

Buildings Department expresses grave concern regarding ICAC's arrest action at a construction site at Anderson Road

The Buildings Department (BD) expressed grave concern today (May 21) regarding the arrests made by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) at a construction site at Anderson Road on suspicion of offering and accepting advantages. The BD emphasised that illegal or non-compliant behaviours would not be tolerated. The BD has been actively co-operating with the ICAC's investigation, including providing information and assisting in evidence collection and enforcement action. As the investigation is still on-going, the BD will not comment on the details of the case.

The main contractor involved is a registered general building contractor (RGBC) under the Buildings Ordinance (BO). Apart from assisting in the ICAC's investigation, the BD is also conducting an investigation on the quality of works at the subject site under the BO. The BD received a report in August last year alleging that the steel reinforcements of some structural elements in the superstructure works of six blocks of residential buildings being carried out at the site had not been installed in accordance with the standards under the BO. The BD took the matter very seriously and deployed its staff to the site for inspection four times in September last year. It was found that the number of steel reinforcements installed at some beams was less than that required in the approved plans. The BD thus served an order under section 23 of the BO ordering the cessation of works for the entire site in October last year. The BD subsequently deployed its staff to carry out site inspections on many occasions, conducted interviews and collected project information from the project registered structural engineer (RSE) and registered contractor (RC), including requiring open-up of concrete at various locations of the superstructure works of the six buildings to determine whether the quantity, distribution, position, and size of the steel reinforcements complied with the plans, as well as testing the strength of the concrete.

The BD has largely completed the concrete open-up investigation. The results of the inspections conducted so far show that there are major deviations in part of the steel reinforcement installation from the approved plans in the six blocks of residential buildings, including positional discrepancy and displacement of steel reinforcements, discrepancy in the size of steel reinforcements, as well as fewer steel reinforcements than those shown in the plans. The BD is currently consulting the Department of Justice in considering prosecution against the relevant individuals based on the evidence in accordance with the provisions of the BO.

Following thorough inspection and structural assessment by the BD, and considering the scope, quantity, nature of the problematic steel

reinforcement works, and the adjoining structures, it has been determined that there is no obvious danger to the overall structure of the buildings. Current inspection results indicate that the quantity of main steel reinforcements within the structural components is, on average, below 10 per cent less than of that in the approved plans. Taking into account the overall configuration of the steel reinforcements and the load-bearing design of the adjacent concrete walls which are sufficient to support the loads, no obvious danger is thus posed to the overall structure. The BD has requested the project RSE and RC to submit an incident report and the necessary remedial measures, including localised strengthening of the buildings, demolition of part of the structural elements where necessary, and reinstalling the steel reinforcements and recasting the concrete.

In addition to the Anderson Road project involved, the main contractor is currently the RGBC of five other private developments that have not yet been completed. Of these five developments, three are for residential use, one for commercial use and one for commercial/residential use. The commercial/residential project is nearing completion, while the remaining four projects are expected to be completed between the second quarter of next year and the third quarter of 2027.

In view of the problem of steel reinforcements of the Anderson Road project, the BD has, during the past period, proactively stepped up inspections of the five private developments being undertaken by the main contractor. This includes doubling the number of surprise site inspections and conducting audit checks on the completed concrete structural elements by using non-destructive covermeter testing technology. No deviation in the quantity and position of steel reinforcements from the approved plans, or any obvious structural safety issues, were found. Notwithstanding the above, to ensure building safety, the BD will immediately issue letters to the developers of the five developments, requesting them to urge their appointed RSEs to conduct a comprehensive review of all the supervision records of steel reinforcement installation at the sites concerned; to provide the BD within two months a review report and a testing proposal for checking the steel reinforcement installation; to engage an independent accredited laboratory to conduct the tests according to the testing proposal upon agreement by the BD; and to submit to the BD an independent testing report, so as to ensure the structural safety of the projects. If the developers concerned fail to comply with the BD's requirements, the BD will consider issuing orders to the authorized persons of the projects under section 22(3) of the BO to require them to carry out the tests deemed necessary by the BD to ensure that the works comply with the relevant requirements.

The BD emphasises that this case is a rare individual incident and that the current regulatory system of building works is robust and well-functioning. Under the existing system, registered building professionals (RBPs), RCs, and technically competent persons (TCPs) bear the overall responsibility for supervising building works. They should ensure that all stages of the works are carried out in accordance with the BO and its subsidiary regulations, as well as the approved plans, while ensuring construction safety. If any irregularities in the works are found, the

relevant procedures should be initiated to effect rectification. In other advanced regions and cities, including Singapore and the United Kingdom, building design and supervision are also carried out by qualified building professionals and contractors. Under the system, RBPs, RCs, and TCPs monitor each other to ensure that the overall construction process is not compromised by the errors or non-compliance of any single individual. The BD ensures that the relevant parties properly discharge their statutory responsibilities and that the works comply with the standards and regulations through surprise site inspections, audit checks of site supervision records, sampling for verification tests, reviewing test reports, etc. In case of any violations of the BO, the BD will impose sanctions through prosecution, refusal of renewal of registration, and disciplinary actions, while the relevant professional bodies may also consider imposing sanctions.

The BD will review the experience from this case and double the number of construction sites for audit inspections of the configuration of steel reinforcements prior to the casting of concrete at sites, from the current annual sampling rate of at least 12 per cent to at least 25 per cent of projects. For the configuration of steel reinforcements after the casting of concrete, the BD will also conduct audit checks with an annual sampling rate of 25 per cent of projects as a regularised practice, using covermeter technology for sampling tests to further strengthen the monitoring mechanism.