

Government regrets over obstructions to clearance operation at Choi Yuen Tsuen

The Government expressed regret over the petitioners' obstruction to the land resumption work at Choi Yuen Tsuen (CYT) today (November 19). As the access roads to CYT were very narrow, the Government has decided to suspend today's operation so as to prevent accidents which may cause injuries to the protesters and site workers.

The Government has stated repeatedly that it would handle the phased land resumption in a humane manner. Since the launching of the operations in mid-October, the Administration has firstly taken possession of structures from the villagers and business undertakings who have moved out as well as agricultural sites and vacant lands, with a view to commencing the preparatory works, such as site formation, as soon as possible.

A Government spokesman said, "Today's operation aims at taking possession of structures vacated and handed over voluntarily by villagers and business undertakings who have already moved out of CYT. However, protesters have blocked our staff from entering CYT. This not only have caused delays to the land resumption work , but also brought inconvenience to villagers who had moved out and made an effort to come back to CYT today to hand over their land to the Government. Such acts are unreasonable."

The spokesman said that by taking over land in phases, the progress of works of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) project would not be affected, and at the same time villagers with special needs would have more time to implement their moving plans. He called on the petitioners to appreciate the Government's sincerity and efforts and to achieve a win-win situation together.

As at today, the Government has taken over about 20% of the household's structures and around 40% of the structures of the business undertakings. These structures together with the agricultural sites and vacant lands recovered, amounted to nearly 50% of the total area of CYT. The land resumption work has progressed as expected. As the construction of the XRL project is on a very tight schedule, the Government will carry out clearance operation in phases soonest possible.

The spokesman explained why some structures are yet to be recovered:

- (1) Some households are moving out their belongings or renovating their new flats;
- (2) Some households are implementing agricultural resite plans;
- (3) Some households are considering whether to accept the public housing units or interim housing units offered;
- (4) Some households request to move to public housing units but are not eligible for that; and
- (5) Some households have moved out but have not yet handed over their structures.

The spokesman stressed that while the Government would handle each case in a humane manner, the grace period could not be extended indefinitely. The villagers must genuinely implement their moving plans as soon as possible. The Government would extend the grace period to end November, and would assess the situations of the villagers by then.

A total of \$250 million including land compensation and various types of ex-gratia cash allowances were offered to the CYT villagers. Among them, \$160 million of land compensation and \$72 million of ex-gratia cash allowances were approved. Almost all of the some 140 households of villagers who were offered the ex-gratia cash allowances had collected their allowances. So far about \$13 million of crop ex-gratia allowances were approved to applicants, involving some 160 cases. Most of them were involved in small-scale planting in front of villagers' structures. The crops grown were mainly for private consumption. On average, each case was granted an allowance of more than \$80,000. About 30 farmers, who were still actively participating in agricultural activities, were offered hundreds of thousands dollars of crops allowance, with the highest offer amounting to over \$1 million. The calculation of the crops ex-gratia allowance was based on information obtained from wholesale markets and territory-wide farms as well as market surveys conducted, and the amount of allowance is more or less the same as the amount of money gained by selling the crops in the market by farming households. Apart from the allowances, the farmers may sell their harvested crops before land resumption so as to make additional profit.

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