

LCQ15: Compensation and rehousing arrangements for Choi Yuen Tsuen villagers

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (February 24):

Question:

It has been learnt that some concern groups pointed out that although the funding proposals for the project of the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link ("the XRL project") had been approved by the Finance Committee of this Council amid controversies, some villagers of Choi Yuen Tsuen ("CYT") in Shek Kong, who are affected by land resumption and clearance of sites required under the XRL project, have still expressed their dissatisfaction over the arrangements for compensation for land resumption and clearance of sites, rehousing and continuing farming activities, etc. proposed by the authorities, and some villagers even maintain their objection to land resumption and clearance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the latest progress of the negotiation between the authorities and CYT villagers affected by the XRL project on the aforesaid compensation and rehousing arrangements, etc.; of the current number of households which have formally registered with the Government for accepting the compensation package, and the percentage of such number in the total number of households in CYT; and

(b) whether it has estimated the number of households which would still refuse to accept the compensation package upon the expiry of the registration period at the end of February this year; what solutions the authorities have regarding the

households' refusal to accept the compensation package, whether the authorities will introduce more flexible arrangements for rehousing and continuing farming activities, etc., so as to meet the requests of the villagers; and whether the Government has formulated measures to avoid any conflict that may arise from land resumption and prevent the villagers from sustaining any injury?

Reply:

President,

To ensure passenger safety of the Hong Kong section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and to meet its operational needs, we have to resume land at Choi Yuen Tsuen (CYT), Shek Kong and its vicinity for the construction of an emergency rescue station and stabling sidings. In designing the alignment for the Hong Kong section of the XRL within the New Territories, the MTR Corporation Limited has examined in detail various site proposals and confirmed that the site selected will affect the smallest number of residents and achieve the most satisfactory effect in rescue and evacuation operations.

The Administration has offered a special ex-gratia rehousing package (the Package) to help CYT households meet their special rehousing needs. Under the Package, qualified households affected by land clearance for the Hong Kong section of the XRL may choose one of the following special assistance options:

(i) an ex-gratia cash allowance (EGCA) of \$600,000; or

(ii) an EGCA of \$500,000 and the opportunity to purchase a surplus Home Ownership Scheme flat without being subject to the Comprehensive Means Test.

To enhance the flexibility of the Package in providing

assistance to households which have special rehousing needs but do not fully comply with the relevant eligibility criteria, the Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) has been authorised to decide, at her discretion, whether such households can be entitled to the Special Assistance under the Package as if it is a qualified households, and whether or to what extent the amount of EGCA to be offered to the households should be reduced.

The Package and the compensation and rehousing arrangements available under existing policy will provide assistance to villagers affected in an appropriate and flexible manner. If villagers meet the relevant eligibility criteria, they may choose between agricultural resite to build houses for domestic purpose in vicinity to the farm land, purchasing Home Ownership Scheme flats without being subject to Comprehensive Means Test, renting or purchasing low rise private accommodations in the rural area, or rehousing to Public Rental Housing with priority, etc.

My reply to the two parts of the question is as follows:

(a) As at February 20, over 140 households in CYT, a majority of the households, have registered with the Lands Department (Lands D). Applications from about 30 households have been processed. Two of them have collected the EGCA, while other villagers who are granted the EGCA may contact the Lands D at any time to arrange for collection of the cash allowance. The remaining applications are being processed, and villagers will be notified of the results of their applications progressively.

(b) The registration period for applications for special assistance under the Package will expire by end of February. All affected villagers must register with the Administration so that we can process their applications and verify their eligibility promptly.

We have convened several resident forums in CYT to explain the Package in detail to villagers. We have visited individual households on a number of occasions to explain to them and in person the specific details of the Package, understand their needs and help them register. We have also operated a one-stop information centre in CYT to make it more convenient for villagers to register. We understand that the Heung Yee Kuk and relevant village representatives have been in close touch, especially on the discussion on how to assist villagers in identifying land for agricultural resite. In addition, we have published six issues of newsletter for CYT residents to explain the Package, provide frequently asked questions and answers, and set out some sample cases in which the EGCA was granted (please see the ninth issue of the newsletter at Annex).

To help rehouse the affected villagers, we provide them with the Package. Together with the compensation and rehousing arrangements available under existing policy, villagers are provided with different choices.

On procedures, we will process the cases of affected villagers in a highly flexible way. For instance, under normal circumstances, an agricultural resite applicant has to be certified as a genuine farmer and submit a feasible farming plan providing information such as the location of the replacement agricultural site. The Government understands that the affected villagers may not be able to find replacement sites to continue farming within a short period of time and submit their farming plans to the relevant department for examining their feasibility. We will, therefore, adopt a two-step approach in processing the applications. The applicant may locate a private agricultural site and submit a farming plan to the Administration for approval after the applicant is certified as a genuine farmer.

We also understand that some villagers need cash to pay

for the deposit for their new homes. Villagers who are granted the EGCA may contact the Lands D at any time to arrange for early collection of the cash allowance, so that they can sign the sale and purchase agreement immediately after identifying suitable accommodation. Moreover, when collecting their EGCA, we allow villagers to fix with the Government a convenient date for moving out since we know it will take time for the villagers to, among other things, go through the formalities of home purchase and have their new homes renovated. Generally speaking, the earlier the villagers register, the sooner the approval procedures can be completed, and the villagers can have more time to prepare for removal.

We will stay in close touch with the CYT residents, take note of their needs and do our best under the framework of the Package and existing policy to help them overcome difficulties in removal.

Ends/Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Issued at HKT 17:23