

## Over 80% of land in Choi Yuen Tsuen recovered

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A spokesman for the Transport and Housing Bureau said the Government had taken over more than 80% of land in Choi Yuen Tsuen since its land resumption work started in mid-October last year and had begun preparatory works for the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) on the resumed land.

At present, most of the villagers and business undertakings have moved out from Choi Yuen Tsuen and continued their living in the new homes. Among the remaining some 70 households, most of them opt for the collective agricultural resite plan.

"Recently, some villagers, who plan to take part in the collective agricultural resite, are worried that while the road access issue relating to their newly-bought farmland has yet to be resolved, the due date of clearance is approaching. We appreciate their worries," the spokesman said.

"The Government has stated repeatedly that it will implement land resumption in phases by firstly taking over vacated land, agricultural sites, and structures and sites from villagers and business undertakings who have moved out. At this stage, provided that the construction progress of XRL would not be adversely affected, we shall continue the current work procedures and continue carrying out the preparatory works, such as land formation, demolishing resumed structures, erecting hoarding, on the resumed land. Through this, we aim to extending the due date of clearance for these villagers participating in collective agricultural resite as far as possible to enable them to have more time to handle the road access as well as other issues."

The spokesman understood that villagers who opted for collective agricultural resite had purchased a farmland without a vehicular access at a relatively low price and had to negotiate with the landowners of adjacent lands over the road access issue. It was understood that both parties had yet to reach an agreement and Heung Yee Kuk would continue to coordinate. As the negotiation involved their respective financial interests, the Government could not force any party to accept the terms imposed by the other one.

On rumours that some villagers refused to hand over their farmlands to the

Administration on the ground that the compensation issue had yet to be settled, the spokesman stressed that the land compensation issue had been resolved earlier. A total of \$160 million of land compensation was granted to the Choi Yuen Tsuen villagers who owned land. The ownership right of all land in Choi Yuen Tsuen now rested with the Government in accordance with the law. The crop ex-gratia allowances were extra sum of money which were unrelated to land right. The Agricultural and Fisheries Conservation Department (AFCD) had already assessed all applications of crop ex-gratia allowances and kept a complete record of the crops on the date of assessment for all the cases. It could serve as the basis of claims for further compensation in future, if necessary. In fact, all farmers (including those who had been engaging in agricultural activities on the Government land), apart from being able to collect crop ex-gratia allowances, were also given sufficient time in last year to harvest their crops for sale before handing over their farmlands. About \$13 million of crops ex-gratia allowances had been approved to Choi Yuen Tsuen villagers. Therefore, even if farmers were dissatisfied with the amount of crop ex-gratia compensation, they should hand over their land to the Administration before making further appeals based on the record of crops on the date of assessment taken by AFCD last year.

"The construction works at Choi Yuen Tsuen is a key part of the XRL project and involves the diversion of the rivercourse. The schedule is very tight as some of the works has to be completed in the dry season. Therefore, we have to carry out the clearance operation and land resumption on time. The land resumption cannot be delayed," the spokesman said.

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