

LCQ20: Economic development in New Territories North

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (July 21):

Question:

It is learnt that the Shenzhen Municipal Government is now pressing ahead in full steam with the planning and construction of a port economy belt on the Shenzhen side along the Shenzhen-Hong Kong boundary, and the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) has also put forward a development blueprint for New Territories North. Moreover, this Council passed a Member's motion in May this year, urging the Government to drive the development of New Territories North with port economy, including opening up the Sha Tau Kok Closed Area. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current population of usual residents in the Sha Tau Kok Closed Area;
- (2) of the total number of Closed Road Permits for access to the Sha Tau Kok Closed Area issued by the Hong Kong Police Force in the past five years;
- (3) as it has been reported that the Shenzhen Municipal Government has preliminarily completed a planning proposal for the redevelopment of the Shatoujiao Checkpoint in the Yantian District of Shenzhen, under which it plans to develop the Checkpoint into a landmark checkpoint in Shenzhen East mainly for facilitating traveller clearance which will be complemented with the functions of international tourism and consumption, whether the SAR Government will consider dovetailing with such planning by opening up the Sha Tau Kok Closed Area in the future, so as to take forward the economic development in New Territories North and increase the employment opportunities within the area; and
- (4) whether the SAR Government will consider discussing with the Mainland authorities the full implementation, at the Sha Tau Kok Boundary Control Point, of the arrangement of carrying out at the same place the customs, immigration and quarantine procedures of Hong Kong and those of the Mainland (i.e. the "co-location arrangement"), as well as the provision of relevant ancillary boundary-crossing facilities to further facilitate Hong Kong residents to commute between Shenzhen and Hong Kong for work and living, so that they can benefit from the policy of opening up and developing the frontier closed areas?

Reply:

President,

The Frontier Closed Area (FCA) is established to ensure that law enforcement agencies can effectively safeguard the integrity of the boundary between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the Mainland, as well as to combat illegal immigration, smuggling and other cross boundary criminal activities. It has all along been the policy of the HKSAR Government to limit the FCA coverage to the area required for ensuring public order. Therefore, having balanced the security risks concerned, the HKSAR Government substantially reduced the FCA land coverage from about 2 800 hectares to about 400 hectares between 2008 and 2016. Since there is no physical barrier along the Hong Kong-Mainland boundary to separate Sha Tau Kok (STK) Town from the Mainland, and Chung Ying Street in STK Town is the only place in Hong Kong where cross-boundary movement of people and goods is allowed without boundary control facilities, the primary considerations for keeping STK Town within the FCA are the actual circumstances in the area and its security risks.

After consulting the relevant departments, my reply to each part of the question is as follows:

(1) According to the Police's information, the population of usual residents in the STK Closed Area was about 4 000 as at December 2020.

(2) The numbers of Closed Road Permits (CRPs) for access to the STK Closed Area issued by the Hong Kong Police Force in the past five years are as follows:

Year	Number of CRPs for access to the STK Closed Area issued (Note)
2016	13 822
2017	13 250
2018	12 569
2019	12 952
2020	13 153

Note: CRPs are issued not only to usual residents in the STK Closed Area but also to those conducting commercial or other normal activities and meeting the relevant requirements.

(3) As regards the proposal of fully opening up the STK FCA, we anticipate that it will lead to more unnecessary flow of people and goods into the FCA, posing greater security risks. In particular, a serious case involving \$80 million of smuggled goods took place in the FCA last year. Taking advantage of the shore near STK Town, lawbreakers will use modified speedboats with increased engine power to smuggle goods and swiftly leave Hong Kong waters via Starling Inlet. It poses considerable difficulties for law enforcement to pursue these smuggling speedboats and exposes law enforcement officers to huge risks. Besides, if the security environment along the boundary is not stringent enough, criminals will take advantage of such environment for

smuggling of firearms or drugs inbound. Therefore, there is a genuine need for us to curb cross-boundary crimes through the existing FCA arrangement. Also, local residents have expressed grave concerns that the opening up of the FCA will cause disruption to their tranquil daily lives, create traffic problems, lead to road capacity issues or bring inconvenience as a result of the enhancement of other ancillary security measures (e.g. erection of boundary fences). Any proposal involving the relaxation of the FCA arrangement must therefore be handled and considered carefully on the premise of effectively controlling security risks and curbing cross-boundary crimes upon consultation with residents who may be affected by the relaxed arrangement.

(4) The HKSAR Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government have all along maintained close collaboration and jointly explored measures that enhance the handling capacity and clearance facilitation of land boundary control points (BCPs) for promoting efficient and convenient flow of people and goods. Over the past year, measures actively taken forward/implemented by both Governments included commissioning of the Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Control Point, implementation of 24-hour clearance at the Shenzhen Bay Port, pressing ahead of the redevelopment of the Huanggang Port and implementation of the co-location arrangement etc. The two Governments will continue with their holistic consideration in various areas such as overall planning, transport infrastructures and BCPs' service demand and operation, and implement measures that facilitate enhancement in the handling capacity and clearance facilitation of BCPs.