

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Development

Proposed duty visit to Sichuan from 24 to 26 September 2009

Purpose

This paper invites members to note the invitation of the Sichuan Provincial People's Government ("Sichuan Provincial Government") extended to members of the Panel on Development, as well as Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of the Finance Committee, House Committee, Panel on Education, Panel on Health Services, Panel on Home Affairs and Panel on Welfare Services to visit Sichuan Province from 24 to 26 September 2009. This paper also sets out the proposed arrangements for the duty visit.

Background

The earthquake at Wenchuan County on 12 May 2008

2. On 12 May 2008, a serious earthquake, the worst one since the Tangshan earthquake in 1976, jolted Wenchuan County, Sichuan Province. According to the State Council Headquarters for Resisting Earthquake and Providing Disaster Relief, as at 10 July 2008, the death toll of the earthquake stood at 69 197, with 374 176 injured and 18 377 missing. The total number of victims was over 46.24 million. The earthquake affected a wide expanse of 440 000 km², of which 125 000 km² was hard-hit; 417 counties, 4 656 villages/towns and 47 789 village sub-areas in Sichuan, Gansu, Shaanxi and Chongqing were affected. In Sichuan alone, the quake-stricken area reached 250 000 km², of which 100 000 km² was hard-hit. Premises of over 4.5 million households collapsed or were seriously damaged to the extent that they became uninhabitable. Beichuan, Wenchuan and Yingsiu counties were nearly flattened. A total of 22 000 km of expressways, trunk-roads and village roads, 940 bridges, 16 national/provincial trunk-roads, and six railway lines including the Bao-cheng Railway were broken.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's immediate relief to earthquake victims

3. Two days after the earthquake, i.e. on 14 May 2008, the Administration proposed and the Finance Committee ("FC") approved the injection of a sum of \$350 million initially to the Disaster Relief Fund in aid of the earthquake victims. On the advice of the Central People's Government ("CPG"), a sum of \$300 million was channelled to the earthquake victims through the State Council Headquarters for Resisting Earthquake and Providing Disaster Relief. The remaining \$50 million was set aside to cater for applications for grants under the Disaster Relief Fund by major relief organizations to provide emergency relief to the earthquake victims.

Funding support for reconstruction in Sichuan

4. Upon further communication with the CPG and the Sichuan Provincial Government, the Administration obtained the understanding that the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions were requested to assist in --

- (a) the reconstruction of public service facilities in the hard-hit counties of Sichuan such as schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, homes for the aged, orphanages, women and children healthcare centres, and cultural and sports facilities;
- (b) the key elements of specific infrastructural projects of Sichuan, including roads and bridges; and
- (c) the reconstruction of Wolong Giant Panda Reserve.

Besides, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR") could also offer assistance in accordance with the actual needs of the stricken areas such as medical and rehabilitation services, emotional support and counselling services, and other areas of professional training.

5. As the Sichuan earthquake reconstruction support work falls outside the ambits of the Disaster Relief Fund and "The Secretary for Home Affairs Incorporated -- Donations" dedicated account, the Administration proposed the creation of a new commitment of \$2 billion for the establishment of the Trust Fund in Support of Reconstruction in the Sichuan Earthquake Stricken Areas as HKSAR's financial commitment to the reconstruction support work in the initial stage. The Administration briefed FC on the proposal on 14 July 2008 and the proposal was considered and approved by FC on 18 July 2008. A delegation of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") comprising 20 Members and led by the President visited the earthquake stricken areas in Sichuan from 4 to 6 July 2008.

6. The Administration briefed the Panel on Development on 28 October 2008, 3 February 2009 and 18 June 2009 on the progress of HKSAR's reconstruction support work in Sichuan. On the latter two occasions, the Administration also consulted the Panel on the proposed financial commitments of \$4 billion for the second stage and \$3 billion for the third stage reconstruction support work. The two funding proposals were approved by FC on 20 February and 3 July 2009 respectively.

Major concerns and views of Members regarding the reconstruction support work

7. At the relevant meetings of the Panel on Development and FC, Members expressed deep sympathy with the circumstances of the people of the earthquake stricken areas and recognized that post-quake reconstruction was an arduous task and would take at least several years to complete. As such, support from all sides and concerted efforts of the whole nation were needed to overcome the severe challenge. As regards HKSAR's reconstruction support work, while Members were generally supportive of the proposed reconstruction projects and funding commitments at different stages, they were very concerned about the monitoring of the quality and implementation process of and the management of funds for the reconstruction projects. At the relevant meetings of the Panel on Development and FC, the following issues were discussed --

- (a) how the HKSAR support projects were determined and the basis for the project cost estimates;
- (b) the respective responsibilities of the HKSAR Government and Sichuan authorities and legal liabilities of the various relevant parties;
- (c) the tendering, project management, audit and fund disbursement arrangements; and
- (d) the involvement of Hong Kong professionals and non-government organizations in the reconstruction work.

8. At Members' requests, the Administration provided further details on the above issues to supplement the information in the relevant discussion papers to the Panel and FC. In assuring Members that the Administration would exercise vigilance in its monitoring work, it had pledged to provide regular reports on the progress and expenditures of the support projects to Members through the Panel on Development on a half-yearly basis.

Proposal for a visit by a LegCo delegation to Sichuan in connection with reconstruction support for the earthquake

9. On 22 May 2009, the House Committee considered a proposal for a visit to be undertaken by a LegCo delegation to Sichuan. After discussion, Members agreed that there was a need for them to visit Sichuan to obtain first-hand information on the progress of the reconstruction work and utilization of the funds approved by LegCo for the purpose, and the delegation should be led by the President of LegCo. Subsequent to the meeting, the Chairman of the House Committee wrote on behalf of Members to the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) requesting the HKSAR Government to assist in arranging the visit. CS replied on 4 June 2009 advising that the Administration had conveyed the proposal to the Sichuan Provincial Government, and would continue to reflect Members' interest and concern about HKSAR's participation in the reconstruction of Sichuan to the Sichuan authorities.

10. At the meetings of the Panel on Development on 18 June 2009 and the Finance Committee on 3 July 2009 when the funding proposal for the third stage reconstruction support work of HKSAR was considered, Members noted that all the 20 first stage reconstruction support projects had proceeded to the substantive implementation stage of design, tendering and site construction. As for the 100 second stage reconstruction support projects, the Sichuan authorities had completed the preparation of the feasibility study reports of the projects, and the necessary vetting and approval work was in progress. In view of the progress, Members considered that it was opportune for LegCo Members to visit Sichuan to better understand the actual implementation situation of the reconstruction projects, and thus urged the Administration to request the Sichuan authorities to expedite the arrangements for the visit.

Invitation from the Sichuan Provincial Government

11. On 2 September 2009, the Sichuan Provincial Government sent a letter to LegCo inviting members of the Panel on Development, as well as Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of the Finance Committee, House Committee, Panel on Education, Panel on Health Services, Panel on Home Affairs and Panel on Welfare Services to visit Sichuan from 24 to 26 September 2009. The Sichuan Provincial Government also invited the President to lead the delegation. Members were informed of the invitation on 2 September 2009. In view of the tight timeframe for logistical arrangements, the Secretariat issued a circular on 3 September 2009 to the invited Members requesting them to indicate whether they would join the visit. Subsequently, the President and 14 other Members have indicated that they would join the visit. The list of participating Members is in the **Appendix**.

Visit programme

12. The Sichuan Provincial Government is drawing up the visit programme which would include visits to some reconstruction projects in Dujiangyan, Yingxiu and Deyang, such as schools, road infrastructure (Provincial Road 303 from Yingxiu to Wolong), a rehabilitation centre and a factory. Some of these reconstruction projects are supported by the HKSAR and some by other provinces/municipalities. The delegation would also visit the Jinsha Site Museum and meet with officials of the Sichuan Province to discuss the restoration and reconstruction work in Sichuan.

Logistical arrangements for the visit

Air passage

13. Air passage for the duty visit will be centrally arranged by the Secretariat. The flight schedules are as follows --

Hong Kong to Sichuan on 24 September 2009

KA820 departing at 10:20 am and arriving at 12:55 pm

Sichuan to Hong Kong on 26 September 2009

KA1427 departing at 4:00 pm and arriving at 6:25 pm

Economy class seats have been reserved for the delegation.

Estimated expenditure

14. Expenditure arising from this duty visit will be charged to individual Members' overseas duty visit account of HK\$55,000 for the purpose of duty visits outside Hong Kong organized by committees, other than the Parliamentary Liaison Subcommittee, of the Council during the 2008-2012 term. A tentative estimate of the expenditure for the 3-day visit is about \$5,800 per person.

Media arrangements for the visit

15. Arrangements will be made to enable press members to accompany the delegation throughout the visit in Sichuan, except for the meeting with officials of the Sichuan Province on 26 September 2009 which will be preceded by a photo call. The Public Information Division will liaise directly with media organizations on the detailed arrangements.

Advice sought

16. Members are invited to note the invitation of the Sichuan Provincial Government for a visit to Sichuan in connection with the post-quake restoration and reconstruction work. A paper on the duty visit will be submitted to the House Committee for information.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 September 2009

Appendix

List of Members who have indicated that they will take part in the visit to Sichuan from 24 to 26 September 2009

(Position as at 14 September 2009)

Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing (President and Delegation Leader)

Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai

Hon James TO Kun-sun

Hon CHAN Kam-lam

Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun

Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong

Hon WONG Yung-kan

Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee

Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting

Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long

Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming

Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing

Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau

Hon IP Kwok-him

Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho

Total: 15 Members