

Government had not recovered Choi Yuen Tsuen's structures by force up to now

In response to media enquiries on the construction progress of the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL), a spokesman for the Transport and Housing Bureau said today (January 24) that since mid-October 2010, the Government had launched phased land resumption in Choi Yuen Tsuen (CYT) by firstly taking possession of structures from villagers who had moved out as well as agricultural sites and vacated lands, with a view to implementing the construction works for the XRL project.

“Up till now, all recovered structures were vacated ones which were handed over voluntarily by villagers who had moved out; and all recovered land were either those which had always been Government Land or were granted compensation,” the spokesman said.

On the allegation that the Government had forced villagers to move out CYT, the spokesman stressed that the Government had not forcefully taken possession of any structure which was still being resided by the villagers over the past three months. The MTR Corporation and its contractor have been carrying out preparatory works for the rail project on the recovered land, such as building hoarding and temporary site office and other related facilities. So far, the contractor has only commenced works on the recovered land, and not on any structure which is still being occupied by the villagers. Same with today's works at CYT, the contractor was only building hoarding to protect its site office, without affecting any villagers.

The objective of phased land resumption is to minimise the impact on the construction progress of the XRL project while allowing the villagers with more time to complete their moving plans. “We are regretted that the villagers have not cooperated with us. Some villagers who are still residing in CYT, together with other parties, have repeatedly trespassed into the construction sites, posing risks to their own and other people's safety, and obstructed the contractor's works, such as hoarding erection. The construction of the rail project was obstructed,” he said.

“In the face of such irresponsible behaviour and interferences, the contractor has but to step up security to protect the workers and facilities at the work site so as to enable the workers to continue their work. These have been widely covered by the media over the past few months.”

“We call on all relevant parties to observe the law. Unauthorised people are not allowed to enter the construction site of rail projects and should not damage the facilities of the work site. Otherwise, they will not only risk their own safety, but also will be legally liable.”

Up to now, the Government has already taken possession of about 85% of land in CYT. Among the remaining non-recovered parts, most are occupied by the structures of villagers who have opted for the collective agricultural resite plan. The Government understood that although they have purchased a piece of farmland, negotiation over the road access issue is not concluded as both parties have yet to reach an agreement on the specific terms. As the negotiation involved their respective financial interests, the Government could not intervene and could only allow as much time as possible for the villagers to continue the negotiation, provided that the construction works of the XRL will not be adversely affected.

“We have to make it clear that the grace period cannot be extended indefinitely. We call on the villagers to grasp time to focus on their road access right and home construction issues and do not waste their energy in obstructing the rail construction works anymore,” the spokesman said.

The construction work of the XRL project was authorised by the Executive Council and its funding application was approved by the Legislative Council in early 2010. The Government had to resume 27 hectares of land lots near CYT for construction of emergency rescue station and stabling siding. To compensate some 400 CYT villagers affected by the land resumption, the Government had in total approved \$250 million, including around \$160 million of land compensation, \$70 million of ex-gratia rehousing allowances, and \$13 million of ex-gratia crops allowances, for the villagers to arrange for their new lives. The ownership right of all the land in CYT now returned to the Government in accordance with law.

Ends/Monday, January 24, 2011

Issued at HKT 22:14