it's opaque. In
25 fact, it's been covered. In fact, it's covered by this
26

1 material.

2 Another is this. When we look at this living room,
3 when we look at the living room again, for the area that
4 cannot be seen through, that's where the foam board was.
5 And then here is from the living room. In fact, they
6 have been covered with 2 mm-thick corrugated plastic
7 board. Basically, in terms of the structural thickness,
8 it's very similar to the toe-boards. It's just
9 different in colour.

10 So on site there were also plastic panels to protect
11 the windows or to protect the openings. Other than the
12 styrofoam covers -- after removing the air-conditioners,
13 in fact you can also see the aluminium panels that were
14 used for the access points.

15 So we also made reference to the GB 5545. One would
16 be applicable to this type of materials and we found out
17 that for the orange parts, in fact they could be ignited
18 within seconds and then afterwards they can also spread
19 very quickly upwards. They would also generate a lot of
20 flame and droplets and there is no indication it's going
21 to stop on its own. For example, you can see a lot of
22 foam boards are on site, a lot of toe-boards, a lot of
23 5 mm aluminium composite panels and also some of the
24 thicker composite panels were like this too. Also there
25 were also aluminium composite panels I just referred to

26

1 just now. In fact, they made up predominantly of
2 plastics, so if there is continuous sources of fire,
3 then they will continue to burn.

4 That concludes my report.

5 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Mr Victor Dawes.

6 MR VICTOR DAWES: Your Honour, my question will take half an
7 hour's time. Would you like to take a recess first?

8 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: We will take a five-minute
9 break.

10 (3.00 pm)

11 (A short adjournment)

12 (3.06 pm)

13 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Mr Victor Dawes.

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: Thank you, chairman.

15 Dr Lee, thank you for your briefing. There are
16 several areas in which you could assist us. The seat of
17 the fire is the flat roof on the light well of flats 104
18 and 105 of Wang Cheong House. The reports corroborated
19 this. Near the flat roof of flats 104 and 105 the fire
20 damage was more severe.

21 DR LEE WING MAN: Right.

22 MR VICTOR DAWES: And also the rusted metal grille has
23 deformed.

24 DR LEE WING MAN: Right, it's the one closer to flat 105.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: Please explain to us why can we assume
26

1 that the location where fire damage is serious is also
2 the seat of the fire?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: The counsel is correct. The seriousness
4 of the fire damage also depends on the amount of
5 combustible items nearby. If there were a lot of
6 combustible items, but if that's not the case for the
7 seat of fire, then the burning would be less severe.
8 But the longer the fire sustains, the more severe the
9 damage should be. That's why we assume the fire damage
10 at the seat of fire should be more severe than other
11 locations. That's why we focused our investigation in
12 the area near Wang Cheong House.

13 In this fire, we have a lot of video recordings
14 showing us the condition near the seat of fire but we
15 also investigated whether the fire has spread from
16 within the flats. According to our investigation, the
17 earlier the location has caught fire, the more severe
18 the fire damage would be, because of longer sustained
19 heating.

20 Now, among the three light wells, the one at flat
21 105 has seen the most severe deforming to the metal
22 grille and there was a lot of fallen debris. So that
23 has corroborated with the theory that that was the seat
24 of fire.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: So you have also ruled out that the seat
26

1 of fire is located higher up the building; is that so?

2 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, that's the flat roof of the light
3 well. A lot of initial videos have captured that
4 clearly.

5 MR VICTOR DAWES: You have also mentioned that on the flat
6 roof many combustible items have been found, for
7 example, tools, electric cables or even scaffolding
8 nets. Some combustible items have been covered under
9 the mosaic tiles so that those combustible items have
10 not been burned. Can you explain to us what your
11 observation is concerning that?

12 DR LEE WING MAN: Assuming that the carton boxes caught fire
13 first and then the fire spread upward vertically, then
14 collapsed items would have shielded the objects
15 underneath and during the smouldering, oxygen would have
16 been depleted and then the fire would stop.

17 Having removed the mosaic tiles, we have uncovered
18 some items which have not been burned completely and
19 also we have -- we think we have located the original
20 seat of fire. Most of the safety nets or canvas would
21 deform and melt with heat and reconstitute themselves
22 once the temperature has cooled down.

23 So once the temperature has cooled down, we were
24 able to see the original state of the materials. So
25 that has shown us how the objects were placed originally
26

1 before the fire.

2 MR VICTOR DAWES: Although we cannot identify direct proof
3 scientifically to determine the seat of fire and how the
4 fire started, it seems that we cannot locate an
5 alternative location from the videos other than flat
6 roof 104 and 105 so I believe you have ruled out all the
7 other possibilities.

8 DR LEE WING MAN: We have ruled out the possibility that the
9 fire spread from within.

10 MR VICTOR DAWES: So besides flat roof 104 and 105 you have
11 not identified any other possible seat of fire?

12 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: I know you may not be able to provide an
14 accurate answer to my following question, so let's call
15 this a working assumption that the seat of fire is flat
16 roof light well 104 and 105. So from the evidence you
17 have, can we say that this working assumption is pretty
18 accurate?

19 DR LEE WING MAN: By deduction, we can reach this
20 conclusion.

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: Another matter you have studied is the
22 existence of ignitable liquid or leakage of inflammable
23 gas. Concerning ignitable liquid, we found no evidence
24 for their existence. Can you explain to the public, for
25 fire started with ignitable liquid, would you usually be
26

1 able to find traces of the ignitable liquid?

2 DR LEE WING MAN: If the fire is started by an arsonist with
3 ignitable liquid, as you can see in the video, we saw
4 some carton boxes remaining intact and if there was
5 ignitable liquid, the carton boxes would have absorbed
6 them and we would have found traces of the liquid
7 afterwards. And also we have removed all the soot on
8 the ground and exposed the concrete surface. The
9 concrete surface is still of the usual colour,
10 greyish/whitish. So if there was ignitable liquid
11 causing concentrated burning it would cause indentation
12 to the surface, but that's not what we saw.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: Now, about cigarette butts and smoking.
14 In your final report, paragraph 6.1.10, that's ER1/75,
15 it says:

16 "No other sources of ignition could be identified at
17 the suspected point of origin. As such, with no
18 contradictory evidence suggesting otherwise, the IFITF
19 was satisfied that the fire was most likely accidental
20 in nature. Most probably: a glowing source, such as
21 a lit cigarette end, ignited combustible materials, such
22 as carton paper boxes, at the scene."

23 It seems that the conclusion is that the fire was
24 caused by an unextinguished cigarette butt. So by way
25 of elimination you can reach this conclusion because no
26

1 other possible cause of fire could be found and this one
2 is the most probable one?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: That should be the only suspicious cause
4 of fire we could identify.

5 MR VICTOR DAWES: I would like to explore the matter of
6 scaffolding nets with you. You have explained in detail
7 the test you have conducted. Now, the public do not
8 have access to your report so could you please explain
9 to us, from the test you have conducted, we can see --
10 we can find the following. In your statement,
11 ER2-1/505, paragraph 3.2, five samples have been tested.
12 Those samples are from Wang Cheong House.

13 You have many witness statements so let me summarise
14 what you have said. Page 474, we don't have to show
15 each and every page, you said you have obtained from the
16 police scaffolding net samples from Wang Chi, Wang Yan,
17 Wang Tao, Wang Tai, Wang Kin, Wang Sun and Wang Shing
18 Houses. So you have listed out all the samples.

19 Page 483, paragraph 5, you have examined a score of
20 samples. The nets are from Wang Chi, Wang Tao, Wang Yan
21 and so on. They are from the same supplier.

22 Page 483, paragraph 2.1, can you see the supplier,
23 Lam Kee Construction Material?

24 Page 546, the same bundle, you tested several
25 scaffolding net samples from Wang Chi House, Wang Yan
26

1 House and Wang Tao House.

2 You have stated the origin of the sample as well as
3 the supplier of the scaffolding nets in your statement.
4 Now, my question is you were not the one to decide where
5 the samples were taken by the police; is that correct?

6 DR LEE WING MAN: Having discussed with the police, we have
7 suggested some valuable samples to the police for
8 gathering.

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: One topic, one issue in this hearing is
10 that the location from which you take the sample would
11 affect the results. Can you explain more?

12 DR LEE WING MAN: Initially we would like to know as soon as
13 possible the makings of the net. So I have suggested to
14 the police to take samples from Wang Cheong House and
15 also the buildings nearby. However, the initial samples
16 were in rather poor condition and there were a lot of
17 constraints, so the samples especially from Wang Cheong
18 House were quite poor. They were charred or greatly
19 diminished. They were greatly deformed.

20 So we had limitations at the beginning. As I said,
21 we had to do the test couple of times before we arrived
22 at the value, but at the beginning I had a preliminary
23 test from different directions or maybe we had just one
24 direction. So at the beginning the reports had
25 different interpretation from the later ones and there
26

1 are two conditions, A and B.

2 Later on we had enough samples and the police
3 managed to get more comprehensive piece of nets and we
4 could conduct a complete test. But at the very
5 beginning the samples presented to us depend on the
6 devices, because we only have one device and there were
7 so many samples. In the report we specified the full
8 report and also condition A because of limitation of the
9 samples.

10 MR VICTOR DAWES: A very good explanation. Perhaps you
11 might wish to tell us conditions A and B, like you said,
12 later on there were more samples, more comprehensive.
13 If you look at 482, 16 March, 3.3 and 3.4, in the same
14 bundle, you've explained the tests, and there were 57
15 condition A and 56 using condition B. And the result on
16 page 492, annex C, you have set out the details.

17 Now, there are 24. The after-flame of more than
18 four seconds, that exceeded the requirement, and the
19 longest, 10.8 seconds. That's the lowest part.

20 I'd like to take this up with you. 80 per cent
21 fulfilled the FR standard in this report. In this round
22 of test, the nets came from Wang Chi, Wang Tao,
23 Wang Yan, and these blocks, the supplier is Lam Kee.
24 Other than Lam Kee, there are other suppliers as well
25 other than Lam Kee. Do you understand that?

26

1 DR LEE WING MAN: I don't.

2 MR VICTOR DAWES: You don't know about that?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: I only know there is Lam Kee.

4 MR VICTOR DAWES: When you conducted the test on the nets,
5 you didn't have any information about what supplier gave
6 you what nets to you?

7 DR LEE WING MAN: The nets taken from suppliers had the
8 reference samples, and indeed the police gave us the
9 Lam Kee samples for testing. Basically we'd like to
10 conduct tests on the samples from the scene.

11 MR VICTOR DAWES: When you collected the samples from the
12 scene, you did not know what supplier gave what
13 material; right?

14 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: Wang Chi, Wang Tao, Wang Sun, Wang Yan,
16 these are the blocks suffering less casualties and
17 burns.

18 I'd like to take this up with you. Other than
19 Lam Kee as a supplier, the nets sample you got from
20 these blocks, the percentage of them fulfilling the
21 requirement seem to be higher.

22 DR LEE WING MAN: I mentioned the limitations. We got the
23 sample from the scene. I mean to say they fulfilled the
24 requirement. There is some constraints there.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: Can there be some other issue, and that is

26

1 a selection bias in the testing? Will you explain to us
2 here?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, selection bias, I would say that
4 there are limitations on the scene. Wang Cheong House,
5 there was nothing left much after the fire. The police
6 managed to get some samples but they were very limited
7 in size. We cannot have a complete testing. They were
8 really completely charred. The results will be really
9 bad. Even if we find this is not FR, we cannot say
10 anything about it conclusively.

11 MR VICTOR DAWES: There is another possibility I'd like to
12 ascertain. In the fire, for non-FR nets, they're more
13 vulnerable to ignition. So it would be harder to get
14 samples because they have burned down in any case;
15 right?

16 DR LEE WING MAN: As I said, instead of saying "selection
17 bias", I would say selection limitation.

18 MR VICTOR DAWES: I'm sure you would agree that the
19 remaining samples, they can be tested. The percentage
20 of them fulfilling the criteria would be high because
21 all the non-FR nets might have already been burned
22 through; right?

23 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

24 MR VICTOR DAWES: Thank you.

25 DR LEE WING MAN: If I may add here, the canvas presented to
26

1 me, the number, the volume is small, but as we can see,
2 all the canvas were severely burnt. So canvas is also
3 another area of concern.

4 MR VICTOR DAWES: Canvas, I would also like to solicit your
5 assistance. Perhaps let's have a look at the clip. We
6 understand that during the renovation some residents
7 mentioned the fire retardancy, there were some tests
8 conducted, and the tests on site might not fulfil your
9 standard. I14(a), that's in 28 February 2024.

10 (Video played)

11 Here, I'm sure you have seen this before. This is a
12 kind of test in the lab fulfilling the lab criteria, but
13 can I say this. Even if this test proves satisfactory,
14 it may not fulfil the criteria in the lab.

15 DR LEE WING MAN: If they want to have some reference but
16 the net was ignited, after ignition the flame -- and
17 after the flame last for some time, as long as
18 12 seconds, if there is no interruption, I'm not sure
19 how long it will burn for. There are also the flaming
20 droplets that are of concern. It was blown out
21 eventually and he tried twice and it wasn't ignited.
22 The net seemed to be horizontal but from my angle -- the
23 net was horizontal, the flame was actually here and I'm
24 not sure how close the claim flame was to the net.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: So there are two observations. Can I say
26

1 this. With a test like this, the after-flame time more
2 than 10 seconds, in a lab environment, in your
3 experience, it wouldn't pass, would it?

4 DR LEE WING MAN: I might be too bold to say this. In that
5 environment, I'm not sure how long the flame is, but
6 indeed, it was ignited -- it wasn't blown out, it might
7 continue. There are also flaming droplets. These are
8 the two things that should be of concern. It's worth
9 having a lab test.

10 MR VICTOR DAWES: You mentioned the horizontal materials and
11 the vertical materials. From your perspective --

12 DR LEE WING MAN: It was horizontal. It should be like
13 this. If it is vertical, if the sample is vertical, the
14 flame is burning from underneath.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: Sorry, you blocked the mic.

16 DR LEE WING MAN: The flame is burning underneath and the
17 heat will be going up. But from what I saw for the
18 other two attempts, the net were put horizontal and the
19 flame was here and I'm not sure how close the flame was
20 to the net. But if the net is horizontal, the flame is
21 like this. And the contact is very, very small, so when
22 they put the net horizontal, I'm not sure whether they
23 can reflect the situation. It would be harder to ignite
24 it compared with in the lab.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: Let me put it this way. For the sampling,

26

1 there are difficulties on site. In your report
2 regarding the conclusion of whether the nets are
3 fire-retardant, we said that for the burnt one we cannot
4 get them for testing. Let me take this up with you. It
5 seems that if you use the nets from Wang Cheong House
6 compared to Wang Kin, Wang Shing, Wang Tao, Wang Sun,
7 the nets from Wang Cheong House on 29 December 2025,
8 E2-1/516 to 517, 4.2.2, it says that you've done five
9 from Wang Cheong House, four, the after-flame time was
10 actually more than four seconds. So from Wang Cheong
11 House 80 per cent do not fulfil the fire-retardant
12 standard. I must admit the samples are small.

13 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, 2, 3, 4, I've done a horizontal
14 direction and one vertical direction.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: The limitation is because of the size of
16 sampling?

17 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

18 MR VICTOR DAWES: Can I put it this way. Obviously, ideally
19 you would like to have more for testing. The horizontal
20 one is not up to scratch. What about vertical one? Is
21 it up to scratch? There are different scenarios.

22 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, there are different scenarios. The
23 horizontal or the vertical weaving might have impact on
24 the burning.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: So the actual limitations make things
26

1 difficult. Wang Tai House, Wang Sun House, there are
2 three scaffold net testing each. As mentioned in
3 26 March, page 474.

4 DR LEE WING MAN: If I may, for Wang Cheong House, I'd like
5 to elaborate a little bit here. For Wang Cheong House
6 we used condition B. We have more of these samples A
7 and B, but we used condition B in the test.

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: Wang Tai House and Wang Sun House, on
9 26 March, paragraph 3.4, seems an after-flame more than
10 24 seconds. Except for the horizontal test. So for
11 these two tests, they fail and the number of samples is
12 smaller?

13 DR LEE WING MAN: They didn't send these samples. For the
14 samples that were enough, I would do the complete test
15 and therefore into another report. These are the
16 samples that not complete, so we did one horizontal and
17 one vertical, or just horizontal.

18 MR VICTOR DAWES: I understand that there are actual
19 limitations but it seems that given the limited samples,
20 most of Wang Cheong, Wang Tai samples, you have done
21 them, they are non-FR samples.

22 DR LEE WING MAN: Let me reiterate that the condition of the
23 samples may not enable us to say that they are FR or
24 non-FR. 3.2. If the samples specify charred or some
25 signs of burning, then we have to be even more careful
26

1 with the assessment.

2 MR VICTOR DAWES: We looked at this before. There are very
3 limited samples. Let's turn to the canvas that you
4 mentioned a moment ago. You've seen canvas. And you
5 also used the same FR standard, GB 5725-2009. That's
6 5455. The BD did issue some circulars to say that other
7 than the nets, the canvas would be subject to the same
8 requirements.

9 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

10 MR VICTOR DAWES: For these canvas, on 16 March, in your
11 evidence annex C there are some samples that have been
12 tested and the after-flame time, 12.5 seconds onwards.

13 DR LEE WING MAN: Right.

14 MR VICTOR DAWES: So for these canvases, they can burn for
15 longer and more severely than nets.

16 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes. We saw the two clips and that's very
17 clear. We didn't have to wait for 12 seconds. There
18 are flames and they spread pretty rapidly and upwards.
19 All the canvas, they were completely burned down.

20 MR VICTOR DAWES: For fire retardancy of canvas you still
21 use the same standard, four seconds?

22 DR LEE WING MAN: The four seconds is for the safety nets.
23 For the guidelines you mentioned, there are the
24 standards, but having said that, the condition that we
25 saw, I'm sure there are no standard that would be up to

26

1 scratch.

2 MR VICTOR DAWES: Can I understand it this way. Well,
3 broadly speaking, for safety nets, you have the
4 four-second standard, but what about canvas? What is
5 your understanding?

6 DR LEE WING MAN: For canvas, you mentioned the BD's
7 document. Actually, there are other specifications in
8 the same document.

9 MR VICTOR DAWES: We understand 5725 and 5867 and there were
10 also two GB standards.

11 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

12 MR VICTOR DAWES: I can deal with that in my submission, but
13 then, if you can simply put that to the public. So you
14 have the several-second standard. Can you tell us that,
15 that is about the safety nets?

16 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, I'm not the one specialising on the
17 safety standards. If four seconds for safety nets would
18 be acceptable, then for canvas that is to be used, then
19 similarly we should use similar standards to assess
20 whether or not they are okay.

21 And also, it's a bit embarrassing, that is for 5725,
22 you call them "safety nets" and therefore it's a bit
23 embarrassing because if you directly apply that, is that
24 appropriate and therefore it's subject to discussion.
25 We also had this UK standard, that is 5867, and it's

26

1 also a very similar approach. So from the left-hand
2 side to the right-hand side and then also upward and
3 downward to see how it spreads, so it's not just about
4 the burning time. It's about when the flame is put to
5 it, whether or not it would spread leftward or rightward
6 or upward or downward and all the way to the top.

7 So before we apply the UK standard test, you can
8 look at -- the sample is completely consumed. So
9 I can -- I guess it's spreading very quickly both -- in
10 all directions.

11 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: For scaffolding nets, we had
12 the GB and also the international standard and also the
13 BD circular which specifies the standards. But then
14 what about canvas?

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: It's not spelled out that quickly. It
16 doesn't spell out how many seconds it can burn. But
17 then it appears in different places or in different
18 documents.

19 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: It has to be fire-retardant;
20 right?

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: Yes. It only says that it should be
22 fire-retardant. I think the issue is -- we can discuss
23 that with Dr Lee.

24 If both used on the scaffolds and if the two
25 materials -- so they have the four-second standard and
26

1 the other was completely consumed, so definitely it's
2 substandard; right?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, I define it as dangerous.

4 MR VICTOR DAWES: Let me supplement. Because we have
5 identified some information and in some cases it only
6 burnt for 2.5 seconds, is the UK standard. But then for
7 the time being, in the evidence, it's not spelled out
8 very clearly, so during our submission we can provide
9 further information. But then in some standards the
10 requirement is even more stringent or is even more
11 demanding.

12 Can I put it this way. What we have seen is that
13 for the facade of Wang Fuk Court, there are a lot of
14 plastic, canvas. If the flammability is higher than
15 that of safety nets, then, as far as this fire is
16 concerned, the impact is rather significant; is that the
17 case?

18 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, you can put it that way. In fact, in
19 the end, as you can see from the platform of the light
20 well, we have found a lot of mosaic tiles, backing
21 papers and a lot of the materials holding the mosaic
22 tiles were also found. So usually, for the unused
23 materials, they would be covered by canvas. So if the
24 point of ignition also had such materials there, then
25 you can see that even if it's a small fire, within
26

1 a short space of time that can also ignite the materials
2 and start the fire.

3 MR VICTOR DAWES: Next is about styrofoam boards. For
4 styrofoam panels, three days after the fire, you went to
5 the scene to examine them and then, according to your
6 evidence, you ignited one of the styrofoam boards on
7 site. And then when you did that on site, after three
8 seconds it continued to burn and then it did not
9 extinguish after 45 seconds. So that's what you said in
10 your evidence. And of course that's not a laboratory
11 test. But then initially, when you examined it and you
12 conducted the test on site, can you tell us with regard
13 to the styrofoam boards what's your view there and then?

14 DR LEE WING MAN: As I said, majority of the test that
15 I did, I was trying to find out that if there was
16 a small source of fire igniting those materials within
17 a short space of time, what is going to happen. It's
18 very different from that done by the FSD.

19 So I'd like to carry out some tests given the
20 environment to determine their danger and also when the
21 source of fire is taken away it continued to burn. So
22 if there is a very small source of fire, then it can
23 being ignited very easily.

24 MR VICTOR DAWES: Even if -- well, even if we set aside the
25 fact that if the test is done in the laboratory, whether
26

1 or not they can meet the standards, if you just carry
2 out a casual test, it's still very dangerous.

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, you can see the black smoke
4 generating from it. It would not just expedite the
5 spread of fire. It can also emit some gas to the
6 surrounding area, increasing the harmful effects of the
7 fire.

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: And then afterwards, on 5 March this year,
9 we knew that you once again burned some styrofoam boards
10 and also some of the toe-boards.

11 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes, and also some corrugated plastic
12 boards.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: So you collected 16 styrofoam boards, two
14 from each block, and then 13 panels or the so-called
15 toe-boards and also the corrugated plastic sheets.

16 For the test that you did, can you explain to us.
17 In your witness evidence you said that -- E/469, if we
18 can look at paragraph 3.7, you said you followed this
19 ISO standard in carrying out the test.

20 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: Can you briefly explain to us concerning
22 these materials how did you carry out the test? What
23 were of the standards?

24 DR LEE WING MAN: Actually, as I mentioned, for 5545, when
25 I did it on the scaffold nets, that's woven materials,
26

1 so I'd like to see how they perform in a fire. But then
2 for such panels you cannot classify them as woven
3 materials and therefore I made reference to another
4 applicable standard applicable to such materials. That
5 is EN ISO 11925.

6 As you can see, in fact the performance was similar.
7 For every sample, you would place them vertically and
8 then the source of fire would be fixed at the bottom of
9 the sample. And then the flame used would be somewhat
10 smaller than that used during the 5545 test; it's just
11 half of it. Irrespective of the size of the flame, it
12 would be placed at the bottom edge of the sample and
13 then we'd place it there for a while to see how it
14 performs.

15 Then for 5545 test, that would also limit the time
16 when the flame would be applied to it. And here, as
17 soon as it ignites you would have to have the fire there
18 for 15 seconds and then if it doesn't burn you would
19 extend it to 30 seconds. You can see that for many
20 samples, we did it for 15 seconds, 30 seconds, but then
21 I also tried to extend it because I'd like to confirm
22 how long it takes for them to start to ignite because
23 I can see that by 15 seconds it started to ignite and it
24 doesn't stop. I did not do the 30-second test. I can
25 see that it's already ignited and then I take away the
26

1 source of fire to see if it continues to burn to
2 determine whether or not it can be ignited that quickly
3 and then to see the after-flame situation.

4 MR VICTOR DAWES: You explained just now you found out there
5 were two types of canvas and one would be like a prism
6 and another would be of another shape. For the circular
7 canvas, it burned more easily and it can also burn for
8 more than 10 seconds. And then for the prism shape, it
9 would self-extinguish after a while.

10 So for the diamond-shape canvas, if it's ignited for
11 long enough, then it would continue to burn; right?

12 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes. In a test, if I put the source of
13 fire there and if it's taken away from the source of
14 fire, then it would extinguish. But then for the
15 rhombus-shape canvas, it could also be affected by the
16 heat of the fire and it continues to burn until the time
17 when the source of fire is taken away.

18 But then you talk about the two types of canvas. So
19 you describe this as the rhombus shape. In fact you can
20 find it all over the place in Wang Fuk Court. For the
21 other shape, it's not that common. But then it's still
22 there.

23 MR VICTOR DAWES: So apparently there are two batches of
24 canvas.

25 DR LEE WING MAN: Definitely.

1 MR VICTOR DAWES: But then as to the amount, there is
2 a difference.

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes. When I walked around the site,
4 mostly it's the rhombus-shape canvas. Therefore, on
5 29 November, in my first report, the one that was
6 ignited on site, that's actually the other shape. And
7 then in 10, 12 seconds it was ignited.

8 MR VICTOR DAWES: You also talk about the 5 mm and 9 mm
9 corrugated plastic board and also the 2 mm toe-boards
10 and also 2 mm corrugated plastic panels and so on. I'd
11 like you to explain a bit about such results.

12 So the public would also like to understand that
13 after you completed the test, what's your conclusion?
14 How would you explain?

15 DR LEE WING MAN: As I said earlier, in the orange zone,
16 within a few seconds they were already ignited and then
17 they spread upward and then there were also flaming
18 droplets coming down and they did not self-extinguish,
19 so there was no sign that they would self-extinguish so
20 it would spread upward. Also, where there are droplets
21 coming down and where there are combustible materials,
22 they could also get ignited. Therefore, for such
23 materials in the fire scene, if they were found at the
24 fire scene, then they could also help spread the fire.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: So in a work site, during the renovation
26

1 period, if you use such materials on the scaffolding,
2 then basically they would be rather perilous in terms of
3 fire risk?

4 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes. The risk would be quite high.

5 MR VICTOR DAWES: Okay. You can also help us here. You
6 also mention in your evidence with regard to the
7 protective gear for the deceased fireman, Ho Wai Ho, if
8 you refer to page 549 of the paper, why did you conduct
9 these tests and what were the results?

10 DR LEE WING MAN: At the fire scene the most conventional
11 test would be to find if there's any residue of external
12 ignitable fluids, resulting in the spread of fire. So
13 the materials that we found at the fire scene would be
14 taken back for tests and on the body of the fireman --
15 of the deceased fireman we also took such samples.
16 Basically we couldn't find any combustible materials on
17 his body. And we also had reports about the damage done
18 to his gear.

19 So can we move down a bit to find out the results of
20 the examination.

21 In summary, we also found out the areas of obvious
22 burn damage. We hope that, where necessary, if we want
23 to make reference to that, we would be going to the area
24 where problems can be found.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: To identify if there's any combustible
26

1 materials, you're actually concerned about whether or
2 not it's a case of arson.

3 Well, sorry, we might need to supplement on one
4 point. We might need you to take a look at this. We
5 might need you to explain a bit further because the
6 records might be somewhat different from what we
7 understood.

8 You can see that for the styrofoam panels, some of
9 them were in a rectangular pattern and the other one was
10 in rhombus pattern. So which was the dominant one?

11 DR LEE WING MAN: That's the rectangular pattern.

12 MR VICTOR DAWES: Which was more combustible?

13 DR LEE WING MAN: Well, the rectangular pattern was more
14 ignitable.

15 MR VICTOR DAWES: It's not Dr Lee who got it wrong. That's
16 because we had too many records and therefore there
17 might have been something wrong with the records and
18 therefore, as long as we can correct it, it's okay.

19 Chairman, I have no further questions.

20 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Thank you.

21 Okay. What about the other involved parties?

22 Government representative, Government counsel.

23 MR MICHAEL LOK: Yes, chairman. I'd like to ask some
24 questions.

25 Cross-examination by MICHAEL LOK

26

1 MR MICHAEL LOK: Dr Lee, first of all, Mr Dawes asked you
2 about the possibility of arson.

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

4 MR MICHAEL LOK: On 29 December 2025, you gave a witness
5 statement. We can refer to page 520 of bundle R2,
6 paragraph 6. So the "result of deliberate act" was aid
7 of fire accelerants. You said that it's very unlikely.

8 DR LEE WING MAN: Yes.

9 MR MICHAEL LOK: And then just now Mr Dawes also asked you
10 to conclude on your findings because basically all the
11 measures to protect the safety of life and limbs, they
12 broke down altogether. And also it shows that there had
13 been a lot of man-made mistakes. You can see that if
14 you look at the consultants of Wang Fuk Court, the
15 contractors and also the fire safety installation
16 contractors, there were serious negligence problem,
17 causing the fire to spread quickly and resulting in
18 serious casualties and fatalities.

19 With regard to the report submitted by Dr Lee, I'd
20 like to confirm your role, you conducted some excavation
21 works on site and afterwards you also conducted some
22 laboratory tests to study how the fire started and how
23 it spread. So on this I'd also like to follow up on
24 some of the issues.

25 First of all, I'd like to invite you to refer to
26

1 ER1/80. This is a very detailed report submitted by the
2 IFITF. You're a member of that task force; right?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

4 MR MICHAEL LOK: And then if we look at paragraph 6.2.1.8 on
5 page 81, actually we have a table summarising the key
6 findings with regard to different materials.

7 DR LEE WING MAN: Correct.

8 MR MICHAEL LOK: In your briefing and also Mr Dawes also
9 asked you some detailed questions just now, but then, to
10 facilitate the Committee and the public's understanding,
11 can you also explain some of the key findings in this
12 table?

13 DR LEE WING MAN: The table is the summary of the key
14 findings in my series of reports. The table has been
15 compiled by the Inter-departmental Task Force. These
16 key findings include the burning results of the safety
17 nets.

18 As mentioned in the previous questioning, some
19 safety nets had caught fire and also created flaming
20 droplets which contributed to the spread of the fire.
21 As mentioned just now, the polystyrene window covers, ie
22 the foam boards, have been tested. As mentioned just
23 now, some foam boards have caught fire easily by
24 exposure to a small flame and also flaming droplets have
25 been created as a result, which have contributed to the
26

1 fire spread.

2 Now, canvas, in short, would be ignited by a small
3 flame, causing sustained burning and creating flaming
4 droplets and contributed to the spread of the fire. And
5 then toe-boards, that is the orange toe-boards
6 surrounding the working platforms, again these foam
7 boards are easily ignited by a direct small flame with
8 the formation of flaming droplets.

9 Finally, corrugated plastic boards, there were
10 several types of such boards with different thickness at
11 the scene. Besides the 9 mm-thick plastic board which
12 was less likely to be ignited, the other two types, 5 mm
13 and 2 mm-thick plastic boards, could be ignited by
14 direct exposure of a small flame and create burning
15 droplets and contributes to the spread of the fire.

16 MR MICHAEL LOK: Thank you, Dr Lee. Another issue is about
17 the Guobiao, GB, standard. There are two testing
18 scenarios, that's conditions A and B. May I refer to
19 you ER2-1/487.

20 This table clearly explains how the two scenarios
21 are conducted. Please explain the two conditions
22 briefly.

23 DR LEE WING MAN: Now, if the sample allows, by adopting GB
24 5455 test, I would carry out test under both conditions.
25 The difference between the two conditions are, firstly,
26

1 before the test, the samples would be treated. For
2 condition B, the sample would be placed in oven for half
3 an hour at 105 degrees Celsius and then placed in
4 a desiccator for more than 30 minutes before the test is
5 done. For condition A we would place the sample at room
6 temperature of 20 degrees Celsius and 65 per cent
7 relative humidity. That is set before the test is done.

8 After treating both samples under both conditions,
9 the samples would be exposed to a fire and the duration
10 is different.

11 For condition B, that's the sample in the oven, the
12 flame would only be applied for three seconds. For
13 condition A, the flame would be applied for 12 seconds,
14 as shown in the video clip just now.

15 Finally, under condition A, we would take
16 a representative sample, five of them from -- five
17 widthwise and lengthwise specimens from the sample and
18 then take the average value. So under condition A there
19 will be two smouldering or sustained burning time. For
20 condition B we would only take three lengthwise and two
21 widthwise specimens and then take the average so there
22 would only be one set of value resulting.

23 The other conditions, for example, the strength of
24 the flames and so on and the size of the samples, those
25 are largely the same.

1 MR MICHAEL LOK: What about the last one, criteria for
2 safety nets?

3 DR LEE WING MAN: As mentioned just now, we use GB 5455
4 because we have made reference to GB 5725, that's the
5 standard for the manufacturing of safety nets. So
6 according to GB 5725, it has set the standard concerning
7 the lengthwise and widthwise specimens. The after-flame
8 time should not be larger than four seconds.

9 MR MICHAEL LOK: Please refer to page 483. We have just
10 looked at it. Paragraph 2.1, that's the supplier
11 Lam Kee Construction. The sample was taken from them.
12 The source reference is NTNR -- the left reference is
13 25C2814/25.

14 The first item, 25C2814/25, what's your observation
15 concerning this sample?

16 DR LEE WING MAN: On the furthest left we can see the serial
17 number of the sample. The second column are the
18 conditions under which the sample was tested, and then
19 the orientation under each condition. The fourth column
20 shows a numerator and the denominator. The denominator
21 is about the number of samples burned. The denominator
22 is about the number of samples catching fire. The final
23 column, for samples which has caught fire, that's the
24 average after-flame time having divided by 5. For
25 example, this sample, condition A both lengthwise and
26

1 widthwise, none of the sample caught fire so the average
2 value is zero. Condition B, as I've mentioned, there
3 would be three lengthwise and two widthwise specimens.
4 Among them only one lengthwise specimen caught fire.
5 Then the sustained time is 2.5 seconds, having divided
6 the value by 5. It is shorter than the requirement of
7 four seconds.

8 MR MICHAEL LOK: Finally, moving on to canvas, page 479 in
9 the same bundle, that's the statement given by you on
10 13 April this year. Paragraph 2.1, there were three
11 samples all obtained from the Lam Kee Construction
12 materials. Concerning lab reference 26C0714/2, there is
13 a remark. Would you please explain to us what the
14 remarks mean?

15 DR LEE WING MAN: 26C0714/2, it was later found that the
16 burning performance of the canvas were poor. So
17 controlled samples have to be procured for further
18 testing. So, among them, for the sample under reference
19 number /2, the police have procured some sample which
20 have specified fire retardancy. They were sent to our
21 lab for testing.

22 MR MICHAEL LOK: Next page, paragraph 3.3. The table shows
23 that sample 26C0714/2, what's the results?

24 DR LEE WING MAN: For samples under reference /2, again
25 under condition A, five lengthwise and five widthwise
26

1 specimens were tested. None them caught fire. So the
2 after-flame time was zero. For condition B, again there
3 was sufficient number of samples, three lengthwise and
4 two widthwise specimens were burned. None of them
5 caught fire so the after-flame time was zero.

6 So these were obtained from the manufacturer
7 themselves. So they were not -- they had not been
8 burned or exposed to the elements previously. So it
9 proves that the canvas should be fire-retardant.

10 MR MICHAEL LOK: At paragraph 4.1 you have made a conclusion
11 concerning different samples. Would you please expand
12 on the paragraph, including that piece of specimen with
13 specified fire-retardant capability?

14 DR LEE WING MAN: That sample procured by the police, no
15 matter under which condition, there was no sustained
16 burning after the fire source was removed, so they were
17 supposed to be fire-retardant. For the other canvas
18 obtained from the manufacturer, the fire performance is
19 similar to those we have seen in the video clips. There
20 was sustained burning or even flaming droplets after the
21 fire source is removed. That would have contributed to
22 the spread of the fire.

23 MR MICHAEL LOK: Thank you, chairman and members. I have no
24 further questions.

25 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Re-examination.

26

1 MR VICTOR DAWES: Your Honour, I have no re-examination but
2 there is one thing that I would like to address the
3 judge concerning our work down the road.

4 Concerning the standard applied to canvas, in the
5 bundle there is the technical note of the Buildings
6 Department. That's on page B2/1326. So the paragraph
7 above point (a):

8 "In this respect, protective net, screen,
9 tarpaulin/plastic sheeting installed to cover the
10 facade ..."

11 It goes on to say:

12 "Examples of recognised standards are listed below".

13 The first GB standard, that applies to safety nets,
14 so we do have this standard. However, for (b) and (c),
15 at this stage these have not been covered in evidence.
16 I think we have to supplement on these two standards
17 subsequently.

18 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Of course one of the areas we
19 need to review is whether there is any insufficiency in
20 terms of regulation on temporary protective materials
21 and whether that is a gap. So we have to be clear on
22 whether there are specific regulatory standards for
23 canvas. If not, we have to make them.

24 MR VICTOR DAWES: Yes, chair. It seems that from the
25 evidence we have, including the final report submitted
26

1 by Dr Lee, we have placed our focus on the nets.

2 However, upon revisiting the matter, Dr Lee has found
3 that the other materials, that is the canvas, is also
4 very risky. So we will require further information in
5 this regard.

6 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Please alert us sooner
7 because we don't have sufficient time to write the
8 report. So our focus has been on the nets. If you are
9 telling us that canvas is also problematic, then there
10 are several questions. First of all, are there
11 standards? Are these standards clear for the industry?
12 If not, that may be a regulatory loophole.

13 MR VICTOR DAWES: To be fair to the Government counsel,
14 there has been standards and the technical notes have
15 also stated the relevant standards. What's lacking is
16 the examination requirements under these standards.

17 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Do we know what the standards
18 are, for example, how long the samples have to be
19 subject to the flame? Are there specific requirements
20 in terms of how many seconds? So please tell us in
21 advance.

22 MR VICTOR DAWES: Dr Lee, any supplement?

23 DR LEE WING MAN: This paper has mentioned the standards for
24 nets as well as plastic sheetings, meaning screens,
25 tarpaulins and plastic sheetings. The paper has set out

26

1 some well-recognised standards, for example, GB 5725.

2 That's for safety nets. Some recognised and acceptable
3 standards have been set out in the document. So this
4 should be a paper issued before the fire. So it has not
5 ruled out the possibility of applying GB 5725 on canvas.
6 But the name suggests safety nets, so I would have
7 reservation on that.

8 It's not that we don't have standards. Bulletin (b)
9 and (c) mentions other standards, for example, bulletin
10 (b) refers to a British Standard. The standard also
11 sets out unacceptable scenarios. For GB, as long as
12 it's shorter than four seconds, it would be acceptable.

13 According to my recollection, for the British
14 Standard, the testing methods are similar. They have
15 been set out clearly in the standard and also there are
16 clear standards on what are compliant and what are not.

17 MR VICTOR DAWES: Before Dr Lee submits the latest report,
18 our focus has always been on the nets.

19 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Is it likely that we have to
20 recall the witnesses?

21 MR VICTOR DAWES: It shouldn't be likely.

22 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: We need to know what these
23 standards are about and whether there are concrete
24 requirements.

25 MR VICTOR DAWES: Actually we can supplement these
26

1 information later today.

2 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Mr Jenkin Suen?

3 MR JENKIN SUEN: Yes. We can provide the relevant standards
4 but according to Mr Victor Dawes, they have already
5 found it.

6 MR VICTOR DAWES: Bear with me a moment, your Honour.

7 No further questions for Dr Lee. Thank you.

8 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: Thank you, Dr Lee. You have
9 completed your evidence.

10 (The witness was released)

11 (4.17 pm)

12 THE HON MR JUSTICE DAVID LOK: It seems we have spent more
13 time than we expected. I think we can't start
14 Prof Yuen's evidence today. Let's resume on Wednesday,
15 otherwise it will not be fair to Prof Yuen. So we will
16 hear Prof Yuen's evidence on Wednesday. There should be
17 sufficient time.

18 The hearing is adjourned until 10 am on Wednesday.

19 (4.18 pm)

20 (The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am
21 on Wednesday, 24 June 2026)

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