

\$12.5m bill for temporary refugee closed camp

About \$12.5 million will be spent to convert Bowring Army Camp in Tuen Mun into a closed centre as a contingency measure to accommodate new Vietnamese refugee arrivals.

The proposed closed centre, despite strong opposition from the Tuen Mun District Board, will be opened in September if the number of new arrivals exceeds the capacity of the existing camps.

With a maximum capacity of about 2,500, the camp and a new centre in Hay Ling Chau with similar layout and capacity could provide some breathing room for local officials in the search for emergency shelter for the unwelcome visitors.

If the Government gives the go-ahead, the Tuen Mun closed centre at Fu Tei will be the fourth such camp.

The others are the Chima-wan centre and two at Hay Ling Chau.

Principal Assistant Secretary for Security, Mr Clinton Leeks, told a Tuen Mun District Board meeting yesterday that "the Government is not trying to dump the unwanted at Tuen Mun; the camp was recruited for the pressing problem of accommodating the refugees in the short term."

The Security Branch had

The camp will be managed by the Correctional Services Department and Mr Leeks said a planned staff of 250 would be able to control it satisfactorily.

"The Government will assure the residents of Tuen Mun that a full and adequate number of Correctional Services staff will be at the camp as reinforcement at the first sign of trouble," he said.

He stressed the security in the closed centre would be tightened with double-ring fences and based on experience in the existing two camps.

He noted that the Government was still looking for a longer-term solution but the immediate need had to be met.

The Government had studied at least nine alternative sites but failed to come up with a better site than the camp at Fu Tei.

And the Government anticipated a slight rise in the number of refugees arriving here in the coming summer despite the fact that in the first few months of the year only 800 refugees made it to Hongkong. The rate increased sharply last month, however.

Since July 2 last year, the Government moved to deter Vietnamese boat people from coming to Hongkong by putting them into closed camps.

In the past two years, refugee arrivals totalled be-

tween 7,000 and 8,000 and if this year's arrivals follow a traditional pattern, the largest batch of refugees arriving here will be in September.

Board members agreed that isolated islands were more suitable for setting up closed camps because the centres posed a threat to nearby residents in more crowded areas.

Mr Tso Siu-wai noted that a closed camp in Tuen Mun not only ruined the image of the new town that members had endeavoured to promote but it would affect the development of the site.

Mr Leeks answered that the site was not ready for redevelopment because it would not be available until next year and the site was not scheduled for immediate development.

Querying the Government's policy, Mr Ng Cheuk-tei said the Government was trying to deter refugees from coming to Hongkong while building more camps for them in anticipation of their arrival.

Mr Leeks replied that the Government could not control the situation although it had tried to get the message across to the refugees that closed camp life was not enjoyable.

New transit centre plan for factory

The Housing Authority will convert one of its factory buildings in Tuen Mun into a transit centre for future victims of natural disasters and clearance operations.

The new permanent centre will replace the present facility at Tak Wing Industrial Building, for which the Housing Authority obtained a lease in a hasty bid in December 1981 — for an estimated annual rental of \$6 million — to accommodate the large number of people made homeless in a spate of squatter fires.

The plan for the new centre was disclosed at a board meeting yesterday by Tuen Mun District Officer, Mr Ricky Fung, who said he had been told about it by a senior Housing official.

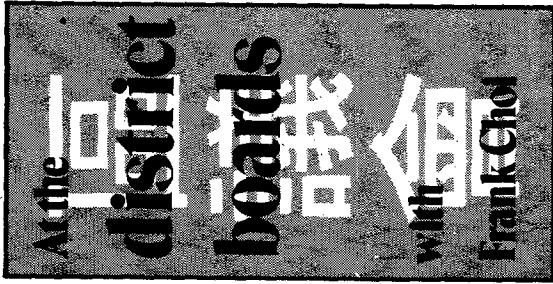
Details of the plan were not available at yesterday's meeting, but it has been confirmed that the Tak Wing transit centre will be closed when its lease expires at the end of this year.

The proposed transit centre will be at Hot Tai factory building, one of the many built by the Housing Authority to accommodate factory operators in temporary industrial areas affected by clearance operations.

The building is currently vacant.

The Housing Authority also plans to build a temporary housing area in Wo Hop Shek for similar use.

S.R.M.F.
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**Today:
Tuen Mun**

obtained a tenure of three years for the use of the separated western portion of the camp which was handed back to the Government this month by the Army.

The northern portion of the camp will be occupied by the Army until next year.

Mr Leeks said the Government had yet to make a decision on the Tuen Mun camp but as the conversion of the camp would take about four months, a decision was needed before the peak season of arrivals in September.