

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 21 June 2001

The Council met at half-past Two o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT:

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE MRS RITA FAN HSU LAI-TAI, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH TING WOO-SHOU, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE DAVID CHU YU-LIN

THE HONOURABLE CYD HO SAU-LAN

THE HONOURABLE LEE CHEUK-YAN

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LEE CHU-MING, S.C., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ERIC LI KA-CHEUNG, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LI KWOK-PO, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE FRED LI WAH-MING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE NG LEUNG-SING

PROF THE HONOURABLE NG CHING-FAI

THE HONOURABLE MARGARET NG

THE HONOURABLE MRS SELINA CHOW LIANG SHUK-YEE, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG MAN-KWONG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUEN-HAN

THE HONOURABLE BERNARD CHAN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KAM-LAM

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG YIU-CHUNG

THE HONOURABLE SIN CHUNG-KAI

DR THE HONOURABLE PHILIP WONG YU-HONG

THE HONOURABLE WONG YUNG-KAN

THE HONOURABLE JASPER TSANG YOK-SING, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE YEUNG SUM

THE HONOURABLE LAU KONG-WAH

THE HONOURABLE LAU WONG-FAT, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE AMBROSE LAU HON-CHUEN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE EMILY LAU WAI-HING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHOY SO-YUK

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW CHENG KAR-FOO

THE HONOURABLE SZETO WAH

THE HONOURABLE TIMOTHY FOK TSUN-TING, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAW CHI-KWONG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TAM YIU-CHUNG, G.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE TANG SIU-TONG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ABRAHAM SHEK LAI-HIM, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LI FUNG-YING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HENRY WU KING-CHEONG, B.B.S.

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL MAK KWOK-FUNG

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT CHAN WAI-YIP

DR THE HONOURABLE LO WING-LOK

THE HONOURABLE WONG SING-CHI

THE HONOURABLE FREDERICK FUNG KIN-KEE

THE HONOURABLE IP KWOK-HIM, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU PING-CHEUNG

THE HONOURABLE AUDREY EU YUET-MEE, S.C., J.P.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TIEN PEI-CHUN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT HO CHUN-YAN

IR DR THE HONOURABLE RAYMOND HO CHUNG-TAI, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE LUI MING-WAH, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TO KUN-SUN

THE HONOURABLE HUI CHEUNG-CHING

THE HONOURABLE MRS SOPHIE LEUNG LAU YAU-FUN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW WONG WANG-FAT, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HOWARD YOUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE YEUNG YIU-CHUNG

THE HONOURABLE LAU CHIN-SHEK, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS MIRIAM LAU KIN-YEE, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG FU-WAH, M.H., J.P.

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING:

DR YEOH ENG-KIONG, J.P.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE

MR LEE SHING-SEE, J.P.

SECRETARY FOR WORKS

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MR RICKY FUNG CHOI-CHEUNG, J.P., SECRETARY GENERAL

MR RAY CHAN YUM-MOU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Clerk, please make a head count to ascertain if a quorum is present.

(The Clerk reported to the President after he had counted the number of Members present)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): We have a quorum. Meeting shall now start.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Two motions with no legislative effect. I have accepted the recommendations of the House Committee as to the time limits on speeches for the motion debates, and Members are already familiar with the rules on the time limits on speeches. I just wish to remind Members that I am obliged to direct any Member speaking in excess of the specified time to discontinue.

First motion: Preventing and reducing suicide.

PREVENTING AND REDUCING SUICIDE

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam President, the Dragon Boat Festival will come next week and I naturally think of QU Yuan, a poet of the Warring States, who worried about the condition of his state and the people and eventually drowned himself in a river. Unfortunately, the problem of suicide has not been alleviated the least bit as society progresses. Last Tuesday, a blind father, driven by poverty and sickness, gassed himself and his two children to death. Earlier on, there were nine cases of suicide in one single day. The situation is shocking. Tragedies occur one after another before our eyes. It seems we are living in a city of sadness.

According to the statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2000, there is one successful suicide every 40 seconds and one suicide attempt every three seconds. The suicide rate in Hong Kong has consistently stood high in recent years, with 12 to 13 people managing to kill themselves out of every 100 000, ranking 24th in the world list.

In fact, the onslaught of the financial turmoil has left Hong Kong with a large pool of unemployed workers in a short space of time. People who struggled to keep their heads above water on the poverty line abound. The entire atmosphere in society is everything but optimistic. Other than such conventional methods of suicide as jumping from buildings, gassing and hanging, killing oneself by burning charcoal has become the trend in recent years.

According to statistics of the Coroner's Court in Hong Kong, suicide cases last year were at a record high of 915, proof positive that the problem has become more and more serious. Therefore, I think the Government must be forward-looking, and it must squarely address the problem and formulate effective strategies complemented by decisive tactics to prevent the proliferation of suicide attempts.

Formulation of policies can be very effective in preventing and reducing the incidence of suicide. In Britain, for instance, after natural gas was introduced to replace town gas for domestic consumption, cases of death by carbon monoxide poisoning have dropped drastically; and the boarding up of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco has successfully reversed the tide of suicide by jumping from the Bridge. The Mass Transit Railway in Hong Kong is also retrofitting platform screen doors in an effort to stop suicide by jumping onto the tracks. Suicide often causes enormous wastage of social resources. Take a university student who committed suicide as an example. From the day he was born to his graduation from university, society has put on him resources amounting to millions of dollars, not to mention the losses caused to productivity or certain economic activities. Therefore, actions to tackle the suicide problem can brook no delay.

I hope that the Government will not shy away from the problem in order not to face up to its severity. Instead, it must start from a macroscopic level and set up a high-level standing policy group (not a task force) to systematically collect and analyse suicide statistics, with a view to formulating effective policies for preventing or reducing suicide. As for the composition of the policy group, it should be led by the Chief Secretary for Administration and should comprise representatives from all relevant departments, including the Department of Health, Social Welfare Department (SWD), Education Department and Home Affairs Department, as well as representatives from the relevant voluntary agencies. All these parties should make a concerted effort to draw up plans to achieve the objectives outlined above.

One of the strategies is the provision of counselling service. The Government should set up a one-stop suicide crisis centre at the community level. Upon receipt of a case of attempted suicide, the Hospital Authority or any other institution should make arrangements for professional counselling staff to follow up each of such cases and provide counselling service for the family members as well. As pointed out by the WHO, suicide can be prevented, particularly, people who have attempted suicide before are most vulnerable to making a second attempt. So, arrangements must be made for persons who have attempted suicide to receive counselling, in order to ensure that they will not think of killing themselves any more in future. In the meantime, it is also necessary to provide relevant professional service for family members of suicides.

Madam President, prevention is better than cure. The Government must at the same time vigorously publicize and promote positive values of life and mental health. A misconception that long exists in the community is that only mental patients require psychiatric consultation. In this society where the tempo of life is hectic, many people are actually suffering from varying degrees of mental or emotional disturbances. We must not lose sight of the fact that people with emotional problems constitute a major category of suicides. Early detection of their problems and prescription of the right medication can greatly reduce this category of suicide cases.

At present, it generally takes weeks for family doctors to refer patients to government psychiatric out-patient clinics. General practitioners and general nurses are not professionally trained on mental health. If more training can be given to them in this area, they can provide counselling and treatment for help-seekers promptly. This, I believe, will help reduce suicide cases due to acute emotional disturbances.

In the present-day society, family life mainly takes the form of nuclear family. However, we should not take the attitude of "minding only our own business". Apart from caring for our own family members, we should also care for our neighbours. Therefore, as part of its publicity and education initiatives, the Government should vigorously promote the spirit of "neighbourly friendliness" through the mass media, so that among neighbours there will be more care and support and hence more hope. Being the conscience of society, the media, in reporting suicide cases, should not describe in detail or unduly play up the method by which the suicide was committed. Instead, expert advice should at the same time be provided to teach the public how to release themselves from emotional disturbances.

At present, there are only three voluntary agencies dedicated to handling help-seeking cases related to suicide and attempted suicide. They have to resolve problems for numerous help-seekers every day and face the problem of severe manpower shortage. The Government should provide these voluntary agencies with additional resources so that they can employ workers tasked to provide more counselling hotlines and embark on follow-up work. What these voluntary agencies can now achieve at most is to stop callers from committing suicide, which is merely addressing the symptom, rather than solving the problem at root. The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong, for example, has only one voluntary worker manning one counselling hotline most of the time late at night and so, only 10% of help-seekers can obtain assistance every night.

In view of this, I urge the Government to consider providing a telephone line similar to "999", using numbers that can be easily remembered, such as "333", as a hotline for people intending to commit suicide to seek help, and counselling service can be provided jointly by voluntary agencies and the SWD. It is because help-seekers usually made the unwise decision to kill themselves on the spur of the moment. Timely counsel can reduce the chance of they mistakenly entering the gate of hell.

In respect of the categories of suicide, I wish to emphasize that adolescent suicide is an important area that we must not overlook. Understandably, parents will be in great grief seeing their children die at a young age. Therefore, the Government should first instil in these future pillars of society a set of positive and correct values of life. The Education Department should help schools formulate a systematic curriculum on the prevention of suicide. In the United States, for example, the California State Department of Education enacted laws in 1987 to make it mandatory for all teachers to receive training on the prevention of youth suicide. Schools also put emphasis on the development of the Adversary Quotient and Emotional Quotient to help they ease their pressure, find a way out amidst problems, learn to make self-improvement in adversities and learn ways to get along well with others, so that they can have a happy and wonderful adolescence. As the policy of "one social worker for each school" is implemented only in secondary schools, I would suggest the Government to expedite the implementation of this policy across the board. In addition, the Government should at the same time promote "one nurse for each school" to inculcate in youngsters knowledge of health and hygiene, particularly primary mental health education.

Besides, over 30% of suicides in Hong Kong are elderly people above 60 of age, which is two to three times higher than the figures in the United States and Australia. The Chief Executive has undertaken to care for the elderly in Hong Kong. But after the financial turmoil, the elderly people are condemned to even greater hardships. On the one hand, some lower-middle class households are caught in the plights of unemployment and on the other hand, the SWD has tightened the criteria for vetting applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) from families with elderly members. The elderly people are therefore deprived of family support and hence in isolation. Once they are stricken by diseases, they will easily lose the will to live. Therefore, I hope that the Government will seriously consider reviewing the elderly welfare policy and enhancing social support to encourage families to take care of their elderly members.

Moreover, as pointed out in the 1999 annual report of the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong, 57.3% of suicides in 1998 were economically inactive; and the unemployed have consistently accounted for the largest proportion of suicides. Therefore, I strongly hope that the Administration will not promote the idea that "CSSA nurtures lazybones" for the sake of cutting expenditure, for this will deter people with financial difficulties from seeking help. When applications for CSSA are received, the SWD should endeavour to understand more about the background of the applicants to see if there is also a need to provide professional social work service. Perhaps this can prevent some family tragedies from happening.

Furthermore, the Government should teach the public correct knowledge of investment to deter people from jumping on the bandwagon of investment which turns out to be the wrong one, such as investing in technology shares. For owners of negative assets, the Government should also assist them in dealing with bankruptcy and negative assets, so that they are able to solve the pressing problems in a positive and rational manner.

Madam President, the prevalence of suicide is a red light indicating that society is facing high risks. It reflects that the economic and political problems in Hong Kong have transformed into a heavy pressure on society, making people feel suffocated and prompting some to make a very wrong decision. So, in order to solve the problem at root, we must work to turn Hong Kong from a high-risk society to a safe one. To this end, we must set up a sound social safety net system and resolve unemployment, so that public confidence in future and their sense of security can be restored.

Being conscience of society, we definitely think that even half a suicide case is too many. As an old saying goes, "Death can be weightier than Mount Taishan or lighter than a feather." To kill oneself without a good cause is but an instance of cowardice.

With these remarks, Madam President, I beg to move, and I hope that the Government can do its utmost to resolve the problem of suicide.

Mr Michael MAK moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, as the problem of suicide has become serious in Hong Kong in recent years, this Council urges the Government to set up a policy group specially responsible for formulating effective strategies to prevent and reduce suicide."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Michael MAK be passed.

Miss CHOY So-yuk will move an amendment to this motion, as printed on the Agenda. The motion and the amendment will now be debated together in a joint debate. I now call upon Miss CHOY So-yuk to speak and move her amendment.

MISS CHOY SO-YUK (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that Mr Michael MAK's motion be amended, as printed on the Agenda.

Madam President, the number of suicide cases has been constantly rising in recent years. According to reports, one person successfully commits suicide every 10 hours and more than 800 people die from suicide each year. In addition, there is one unsuccessful suicide attempt every hour. This is indeed worrying. This also explains why the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) would like to urge the Government to formulate effective measures to prevent and reduce suicide. However, the DAB is of the view that suicide is a social problem as well as a social phenomenon. It is not caused by public policies. Therefore, a "task force" will be more appropriate and better fit the purpose than a "policy group". Actually, the thrust of our amendment is to propose some specific work and a specific direction for the prevention of

suicide. In our opinion, effective preventive measures should cover three aspects: first, allocating more resources to enhance the counselling services provided by various agencies to help-seekers; second, enhancing publicity and education among the public (particularly the young people); and third, strengthening studies on suicidal behaviour and using those studies as the basis for formulating the relevant policies. Next I would like to elaborate these three points.

To start with, the Government must ensure that various welfare service agencies are given sufficient resources to improve their services to cope with the rising number of help-seekers. Suicide is often an act on impulse. If timely counsel and consolation can be provided to persons perplexed by problems, they will not commit suicide because of momentary weakening of will. At present, the SWD, various social service agencies, Kwai Chung Hospital and Castle Peak Hospital have set up hotlines to help the public to solve their emotional problems. Nevertheless, a help-seeker had reportedly failed to get through to one of those hotlines though fortunately he/she eventually decided not to commit suicide. This incident has exposed the problem of inadequate manpower faced by counselling agencies. Although we do not know how many people eventually killed themselves because they could not get through to the hotlines to seek help, we are convinced that some valuable lives can definitely be saved timely given sufficient manpower.

We should note that to rely solely on the provision of sufficient manpower to answer telephone calls in order to effectively prevent suicide will not suffice. Other measures should be taken as well. First, counselling staff responsible for manning the hotlines must have received sufficient training as a professional listener who can convince help-seekers not to commit suicide at the critical moment. Second, telephone counselling should be the start rather than the end of a package of counselling services. Further follow-up actions and assistance must be provided to help-seekers by social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists to effectively ameliorate the disturbance and problems faced by the help-seekers. Otherwise, the idea of committing suicide might strike them again after a lapse of time. For these reasons, the DAB urges the Government to allocate more resources and distribute them effectively to enhance the counselling services provided to help-seekers.

The second major task in preventing suicide is to enhance publicity and education to instill in members of the public, particularly the young people, a correct sense of value. In recent years, news on suicide cases have been reported in great details by the media. This practice has exaggerated the undesirable message that people can escape from the reality by committing suicide. What is more, such news might even act as catalysts for persons of weak will and those who are perplexed by emotional problems. Therefore, in handling suicide reports, journalists must act carefully and convey positive values to the public as far as possible. At the same time, the Government should enhance publicity on cherishing lives at the district level by, for instance, organizing more evening gatherings or carnivals for young people.

The DAB is of the view that the Government and various social service agencies should, in formulating publicity and education strategies, introduce measures geared to people of different age groups. Statistics have shown that the suicide population is getting younger in recent years, with the number of suicide students rising constantly since 1998. To address student suicide, schools should spread such messages as life is priceless among students. In addition, students should be taught how they can handle frustrations and pressures in an appropriate manner and nurture the spirit of mutual consolation and support. If students know that some fellow students are suffering emotional problems, they should notify school social workers and teachers as early as possible so that timely counsel can be provided. Apart from youth suicide, the problem of elderly suicide has also become increasingly serious in recent years. Some psychiatrists pointed out that 10% of the elderly in Hong Kong are suffering from depression. The suicide tendency of the elderly in Hong Kong is also three times greater than their counterparts in Europe and the United States. For these reasons, we should promote the culture of respecting and protecting the elderly and urge the public to care for the elderly.

Madam President, my third point relates to the strategy of reducing the incidence of suicide. In other words, we must carry out in-depth studies and gain a thorough understanding of the problem of suicide. This is because we will not be able to know whether the existing measures or future strategies can really work if we do not understand the characteristics of suicides. Nevertheless, most of the current studies on suicide are not systematic. Although each suicide case has its unique background, still we can sum up certain commonalities. For instance, elderly people commit suicide probably because of death of spouse, illness, senility, and so on. Apart from these, the

characteristics of suicides are also worth studying. We may examine, for instance, the relationship between suicide and sexes, financial situation, academic level and even reports on suicide. Comprehensive records are indispensable to systematic study on the problem of suicide. The problem remains, however, that the existing statistical data are often fragmented and incomprehensive. Although this Council was told by the Health and Welfare Bureau in 1999 that the SWD would improve its system of collecting information on help-seekers, most suicides do not necessarily seek help from the SWD and therefore the data collected by the SWD is far from comprehensive. In this respect, the DAB proposes that the Government should set up a uniform reporting system whereby the medical records, the use of medicine and suicidal methods of suicides and people attempting suicide will be recorded after information has been collected from schools, the SWD and hospitals so that more systematic studies can be carried out in future.

With these remarks, Madam President, I move the amendment and urge Honourable colleagues to support it.

Miss CHOY So-yuk moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To delete "policy group specially responsible" after "this Council urges the Government to set up a" and substitute with "task force"; and to add ", which include: (a) allocating more resources to enhance the counselling services provided by the Social Welfare Department and various social service agencies; (b) enhancing publicity and education in order to instill in members of the public, particularly the young people, the positive values of cherishing their lives; and (c) strengthening various studies on the problem of suicide, such as the causes of suicide, the backgrounds and psychological conditions of the people who committed suicide and the act of copycat suicide, and using them as the basis for formulating the relevant strategies" after "to prevent and reduce suicide"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Miss CHOY So-yuk to Mr Michael Mak's motion, be passed.

Does any Member wish to speak?

MR KENNETH TING (in Cantonese): Madam President, suicide is a serious and complicated social problem and a lot of Western countries are very seriously seeking ways to alleviate this problem. The Liberal Party is very pleased that Mr Michael MAK has raised this topic, giving colleagues of this Council an opportunity to express their views and pool collective wisdom.

During the past 30 to 40 years, the suicide rate in Hong Kong has maintained roughly at 0.001% to 0.014%, and the suicide rate in 1999 was 12.6%, slightly higher than that in the United States and Singapore but lower than that of Japan, France and Switzerland. Compared to other parts of the world, Hong Kong has a moderate suicide rate.

Certainly, we should not feel complacent because these figures reflect in some measure the "unhappy index" of Hong Kong people. Evidently, an average person will take this path of no return only when he has lost hope in everybody, everything. In any case, we should try our best to suppress this "unhappy index" in suicide rate.

Generally, we should pay special attention to a few types of "high risk people". Firstly, the unemployed. In 1999, 40% of the suicides were unemployed, and this reflected the relationship between the two. The latest unemployment rate announced by the Government still remains high and underemployment has signs of aggravating. The Administration should improve the overall business environment so as to create more jobs. At the same time, the SWD should pay more attention to and follow up cases of long-term unemployment and refer them for suitable counselling services when necessary.

Secondly, borderline mental patients, especially depression patients. Though easily neglected by people, the relationship between borderline mental disorder and suicide does warrant our concern indeed. A study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States pointed out that almost all suicides suffered from varied degrees of depression, alcoholism or drug dependence. As Hong Kong people work under immense pressure in a hectic pace of life, they easily have emotional problems but many of them will brush them aside, unwilling to consult a psychiatrist. In the long run, the Government should look squarely at the tendency and introduce concepts of medical treatment to tackle the problem of suicide.

The third type of people who need special attention is the elderly. Globally, the suicide rate of old people aged over 75 is far higher than that of other age groups. The suicide rate of old people aged over 60 in Hong Kong is between twice and thrice the overall suicide rate. It is anticipated that old people aged over 65 in Hong Kong will increase to 1.27 million by the year 2020 and such elderly problems as social welfare and elderly suicide problems would emerge. Therefore, the Government should study the problems as soon as possible and make preparations early.

The fourth type of people is female new arrivals. Many of them fail to adapt to the living environment in Hong Kong and make very few friends, and they also have to do household chores and take care of their children. Often they do not know how to express their emotions when they are unhappy, so they really need counselling and understanding by others.

The amendment proposes improving the existing counselling services. Doubtless these agencies work at the frontline in contact with people with suicidal tendency, so the authorities should examine how best the counselling services of these agencies can be enhanced to provide against possible trouble. Yet, many people with suicidal tendency commit suicide because they are momentarily swayed by personal feelings and they would not take the initiative to seek assistance beforehand. Thus more often than not it relies on the timely discovery, counsel and assistance by their families and friends.

The United States recently launched a large-scale nationwide campaign against suicide. The Government took the lead in publicity and co-operated with voluntary agencies and called upon families, medical personnel and clergymen to help to identify and save people with suicidal tendency through different relationship networks. We should really make reference to this approach with "co-ordination by the Government and focus on non-governmental organizations".

Madam President, the Liberal Party supports the original motion and the amendment.

DR LO WING-LOK (in Cantonese): Madam President, suicide incidents happen one after another in recent years and a certain place in Hong Kong is

even called a "haven for suicide". On 21 May this year, nine suicide cases happened on the same day, in which eight persons unfortunately died and two were rescued. A newspaper called this "shame of society". Has Hong Kong become a high risk region for suicide?

A friend of mine who works as a psychiatrist once told me that according to some surveys, the suicide rate is generally lower during wartime and when people are in a precarious state. Conversely, the problem of suicide will aggravate during a relatively peaceful and prosperous period when people live in stability. In fact, the problem of suicide has become an aggravating social problem for both developed and developing countries.

The information in the World Mental Health Report 2001 being drafted by the World Health Organization indicates that in the half century just past, the global suicide rate has risen by 60%, that is, 16 out of 100 000 people committed suicide on average. Moreover, suicide has also become one of the three main causes of death among people aged between 15 and 44.

We can summarize four points from the Report:

- (1) the global suicide rate is increasing;
- (2) the rate of increase in the suicide rate for young people and women is the most obvious;
- (3) in most developed countries and some developing countries, suicide has also become the major cause of death of young people; and
- (4) the causes of suicide are complicated and varied, involving a host of factors ranging from physical, mental to socio-cultural.

In the past, most suicides were old people but today, young people have become a high risk group as far as suicide is concerned. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine* published on 7 October 2000, suicide was the second major cause of death of people aged between 15 and 24 in European Union countries, second only to traffic accidents. In mainland China, suicide has also become the major cause of death of females aged between 15 and 34.

Last year, 915 people in Hong Kong died of suicide and the figure has evidently increased as compared to 847 in 1998 and 882 in 1999. If the unsuccessful attempts of suicide were included, more people would be involved. Suicide not only affects the persons who committed suicide but also their families, friends, work units as well as society as a whole.

The Government must take various measures to effectively prevent suicide, but I would focus my discussion on two aspects only today.

Front-line medical personnel especially doctors can play a very positive role in the prevention of suicide. For instance, front-line doctors in primary health care are often the first-line helpers for patients. However, quite a few patients would not tell their doctors direct that they have mental or emotional problems because patients who are emotionally upset or depressed will usually only complain about having such symptoms as fatigue, insomnia, poor appetite, headache and dizziness. Doctors should be able to recognize the above signals of emotional problems and become highly alert before they can suit the remedy to the case and defuse the crisis. Therefore, all medical organizations and organs of government should consider enhancing the relevant training for doctors in primary health care so that every front-line doctor can discover a crisis as soon as possible in order to prevent and stop a tragedy from happening. Such training should actually begin from the time students took up medical studies so that they could pay more attention to the emotional and mental problems of patients. It would also strengthen their communication and listening skills so that they would have more confidence in tackling such problems after graduation.

One important link to the prevention of suicide is enabling people to approve of themselves and cherish life. Young people mainly establish self-approval at school and in families, and those young suicides very often come from broken families or face learning or socialization difficulties at school. How can we create opportunities of self-approval for these young people in difficulty?

The answer is that we can create opportunities for them to bring their personal potentials into full play at school or in the community. If the academic performance of a young person is unsatisfactory, it does not mean that he is equally poor in sports and outdoor activities or he cannot perform well in art and craft, music or uniformed teams. Therefore, schools and the community should

give the youth opportunities to participate in such activities. In addition to giving the youth a chance to do well, we can train them to learn discipline and solve problems step by step. They will also have more chances to come into contact with teachers and peers as well as people who have positive influence on them. We can then "create opportunities of self-approval of young people". The plasticity of the youth is very high and we should not think that giving them our protection, supervision and love will suffice. I think that it is more important to give them opportunities of self-making and self-approval.

Only a few regions have so far made the prevention of suicide an important link in public health. Not only so, in a majority of societies, the open discussion of the problem of suicide is still regarded as a taboo. Mr Michael MAK has proposed a discussion on this problem in this Council today, which indicates that our society has made a big step forward compared to other regions. However, we cannot stop at discussion, we must rely on the efforts and co-operation by the community as a whole before we can rein in the suicide trend and enable the community as a whole to respect and cherish life again. I so submit.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): Madam President, I can recall there was this headline in the newspaper on May Day: "Poor family of five fed on fish for cat, cancer mother supported family with \$1,600, son jumped to his death". The suicide had a family of five. They lived on the \$1,634 monthly CSSA payment received by his mother who had terminal cancer. Life was very hard and they could only spend \$10 on low-priced fish for cat as their main course. They have never bought toys for their two children aged 4 and 11 or brought them to fast food shops for hamburgers. On the day of the incident, the unemployed worker told his family that he would go to work, but his family heard him murmur to himself: "I would never be employed or have a job". This person had suffered from borderline psychosis and he was admitted to and discharged from the Kwai Chung Hospital now and then. He had been unemployed for a long time and was in financial straits. Although he had applied for CSSA, he was very tough and insisted on earning his own living after discharge from hospital, thus, he cancelled his CSSA application. It can be said that suicide has more or less put an end to his tragedy and his case illustrates why a person commits suicide.

There is a general trend and a very dangerous phenomenon for Hong Kong people to commit suicide by burning charcoal. In my view, there are three major causes: firstly, the pressure of living or the killing pressure of living; secondly, the collapse of the family and community support system and thirdly, a hole in the safety net provided by the Government.

Why did I say that the pressure of living was killing? I believe Members also understand that as a result of the economic downturn and transformation, tens and thousands of lower-skilled workers have become either unemployed, underemployed, and bowed to low wages or cheap labour. Some employees from the middle class holding negative assets have also become unemployed, therefore, I could say that the pressure of living is really killing.

I have just said that the second cause is the collapse of the family and community support system. I recall that in the Cantonese movies we watched when we were young, movie stars such as CHEUNG Wood-yau and PAK Yin played the part of a couple. No matter how poor they were, they supported each other, even after one of them coughed out blood, they still loved each other till death. What is the state of family relationship nowadays? The relationship in a lot of families is at the brink of collapse. The impressions we got from the Cantonese movies we used to watch when we were young were that CHEUNG Wood-yau and NG Chuo-fan were "intimate brothers", besides, they would help and give food to their neighbours even though they were "starving" themselves. Hong Kong people will not show such sentiments today and it seems that couples, friends and relatives have become a lot more realistic. With the collapse of the entire family and community support system, many people resort to suicide when they are beset with problems because they believe no one will help them or bother about them. Therefore, I hope that the Government can consider, among other things, how to build up the community and re-establish the neighbourhood relationship so as to enhance mutual understanding and support among family members.

The third cause is the hole in the safety net provided by the Government. I have just said that an unemployed worker committed suicide because he wanted to earn his own living and he did not apply for CSSA. Why was he so heroic? Why did he have the idea that it was shameful to apply for CSSA? Workers in Hong Kong have contributed their labour for many years, though some have become unemployed under the economic transformation, they are unwilling to apply for CSSA and they would rather let their families starve. Why is there such a phenomenon? The Government should really think hard about this.

Earlier on, the Government delivered the message that "CSSA nurtures lazybones" in the hope of reducing expenditure on CSSA payments. Certainly, the Government would not admit that it had made such a remark but it was very often the Government's thinking. Mr TUNG Chee-hwa has said that he would tell a person in difficulty who did not apply for CSSA that he respected him. Does it mean that he does not respect those who apply for CSSA? If he respects those who do not apply for CSSA payment, it also means that he does not respect those who apply for CSSA. This is a very bad message.

The figures recently presented at a meeting of the Panel on Social Welfare of this Council indicated that the Government had a 55% rate of success in discouraging people from applying for CSSA. In other words, among 37 000 who made the relevant inquiries, over 20 000 made an about turn. Why does the Government have to treat the needy this way? These people put dignity aside and asked for help but why had so many of them made an about turn? Did the Government really succeed in discouraging people who made inquiries about the application for CSSA? Few people have participated in the Promoting Self-reliance Scheme mentioned by some Members. The figures showed that over 20 000 people had participated in the Scheme but only 3 159 eventually found a job. The success rate was only 10.6% because only 3 159 out of 29 000 people found a job. During the same period, 3 000 people withdrew their CSSA applications and the Government lost contact with 3 000 others. Could we say that the Government had succeeded in discouraging people from applying for CSSA?

As I said just now, the hole in the safety net has given rise to a significant problem. Originally, the safety net meant the CSSA safety net but the significant problem confronting Hong Kong is the lack of unemployment protection. When a worker becomes unemployed, his wages at a certain level suddenly fall to zero and his living standard will keep deteriorating until it reaches such a level that he is eligible for CSSA that he will be protected by a net. But in applying for CSSA he has to put aside his dignity. I do not know if Members have ever tried bungee jump. I have not tried it but I can imagine how a person feels when he plunges. He may not have any feeling at the very beginning but he will soon become more and more frightened when he continues to fall but he may not reach the net (comparable to the CSSA net) yet. While people continue to fall, some may have a nervous breakdown before they finally fall into the net. I believe the most dangerous, horrible and heart-stopping

moment is when they finally fall into the net. Yet, many people may have gone insane before then.

Unlike most countries in the Asian-Pacific Region that have unemployment protection, Hong Kong does not have any unemployment protection. I really hope that the Government can consider this. Hong Kong is a high-risk society but I do not wish to see only danger but not vitality here. Our society relies on the Government to create a sound safety net in order to reduce suicide cases.

Thank you, Madam President.

MR LAU WONG-FAT (in Cantonese): Madam President, Mr MAK's motion and Miss CHOY's amendment can really illustrate that it is already a necessity for the Government to adopt more positive measures to tackle the problem of suicide in Hong Kong. I believe the general public does also feel sad about the continuous aggravation of the problem of suicide in recent years, especially when there are more and more tragedies in which students and the whole families including parents and young children committed suicide. We cannot help lamenting the changes in the world.

It is an indisputable fact that there is a tendency for the mood of suicide to spread and aggravate in Hong Kong. Apart from jumping from heights, charcoal burning has unfortunately become an increasingly popular means of committing suicide in Hong Kong and we find in the newspapers such reports almost every day. Certain holiday bungalows in Cheung Chau have even become black spots for suicide. We certainly feel sad that suicide has become a general mood, but the phenomenon reflects that there are problems with the internal links of society.

What is wrong with Hong Kong? Why have more and more people given up their precious lives so easily? I believe the economic slump is one of the factors but it definitely is not the single factor. Much to our regret, the Government seems to have taken the problem not very seriously. Even though tragedies have taken place one after another, only individual officials have expressed regrets and the Government has not taken any positive measures to address the problem. We have even not heard anything about the Government conducting a relevant survey or study to find out what is wrong.

Madam President, the Government is duty-bound to let the public live and work in peace and contentment and to tackle this problem of life and death. It is definitely correct for the Government to be tensed up and try its best to tackle the avian flu incident. The problem of suicide similarly involves the lives of a lot of Hong Kong people and the well-being of a lot of families. As a benevolent government, there is a lot it can do. For instance, it can review the existing links of publicity, education and welfare and strengthen the support for voluntary agencies and mutual co-operation. As the saying goes, "saving a life is better than building a seven-storey pagoda", the Administration should expeditiously take substantive actions to answer people's wishes. If it remains indifferent, it will be too late when Hong Kong is given the notorious name of "city of suicide and sorrow".

With these remarks, Madam President, I support the motion.

MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, in the past 10 years, we were repeatedly confronted with the problem of school children suicide, a problem that saddens me a great deal. In October the year before last, there was a spate of school children suicide; at that time, six school children committed suicide one after another in a matter of just 11 days, causing me to analyse some of the causes of their suicide. We already know these causes very well, and recently, I tried again to study some new cases of suicide in the past two years. Although the causes are largely the same as before, I still wish to say a few words on them.

On 4 October last year, a 10-year-old girl born to a single-parent family committed suicide on the eve of her birthday; on 4 October the same year, a 10-year-old boy who frequently ran away from home committed suicide because of family and schoolwork problems; on 5 October, a 13-year-old girl left her last words and then committed suicide because her father had a mistress and she could not get over the pain of having to break up with her boyfriend; on 7 October, a 13-year-old boy removed the window grill and plunged to his death after a scolding by his father for poor schoolwork; a 14-year-old boy who had played with hanging himself with a length of nylon rope in his classroom was instructed by his teacher to write an essay on the adverse consequences of committing suicide, but he really committed suicide after finishing the essay; on 14 October, a 20-year-old girl who failed the Certificate of Education Examination twice jumped to her death from a building — finally, after three previous unsuccessful suicidal attempts.

Madam President, within just 11 days in October 1999, as many as six school children killed themselves because of schoolwork pressure and family and emotional problems. The whole community was thus plunged into a state of shock and deep sorrow, not quite knowing what to do. I therefore approached the Education Department and obtained some statistics about the trends relating to school children suicide in the preceding six years. I came up with three unusual observations in the end.

The first observation is that October and November every year are the crisis months of school children suicide. Statistics of the Education Department indicate that the rate of school children suicide is the lowest in July and August, but October and November are the crisis months. Why? The most logical explanation is that school children are back to school by then after the worry-free summer holidays. When school re-opens in September, the pressure is not yet quite so high, but then, in October and November, the endless pressure of curriculum, schoolwork, tests and examinations start to emerge, and all this is simply too much for some students who are not tough enough. If these students come across any family troubles during this period, or if they are confronted with a combination of unhappy events, they may be tempted to commit suicide. Then, when November is over, there will be long school holidays — Christmas, the Chinese New Year and Easter. During that time, students can enjoy some relief from their tense school life, and the rate of school children suicide consequently goes down.

The second observation is that the lowest age of school children committing suicide is 11, and 16 is the most dangerous age. In other words, Primary Five and Secondary Four students are most vulnerable to suicide attempts. From the perspective of the growth and development of school children, it can easily be seen that a student will start to experience increasing pressure from Primary Five onwards. The system of allocating secondary school places, problems of adapting to secondary school education, the uncertainty felt by Secondary Three students as to whether or not they can get a place in their original schools and even emotional frustrations and family problems are, I suppose, all very much like a pressure cooker subjected to ever-increasing internal pressure. Once there is a cause, there will definitely be an explosion. But then, among Secondary Five students, the suicide rate will instead go down, basically because teenagers of this age group have to concentrate on their preparation for the Certificate of Education Examination, and also because people will give more care and attention to youngsters having to

sit for this examination. Anyway, given the time and age distribution of school children suicide, we must admit that the pressure exerted by schoolwork and the cyclical features of the education system are an important cause of school children suicide.

The third observation is that the problem of school children suicide will be aggravated by sensational media coverage. The six-year statistics show that there were totally 12 spates of school children suicide in the community during the period in question, and each of these saw the suicide of three to eight children. Usually, following a sensational case of school children suicide, the media will scramble to give it headline coverage; they will make detailed accounts of the background and even write up oversimplified, misleading and sensational reports, illustrated, almost as a rule, by a bloody picture of the scene. To the general reader, this may at most be just another sad story, one which they will forget soon afterwards. But those innocent school children who are in a state of desperation and helplessness may be moved, and they may thus follow suit, thinking that this is an indictment of society and a means of extricating themselves from their plight. Doubtless the statistics on the spates of school children suicide can show us that suicidal tendency is infectious, in the sense that people may be tempted to follow suit very easily. If the media aim only to achieve sensational effects in their news reports, and if they thus ignore the fact that their reports on school children suicide may aggravate the problem, then they are behaving most irresponsibly towards society, much to our deep regret and sorrow.

I of course agree with Mr Michael MAK that all teachers must be given training on identifying the behaviour and signs preceding the suicide of youngsters, so that they can be offered timely care and assistance. But more importantly, we must try to ease the schoolwork pressure on students and give special care and attention to those who are silent, depressed, battered by broken families, ignored or bullied. Madam President, a youngster who is in the prime of his life will choose to kill himself only when he feels that there is nothing more for him to treasure, or that there is no way out. If we adults, whether as parents or teachers, can give youngsters love and care, we will be able to make them feel the warmth of life, see their prospects and give up the idea of committing suicide.

Therefore, Madam President, I will support Mr Michael MAK's motion and Miss CHOY So-yuk's amendment today, in the hope that the Government can draw up a comprehensive policy on preventing youth suicide as soon as possible.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): Madam President, very often, when we read the newspapers, we will come across some news reports that we do not wish to read — reports about suicides. In recent years, the number of suicide cases has been on the rise. I am sure that the community as a whole does not wish to see this. The causes of suicide are many, such as financial hardship, work problems, love affairs, studies and even health problems. When some people come across these problems, since they do not know how to solve them, and also since they do not have anyone to talk to, they will feel very lonely and desperate. Many a time, just because of a wrong decision made in the flash of a second, these people may simply resort to self-destruction.

We can notice from the numerous suicide cases in recent years that the number of cases caused by financial hardship and unemployment has been rising. I am worried that given the existing employment situation in Hong Kong, we may still have quite a hard time ahead. Earlier on, we all thought that our unemployment problem was easing gradually. But much to our surprise, the unemployment rate in the past two quarters started to rise again, climbing back to the level of 4.6%. The problem of semi-unemployment is especially serious. The people affected are faced with the immense pressure from unemployment, financial hardship, their families and friends. How are we going to deal with them?

According to one survey, from January to April this year, as many as 32 people in Hong Kong were suspected to have committed suicide because of unemployment. In other words, on average, one unemployed person chose to inflict harm on himself or simply end his own life every three days. These people are battered by long-term unemployment and face many difficulties.

Madam President, I wish to tell you a true story that I know. I once met a young man in a housing estate. He told me that he was unemployed, and I asked him if he needed any help. At that time, he was still very energetic. But a few months later, when I met him again, he simply avoided me, not wishing to greet me or telling me where he was going. Many people were once buyers or supervisors in the retail business. Once become jobless, these people may find it necessary to isolate themselves for long periods of time before they can rebuild their self-image and restore self-confidence. From my contact with numerous unemployed people, I have come to realize their desperation, helplessness and plight. They do not know what to do, nor do they know what prospects they have. I think that in face of these problems, the community as a whole must

give these people a helping hand. We must make sure that when these people experience immense hardship, we can always come to their assistance.

Madam President, sometimes, I am very worried, and very pessimistic too, because our society is now faced with the problem of structural unemployment, a problem that cannot be solved overnight. Much has to depend on how the Government looks at the problem and what measures it is going to adopt as solutions. But this is precisely my greatest concern. Some skilled workers were at first very confident about their employment prospects for reasons of their age and skills. But long-term unemployment has gradually eroded all their morale and determination.

We notice that in an attempt to tackle the problems connected with the CSSA Scheme, the Government has put in place the Support for Self-Reliance Scheme. However, from the assessment statistics supplied by the Government at two of the meetings of the Panels on Health Services and Welfare Services Panels, we note that while the Government estimated that the Scheme would have 29 000 participants from June 1999 to November 2000, the drop-out rate during this period was as high as some 40%. I think that the Scheme was actually drawn up by the Government following our initial review on the CSSA Scheme. The Government has given me the impression that the Scheme is a means to prevent the unemployed from applying for CSSA. Of all the people who withdrew from the Scheme, some 24% did so of their own accord; another 24% or so could not be contacted any more; and some 20% claimed that they had found a job. I really hope that the Government can conduct some kind of a recapitulation. The Scheme is especially meant for the unemployed, and there were some 20 000 participants at first. Why did as many as 40% of these people subsequently withdraw? What were the reasons? Mrs Carrie LAM, Director of Social Welfare, has agreed to provide a breakdown of the relevant statistics to us and then let us know the details. But I am still worried that in the end, the unemployed may, for dignity reasons, choose not to apply for CSSA, the approval rate of which has now already been reduced. The consequences may be indirect, but, well, I dare not speculate if this may affect the outlook of life of these people. What is the situation now? I think that the Government must not oversimplify the whole issue, thinking that since too much payment has been made, there is a need to put up some "dignity" obstacles in the way of those people in need of applying for CSSA.

Madam President, as I said just now, I know some "wage earners" who were once middle or even upper-middle management personnel. After going jobless several times, they finally failed to find any job, not even a job as a shop assistant. Some of them may keep things to themselves for a year or two before revealing their situation to us. One of them told me that she had become a domestic helper. We can all imagine the heavy blows to dignity and the psychological pressure which she had to withstand throughout all these times. Who accompanied her in this lonely journey? Who can give her some warmth and comfort? I think the community as a whole really needs to show its care and concern.

Madam President, I very much hope that the Government can take stock of the situation and seeks to find out why some 40% of the participants have withdrawn from the Support for Self-Reliance Scheme, which is originally meant to help the unemployed. I very much hope that these people can eventually come up with some solutions and thus do not have to resort to self-destruction.

Besides, I also wish to express my concern about the suicide rate of elderly people, a new problem that has emerged only recently. By Asian standards, the suicide rate of elderly people in Hong Kong is rather high, as high as 31.2%. Why has the suicide rate of elderly people increased so suddenly in recent years? I have conducted some studies on this, and I believe that while one reason may be elderly people's reluctance to reveal their feelings and worries, there may also be other reasons, such as the unemployment and poor financial conditions of their family members or children. All this may also be a source of great disturbances for them. In addition, elderly people also feel greatly embarrassed when applying for CSSA. This is very much due to the new problems that have cropped up after our amendment of the policy on CSSA. The Panel on Welfare Services has discussed these problems many times, and I hope that the Government can pay attention to these questions: Why have so many people become unemployed? Why have some people resorted to self-destruction after becoming jobless? Has the Government ever considered how best to help these people tide over their difficulties? Should the Government refrain from concentrating only on how to save expenditure? I think all these are precisely the issues which we must all be concerned about.

Thank you, Madam President.

MR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, last year, 915 people managed to kill themselves in Hong Kong, pushing the number of such cases to a record high. Jumping to one's death from a building is the most common and effective means of suicide. Last year, on average, there was one such suicide every 21 hours. Therefore, for the sake of public health and safety, the Government should really urge people to "look up and down" when walking on the streets.

The suicidal attempts of youngsters and students are often the focus of public concern. We can easily understand the greater concern that the community feels about young people trying to end their own lives. But we must also note that the majority of suicides last year were mostly unemployed, who represented 40% of the total number of suicides, or 366 people in actual number. Last year was a leap year, which is why, on average, there was one case of suicide involving unemployed people every day. I do not know the source of the figures quoted by Miss CHAN Yuen-han, but I am sure that it was certainly not one death at intervals of several days; rather, every day, there was one suicide involving unemployed people. I am not going to talk too much about the unemployed, and I shall leave that to Members representing the labour sector.

With respect to the suicide of elderly people, a total of 264 elderly people aged 60 or above committed suicide last year, which means that in every 33-hour period, a suicide was committed by elderly people, and most of the elderly people concerned resorted to jumping down from a building. The Democratic Party supports the proposal of the amendment to allocate more resources for the purpose of stepping up counselling services, publicity efforts and studies on the problem. But it must be said that these three measures will not be very useful in tackling the suicide problem of the elderly. I shall explain the reasons later.

As we all know, about 70% or 80% of the elderly people who attempted suicide would, directly or implicitly, have revealed their intention to the people around them, such as family members, social workers and doctors. Unfortunately, those around them often failed to take them seriously. Therefore, when it comes to the enhancement of publicity and education, we must not concentrate only on explaining to old people the meaning of life; rather, we must also let all people know that they should pay attention to those around them or those they have contact with, so as to detect any suicidal tendencies and thus avoid possible tragedies.

The main factors leading elderly people to commit suicide include chronic diseases, death of spouse, abandonment by their families or the feeling that they are a burden of their families. Poverty and ill health are a good description of the life of many elderly people in Hong Kong. Because of the shortage of community care services, most old people who live with their families are unable to receive any community rehabilitation services. As a result, the bulk of the burden of looking after old people usually falls onto the shoulders of their family members. However, their family members are unable to get the necessary assistance. Under the CSSA Scheme, if an elderly person wishes to apply for CSSA, his children living with him must undergo a means test. This has led many elderly people who are in financial difficulty to give up the idea of applying for CSSA. All these policies have intensified many old people's feeling that they are a burden of their families. Therefore, the strengthening of health services for the elderly, financial assistance and assistance to those family members looking after them are the only means to reduce the number of elderly people trying to commit suicide.

Miss CHOY So-yuk mentioned that publicity and education should be stepped up to instill in people a positive value of treasuring one's life. The Democratic Party does not object to this, but we do doubt the effectiveness of such efforts. As long as our economic and social policies fail to convince some members of our community that there are indeed positive sides to life, all the messages conveyed by publicity and education efforts will at best be beautiful lies.

Elderly people, youngsters and the unemployed all commit suicide because of different reasons. The handling of such problems will require the integrated support of the social welfare, social security and health care systems as well as town planning too.

Besides, I must also talk about another proposal in the motion, so as to clarify the position of the Democratic Party. The amendment proposes to set up a task force to deal with the relevant policies, and the original motion proposes the establishment of a policy group with the special responsibility of formulating the relevant policies. We fail to see any difference between a task force and a policy group as far as this issue is concerned. As a result, we will support both the original motion and the amendment.

I also wish to comment on some of the proposals made by Mr Michael MAK in his remarks. People not familiar with the operation of the Government who have come here for the first time to listen to a motion debate in the Legislative Council will surely think that there are a dozen Chief Secretaries for Administration. The reason is that whenever the establishment of a multi-departmental working group is mentioned in any motion debate, Members will invariably ask the Chief Secretary for Administration to head the working group. But we cannot after all push all the responsibility on the shoulders of top-level government officials every time. The fact is that many social issues will inevitably involve many different policy departments. Thus, the most important point is for the various government departments to decide how best they are going to co-operate fully to handle those social issues that are their common concern.

Mr Michael MAK asked the Government to allocate more resources and employ more hotline staff with the sole responsibility of receiving telephone calls. Many kinds of services in Hong Kong are now provided mainly by voluntary workers. Their replacement by paid workers has the merit of better ensuring the continuity and stability of the services provided. But at the same time, this may easily reduce the incentive of service-providers to recruit voluntary workers. For this reason, if the Government really decides to allocate more resources for the employment of paid workers to provide services, it must at the same time commit resources to the development of voluntary workers' services. That way, volunteer services and those of paid workers can develop in parallel. This is an issue that needs careful treatment.

The Democratic Party is of the view that both the original motion and the amendment have raised some issues that warrant our discussions and concern. It is hoped that the Government can take concrete steps to implement the proposals. Thank you, Madam President.

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, the prevention of suicide is an issue of public concern. But in general, the suicide of youngsters will most of the time arouse more concern than that of old people. People seem to think that the suicide of elderly people is more a personal problem than social. In fact, however, the suicide of elderly people is equally unfortunate, and it warrants equal concern of the community.

According to a report of the World Health Organization, the suicide rate of elderly people is in general higher than the overall suicide rate in many countries, and Hong Kong is no exception. A study conducted by the University of Hong Kong in 1997 indicates that on average, 30 elderly people in every 100 000 people will commit suicide, and the rate of suicide of old people is 12 times that of younger people. Of all age groups, the suicide rate of male elderly aged 75 or above is the highest, with 50 suicide cases in every 100 000 people. The study also observes that about 40% of the elderly people who commit suicide will have sought medical consultation in the month prior to the suicide, and that only a handful of the elderly suicides are entirely unable to look after themselves.

The reasons for the elderly committing suicide are very complex, some examples being changes in social culture, senility, chronic diseases, unfortunate events, emotional disturbances, financial problems, and so on. But relevant studies also show that old people will not usually commit suicide on the spur of the moment; rather, they will consider the whole matter for a long period of time beforehand. For this reason, while trying to improve elderly services and raise the standards of health care, housing and institutional care for the elderly, society as a whole should also enhance its understanding of the psychological needs of the elderly and strengthen the assistance and counsel for them, so as to prevent them from committing suicide.

More Assistance to Carers of the Elderly

Most old people in Hong Kong live with their families, which is why the latter's care and support for the elderly is very important. A study conducted by the University of Hong Kong shows that about 70% of the elderly have disclosed their intention of committing suicide to their family members. However, because of various reasons, their family members may have overlooked these signals for assistance. For this reason, the Government should enhance the support for carers of old people. More family education activities should be organized by Carer's Support and Resources Centres to spread the message far and wide. That way, carers will be able to grasp the various means of effectively communicating with old people and the channels of referral and treatment.

Enhanced Training for Front-line Workers

To reduce the number of elderly suicides, we must pay attention to early prevention. Unfortunately, those front-line professionals who come most frequently into contact with old people, such as social workers, doctors, nurses and the staff of care and attention homes, are often lacking in the necessary training. Surveys conducted by different organizations show that over 90% of these front-line personnel do not have any adequate training and skills required for assisting those old people in need. That is why they have failed to effectively prevent the occurrence of tragedies. In hospitals, for example, the emotional problems and frustrations of some old people may manifest in such physical problems as headache, insomnia, and so on. Medical care personnel who lack any in-service training on this may not have any knowledge about these signs of potential problems, and they may thus fail to notice the underlying problems. The provision of adequate training and support may make these front-line personnel aware of the signs of old people's suicide; they may also improve their counselling skills. Medical staff who come into contact with old people at different levels may then work in co-ordination and refer cases among themselves. That way, the difficulties experienced by old people can be effectively identified at an early stage, and assistance can be rendered to old people in a timely manner.

Expansion of Outreaching Services

One factor inducing old people to commit suicide is the lack of community support. This is especially so when old people are faced with unfortunate events, for they may thus be led to make a wrong decision and commit suicide. To assist old people in overcoming their difficulties, we must enhance the various types of outreaching services, including the provision of meals, household chore assistance and personal care in respect of home care, and mental support and psychological counselling. The Government should also set up a proper network of community services, so as to encourage more people to serve as voluntary workers; adequate training should also be provided to voluntary workers to equip them with the necessary skills that can enable them to take part in assisting old people in need.

Enhanced Publicity and Public Education Efforts

Although old age, sickness and death are the inevitable stages in one's life, we simply should not think that there is any natural and logical connection between old age and suicide. The seriousness of the problem of old people's suicide should not be ignored. Therefore, the Government should conduct more publicity and education work, so as to deliver a proper message to the public and foster respect and care for the elderly in community. That way, people can be induced to get rid of their prejudices and their negative view that when one gets old, one will definitely become unproductive and dependent on others. This will enable old people to receive more attention and better care.

A Thorough Study on Suicide

The suicide of old people is a continual social phenomenon. Unfortunately, so far, there has been a lack of studies and exploration on this problem. Statistics are currently kept by the Government on the number of suicide in general. But we must also look at these questions: Why do some old people wish to kill themselves? Are attempts of suicide preceded by any noticeable signs? What are the physical, psychological and mental conditions of those old people contemplating suicide? Are the existing assistance system and support network effective enough? In the absence of any surveys and studies on these questions, how can we formulate appropriate policies to tackle the problems? As a result, the Government must strengthen its studies on these problems and establish a specific database, so as to make effective use of resources and provide assistance to old people.

The Elderly Commission set up a working group in 1998 to study the suicide of old people. The working group comprised members of the Commission itself, medical social work professionals, academics and representatives from the relevant government departments. The working group subsequently made a number of recommendations to the Government, urging it to address the psychological and social needs of the elderly and prevent them from committing suicide. These recommendations cover the health of the elderly, staff training, assistance to the elderly, problem awareness, compilation of information, public education, and so on. Over the past three years, the Government has done quite a lot to improve institutional and personal care for the elderly, and it has also strengthened the community support network and actively promoted a positive way of life. In spite of this, some of the

recommendations advanced by the Elderly Commission have yet to be implemented or intensified in their implementation. We hope that the Government can quicken the pace of the relevant work.

Madam President, no matter how old a person is, his suicide will still mean an early termination of his life. Besides bringing grief to the his family members, suicide will also lead to losses on the part of society. To avoid the spread of suicide, we must help one another out.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): Madam President, my speech today will focus on the problems faced by children and youngsters when they committed suicide.

Last week, in Ngau Tau Kok, a blind father gassed himself and his two children respectively aged five and seven to death. In fact, similar incidents have occurred time and again. In May this year, for instance, the High Court sentenced a woman to Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, for she had tried to kill herself together with her two children by burning charcoal. Although this woman was saved, her son died of excessive intake of carbon monoxide. In these cases, children often became victims being buried with adults who committed suicide.

I fully appreciate that the two adults in these incidents must have faced dire adversities and they therefore came up with the idea of committing suicide. They were in need of help. But in these incidents, it is most regrettable that the parents did not respect the right of their children to live. In Chinese society, parents always say that they love their children, but it has never occurred to many parents that the lives of their children are independent, not controlled by parents, and that parents have no right to deprive their children of the right to live. Our social values require children to be compliant and obedient, and children are seldom encouraged to understand their own rights. Apart from stepping up counselling services and providing more support for families, I hope that the Government will inject more resources to make parents understand the rights of children through community and school education. At the same time, children should be trained to develop independent thinking and strengthen their ability to protect themselves. I think Miss CHOY So-yuk's amendment appears to have neglected this point (Miss CHOY may, of course, argue that what I referred to just now is murder, not suicide, but in any case, the lives of these small children came to an end as a result of suicides by adults).

With regard to youngsters, statistics of the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong show that in 1999, the suicide rate of youngsters aged below 19 was 1.6%. For people aged between 20 and 59, the rate was 13.4% and for people aged above 60, the figure was as high as 26.5%. It is understandable that the suicide rate of youngsters is lower than those of other age groups, for young people should be living happily and blissfully. Yet, we cannot neglect the fact that young people also need care and attention. In fact, the community is particularly concerned about why young people, with a happy life and a bright future, should commit suicide. These incidents of suicide often aroused grave public concern, and there would be extensive media coverage of these incidents. On 22 May, a 12-year-old jumped to his death after being reprimanded by his father for stealing money to buy video games. On 7 June, a Secondary One female student attempted to jump from a building allegedly because she had been reprimanded by her teacher. On the same day, a 15-year-old boy stated that he would commit suicide after he had been teased allegedly for being found to have posed as a rich kid. Following these reports, there are comments that young people nowadays have experienced too little frustrations, that their lives are far too easy, and that they lack the ability to face up to adversities, and that is why they committed suicide for trivial matters.

I understand that under the present-day environment, young people very often lack the ability to face up to adversities. But is this truly the main reason why youngsters committed suicide? I very much doubt it. It is true that we can see from many incidents that young people committed suicide for trivial matters, such as being scolded by parents, poor academic performance, examination pressure, reprimand by teachers, being teased by schoolmates, and so on, but these were just the fuse. The true cause may be that many young people are not living happily. How can we ask them to be happy? The examination system has subjected them to heavy pressure from homework; if their examination score is poor, their parents will be getting hot and bothered and the community will have a low opinion of them. These situations have made it impossible for young people to raise their heads. To our young people, the education system brings more setbacks and frustrations than a sense of achievement, and more pain than happiness. From this perspective, our society does not make this group of youngsters kill themselves. Rather, it is murdering them. Dr John TSE, Associate Professor of the Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong, stated that adolescent suicide is caused by long-standing disturbances in most cases. There are now over 370 000 youngsters in Hong Kong and they are affected by at least one potential risk

factor that would induce suicide attempts, including higher divorce rate, increase in the number of CSSA families, child abuse, and so on.

Miss CHOY So-yuk's amendment proposes to instil in young people the positive values of cherishing their lives. This I certainly agree. But it is more important to find ways to help this group of young people so that they know how to seek help when they encounter problems, and to promote in the community concern for young people to help them cope with adversities and enable them to live more happily. At the same time, I also hope that, if adults are unable to lend a hand to youngsters, the Government will provide additional resources to train youngsters to help their peers. In any case, I support the original motion and the amendment.

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): Madam President, some of the remarks just made by the Honourable WONG Sing-chi are the same as mine and I almost think that he has read my script.

Madam President, in recent years, we often found newspaper reports on suicide cases. Quite a few people put the blame for the upsurge in the number of suicide cases on the economic downturn and a rising unemployment rate. Indeed, financial difficulty is one of the causes of the aggravation of the problem of suicide that we cannot overlook. Is it the only or most important cause? If financial problem is the only cause, how can we explain why the younger generation — who have less financial pressure theoretically — would easily commit suicide for matters regarded as trifling by others?

Why does a person commit suicide? Basically because he is unhappy. Let us consider this carefully. Regardless of the various causes of suicide cases such as family, academic or financial problems, everyone who committed suicide had been unhappy. Have we ever seen anyone who committed suicide stated in his death note that he was happy? Although everybody wished to be happy, according to the result of a large-scale survey on the Asian region announced in February this year, only 5% of the young respondents in Hong Kong were happy, and the percentage was the lowest among the eight regions that took part in the survey. Conversely, the percentage in Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines exceeded 70%. In March this year, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups also announced the result of a survey entitled "Can the youth be more happy?" Coincidentally, only 5% of the respondents considered themselves happy.

Madam President, why is the next generation so unhappy? Apart from family, financial and academic pressure, it has something to do with the drastic change in the values of Hong Kong people — we no longer cherish and respect the things around us. Materially, we fail to cherish things and we are wasting things indeed. Socially, we only care about our interests and ourselves and seldom care about others' feelings or respect their due rights. If things continue this way, we would not have the most basic respect for ourselves at the end and we would not cherish our life. If a person, before he commits suicide, can think carefully about the point that his death would bring about more problems and trouble for his families and those who care about him, he would most probably change his mind.

It was really lucky for me to have a chance to bring a group of children to carry out help-the-poor and exchange activities in certain impoverished regions in the Mainland. I believe Members can imagine how bad is life in the mountainous regions, but what touched all of us from Hong Kong was that poor children in the mountainous regions still live happily. A very old and simple wooden top was a precious toy for these children and they enjoyed playing it the whole day. I still recall that a child from Hong Kong said at the end of the trip that he would cherish more the toys he had and he would also cherish the loving care and support of others.

A simple toy and incident can arouse the feelings of children. It makes me understand that children are like a piece of blank paper and their views and values are actually closely related to the messages they get and receive every day. Whether they can happily and positively face the social reality depends to a very large extent on how adults, including parents and teachers, teach and guide them.

The problem is: Can our education system guide the youth in establishing a positive set of values? Although we agree that the next generation should receive education targeted at "moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development" since childhood, how much resource or time is allocated to "moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development" at school? The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong conducted a survey straddling the years 1998 and 1999 and analysed the 22 development indicators of "moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic

development". The result was that there was a significant decline in the self-evaluation of the youth and most of the development indicators had become weaker when compared to those in the preceding year.

On the contrary, the youths attach more and more importance to money. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong conducted a survey in July last year on the views of primary and secondary school students in Hong Kong on money. Over 40% of the secondary school students thought that "money brings happiness" and almost 28% of the primary school students agreed. It was more startling that 12% and 20% of secondary and primary school students respectively thought "money is more important than anything".

The two surveys quoted above reflected a serious problem, that is, the values of the youths have changed and they attach excessive importance to money and material enjoyment. Worse still, their evaluation of themselves and others is often founded upon money and material belongings. Thus, we saw on television and in newspapers that some children had jumped to their death after they had failed to get their desired toys or electronic games. For instance, the soft drug abuse problem that has recently haunted the youths in Hong Kong actually arise from the youth's failure to recognize their value and their lack of a sense of direction. Therefore, they prefer to anaesthetize themselves with drugs in pursuit of momentary "happiness" or "extrication".

Madam President, though our discussion today is not about education or the youth problem, prevention is better than cure. To rein in the general mood of suicide, I think we should start from positive education since childhood. To effectively reduce suicide cases in the long run, we must instil in the youths positive values and encourage them to cherish their lives and teach them to respect others. If everybody just attaches importance to his own interests and neglects or even pays no attention to others' interests, how can we establish a healthy, stable and harmonious society? If we are led along by various problems in our society, how can we be happy?

Madam President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, our community has seen a rapid rise in the number of suicide cases in recent years. The problem of suicide has become so serious that the Government can no longer turn a blind eye to it. It is however extremely regrettable that the Government is still shutting its eyes to the problem. I raised a related question twice in the previous Legislative Session. However, government officials merely reiterated the Government's usual policies — the Government is reluctant to inject new resources or consider formulating long-term policies to really solve the problem. I therefore support the original motion's proposal of setting up a policy group to formulate effective strategies to prevent and reduce suicide.

I think the constant rise in suicide figures in recent years is associated with our economic problems. Actual data has also proved that my analysis is correct. According to the figures released by the Coroner's Court, the suicide figure for 2000 is 915, which is 33 higher than the figure for 1999, and 366, or 40%, of the suicides were unemployed. This figure represents 10.7 times the suicide figure for blue-collar workers, 13.5 times the suicide figure for white-collar workers, and 122 times the figure for teachers. The low suicide figure of teachers is attributed to the fact that teachers are, in general, a relatively stable profession. Few teachers will think of ending their lives because of financial difficulties. This shows that financial problems do impose tremendous pressure on the grassroots. Many people will elect to kill themselves when they find no solutions to their problems. Unless the Government starts addressing this problem, I am afraid it will worsen given that it is still uncertain as to when our economy will recover.

Another tendency that even more warrants our concern and attention is that some unemployed people might end the lives of their family members before ending their own. The problem of suicide has thus become a family problem instead of purely a personal problem. We must not take these family tragedies lightly for they have also brought tragedies to the community. These tragedies are mainly caused by the fact that the unemployed are the breadwinner of the family. If the breadwinner fails to solve his financial problems, it is tantamount to the family not solving such problems. In order not to drag his family members into trouble, he would rather end their lives as well. We must therefore handle this issue with a serious attitude instead of taking it lightly.

Adult suicide has not only led to family tragedies mentioned earlier, but also posed a bad model for the younger generation and inculcate a wrong concept in their mind, that suicide can solve their problems when they encounter difficulties. The Coroner's Court figures indicated that there were 25 student suicide cases last year. Youth suicide obliges us to seriously consider the problems facing the adult community: Are young people trying to end their lives because they see no future and disappointment in society? What problems are there with our education system that make it impossible for the young people to continue with their education and instead force them to seek alternative solutions? Financial difficulties have forced parents to struggle to make ends meet, thus neglecting their care for the younger generation. Is this another problem confronting the youths? All these questions warrant our serious consideration.

To resolve the suicide problem, the Government should of course start at preventing and reducing its incidence. In my opinion, giving assistance to the family members of suicides is also one of the preventive measures that the Administration must not overlook. Regrettably, it is clear from the work carried out by the Government in preventing, reducing and following up suicide cases that the Government has failed to develop long-term strategies. Moreover, it lacks preparations and sincerity in formulating long-term policies. I twice asked the Government what it had done to prevent suicide during the last term of the Legislative Council. Although two different persons acted as the Secretary for Health and Welfare when the two questions were asked, the replies given to me were nearly the same. When I asked the Government in January 1999 what measures it would take to reduce the incidence of suicide, the then Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine FOK, merely reiterated the Government's role in family counsel and other services provided by social workers. If the existing services were effective, why was there a dramatic rise in suicide figures? Ten months later, I asked the new Secretary for Health and Welfare, Dr YEOH Eng-kiong, a related question. Except for the so-called employment counselling services, there was actually nothing new in Dr YEOH's reply. Actually, such services are part of the existing services provided by the Social Welfare Department. They are not supposed to be long-term or intensive measure to prevent or reduce the incidence of suicide.

The Government has to date failed to find solutions to solve the polarization between the rich and the poor. The incidence of suicide because of unemployment is now at its peak for the unemployment rate is still standing high and a lot of families are still in financial straits. The Government must

formulate long-term policies to cope with the reality. Apart from providing such services as employment counselling and career information to help the unemployed to re-enter the labour market, the Government should strengthen psychological services for those who have not yet find a job to prepare them psychologically to come to terms with their financial plights and help them rebuild confidence in a prejudice-free environment.

Madam President, I so submit.

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): Madam President, life is precious. Everyone should cherish his life. But over the last few years, about 800 to 900 people died of suicide in Hong Kong each year. In May this year, there were nine cases of suicide in one single day. This is most saddening indeed. Although the causes of suicide vary from one case to another, suicide very often has to do with the inability to handle emotional problems, face up to hardships and challenges, adapt to social pressure, and so on. But other than these personal factors, the economic downturn and social ethos in recent years have, to a certain extent, fuelled the incidence of suicide. Between 1998 and 2000, over 40% of suicide cases involved the unemployed. Furthermore, as family members encounter financial problems associated with unemployment, reduced income, and so on, it is easier for family disputes to arise, eventually leading to family tragedies. The Hong Kong Progressive Alliance considers that the problem of suicide in Hong Kong does warrant more attention from the Government and the community. To effectively prevent the problem of suicide from further deteriorating, we need to pay attention to several areas of work.

Firstly, to address the difficulties faced by the unemployed, the Government must help them seek employment to achieve self-reliance. It must also provide adequate counselling and support for unemployed workers with emotional problems to help them face adversities and ease pressure, in order to prevent them from resorting to self-destruction as a result of losing hope in their future. In fact, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance system and the contingency funds of some voluntary agencies can help people in difficulties meet their basic needs of subsistence. But still, suicide and family tragedies related to unemployment happen from time to time. This actually reflects two problems. First, many of these tragic incidents not purely caused by financial problems. Second, some of those in need of assistance were relatively passive and reluctant to seek help actively. To effectively address these problems, the

Government and social service agencies should more proactively approach problem families to offer them timely assistance.

Secondly, last year a total of 157 housewives committed suicide, accounting for 17% of the total number of suicides, second only to the proportion taken up by the unemployed. In view of this, the Government and voluntary agencies must also pay attention to the various difficulties faced by women. Some academics have pointed out that dry family life, poor relationship with mother-in-law, marital problems, broken marriage, and so on, may subject housewives to emotional disturbances. Long-standing discontentment, if not relieved, may lead to a disposition to suicide. In this connection, the Government should plough in sufficient resources for social service agencies to design suitable activities targetting on the emotional problems of women, thereby improving the present situation where courses provided for women are mostly parenting or cookery courses. At the same time, the Government must also enhance the support service, child care service and family education provided for grass-roots women, with a view to alleviating their pressure of living as far as possible.

Thirdly, there is a need for us to attach greater importance to the problem of student suicide and take early preventive measures. In the last few years, over 20 students committed suicide on average each year. While suicides committed by students accounted for only 2% of the total number of suicide cases, there is a trend that these suicides are becoming younger at age. According to some academics' analysis, an increasingly higher divorce rate, poverty, child abuse, being dropped out from schools, melancholia, and so on, are possible factors contributing to a higher rate of adolescent suicide. To effectively prevent the further aggravation of student suicide, parents and teachers must show more concern and care for children and youngsters. Meanwhile, schools and youth organizations must inculcate in students the positive idea of cherishing life so that students will develop correct attitudes towards life, and also provide guidance for students as to how to cope with crisis.

Lastly, the overall attitude of society is pivotal to the prevention of suicide. After the economic growth in Hong Kong in the '80s and '90s, the perseverance of the people and individual willpower have nonetheless become weaker and weaker, and interpersonal relationships have gradually become alienated. In this connection, all sectors in the community should endeavour to promote the positive message of facing up to difficulties positively and accepting challenges

courageously. Members of the community must also uphold the spirit of helping, loving and supporting one other, so that people with troubles can feel the support and understanding of society, thus curbing their tendency to commit suicide.

Madam President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Michael MAK, you may now speak on Miss CHOY So-yuk's amendment. You have up to five minutes to speak.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam President, in fact, I do not quite understand why Miss CHOY So-yuk moved her amendment today. Perhaps she wanted to speak on this subject earlier and speak more on it. Anyway, I think her amendment is somewhat superfluous, just like "drawing a snake and adding feet to it". Fortunately, what is being drawn is not a poisonous snake, but a gecko, or commonly known as a house lizard. The three specific measures proposed by her are actually part of my demands. I did not set out in detail the various preventive measures and strategies from the outset for there are too many things that have to be done indeed, so many that even a full page will not suffice. Besides, I also wish to allow more time and room for discussion by Honourable colleagues.

However, I think the greatest difference between my motion and Miss CHOY's amendment is whether a policy group or a task force should be set up to deal with the problem. Given the complexity of the causes of suicide and its solutions, the formulation of preventive strategies will take time. Therefore, I do not consider it appropriate to set up a task force, for a task force is only suitable for handling individual cases and for drawing up expedient measures. For instance, in response to the first outbreak of avian flu in 1997, the authorities set up a task force to study countermeasures, aiming to expeditiously find out the origin of the virus and take preventive measures. But unfortunately, last week saw the recurrence of the avian flu. The policy group proposed by me would lay stress on a set of long-term strategies. It would be led by the higher echelon of the Government, say, by the Chief Secretary for Administration, and would attach great importance to this social problem and work on it as an ongoing task.

In fact, in early 1999 the Government already set up an inter-departmental working group comprising representatives from the Health and Welfare Bureau, Social Welfare Department (SWD), Hospital Authority (HA) and the Department of Health (DH) to study ways to collect and analyse statistical data on suicide cases. In April last year, the Government set up a new data system under which the HA will record the number of people involved in suicide cases who died during hospitalization. Besides, the DH will record all deaths in Hong Kong together with their causes, whereas the SWD will collect information on suicide cases handled by its family services centres and medical social services units. But so far, all that the authorities can provide is incomplete suicide statistics for 1998 and 1999. Is this "snail-pace working group" slack in its work, or are there loopholes in it? The Government has failed to propose any policy or countermeasures to address the problem of suicide. Worse still, the Government is like "a rat trying to drag a tortoise" even in respect of work as basic as the collection of data, and finishes just half of the work but not the other half. I am afraid the task force proposed by Miss CHOY would turn out to be just another working group like this. In that case, not only would it fail to propose even piecemeal measures, its enthusiasm would only be transient, eventually getting us nowhere. It would just be a duplication of the existing framework, practically performing no function at all.

Let us take the retrofitting of platform screen doors in the Mass Transit Railway as an example. This proposal has been discussed for years and passengers have even paid more fares for this cause. But what has become of it now?

As regards the SWD hotline, it is set up only for general inquiries, not specifically for suicide. Besides, the operating hours of this service are from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm, and no one will man this hotline during the night. Consequently, help-seekers who are unable to obtain timely counsel and support may resort to tragic means.

Hong Kong is our home, and we are most saddened by each single case of suicide. If we want to be the "super Manhattan, super New York or super London" or whatever of Asia, we should not only pursue material enjoyment and comfort in our lives. Instead, we should aspire for living in a city full of love and care, and this will require the continuous concerted efforts of Policy Bureaux and voluntary agencies.

Finally, I wish to reiterate that we must first find out the crux of the problem before we can prevent its occurrence. Suicide is often an unwise decision made on the spur of the moment. In this connection, the Government should actively promote primary health care specific to mental health. Apart from increasing the provision of dedicated counselling personnel, the Government must also provide more professional services in respect of mental health for the sector.

Honourable colleagues, Miss CHOY's amendment itself has no problem and should be supported. However, as she has narrowed and simplified the problem of suicide and provided no comprehensive analysis, I hope that Members will support my original motion and at the same time actively consider abstaining from voting on the amendment. Please do not support a second best option, worrying that my original motion may be negated. Honourable Members, life is precious. Let us join hands to urge the Government to make continuous and comprehensive efforts in this regard.

With these remarks, Madam President, I cannot support the amendment.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Madam President, I am grateful to Honourable Members for the opportunity to discuss the issue of suicide. I believe we can all agree that life is precious, and one suicide is too many. Suicide is, of course, not unique to Hong Kong. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that last year, approximately 1 million people died from suicide, or there was one death every 40 seconds. Since 1955, suicide rates have increased by 60% worldwide and suicide is now among the three leading causes of death among those aged between 15 and 44. It is therefore clear that all communities must face this challenge and be prepared to develop effective intervention strategies to reduce the incidence of suicide.

Suicide is one of the most disturbing forms of death, since it results in the loss of precious lives, causes trauma to friends and relatives, imposes long-lasting impact, and represents a socio-economic loss to society.

Suicide is defined as intentional and self-inflicted death. In policy terms, suicidal behaviour should be viewed in terms of a spectrum, ranging in severity from merely thinking about self-destruction (suicidal ideation), to making a plan and securing the means in an attempt to end one's own life (attempted suicide,

parasuicide or deliberate self-harm), and finally to completing the fatal act (completed suicide).

In Hong Kong, the known suicide figures have risen slightly in recent years, from 741 in 1994 to 816 in 1999. The age-sex standardized suicide rates per 100 000 of a standard population has remained relatively constant over this period: 12.6 persons in 1994, 9.7 in 1997 and 12.0 in 1999.

The age-sex standardized suicide rates elsewhere per 100 000 of a standard population in 1997 are 7.6 persons in the United Kingdom, 12.6 in the United States, 13.0 in Singapore, 17.3 in Japan and 19.2 in France. With 9.7 in 1997, Hong Kong is positioned in the middle on the global and the Asian scale.

There is no universally accepted "theory of suicide" although various models are covered in the academic literature.

The causes of suicide are complex and multi-dimensional, with each individual case having its uniqueness and usually involving a wide spectrum of factors. Predisposing risk factors may involve biochemical factors in metabolism, personality traits, isolation associated with lack of family or social support, emotional state of hopelessness associated with unhappy experience or unfulfilled psychological needs, and so on. Precipitating risk factors may include mental disorders, physical illness, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and interpersonal frustration or rejection (such as marital failure, failed romance, loss of loved ones), unsatisfactory performance (such as in examination or in jobs), and so on.

Many studies show that there is a strong correlation between psychiatric disorders and suicide. The commonest ones are depression, schizophrenia and drug abuse. According to the WHO, mental disorders (particularly depression and drug abuse) are associated with more than 90% of all suicides.

Imitation (or copycat) suicide is referred to as the "Werther effect". Research has not refuted the theory that publicly reported suicides can become a compelling imitative model for later suicides, such as by immature youth. It is widely acknowledged that the media can play a positive role in suicide prevention, and as such any "glamorous" representation of suicidal behaviour should be discouraged. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Hong Kong Journalists Association has included in its code of professional ethics a provision

that "journalists should not pander to prurience, indecency and sensationalism when reporting news involving suicide".

In 1999, the WHO launched a worldwide initiative aimed at preventing suicide. Effective interventions identified were:

- (a) strategies involving restriction of access to common methods of suicide combined with multi-sectoral approaches involving other levels of intervention and activities, such as crisis centres;
- (b) adequate prevention and treatment of depression, alcohol and drug abuse; and
- (c) school-based intervention involving crisis management, self-esteem enhancement and the development of coping skills and healthy decision-making.

Academic literature argues that effective prevention of suicide lies mainly in the early detection of and intervention for the at-risk groups (particularly those with mental illnesses known to be associated with suicide and addictive disorders) and counteraction of known risk factors (such as drug abuse, management of stress and social support, occupational problems). There is also some evidence indicating that controlling the environment may be effective, that is to say, in terms of restricting access to the means of suicide.

I should now like to briefly outline the strategies and measures adopted by the Government to address this issue. Clearly, a multi-sectoral approach must be adopted since suicide prevention requires intervention from both the health and non-health sectors. To counter some of the pre-disposing and precipitating factors mentioned to earlier, we have adopted various initiatives. These focus firstly, on providing better support for individuals especially, in terms of developing personal skills which enable them to better cope with the working environment; and secondly, on assistance related to crisis intervention. These initiatives include the following.

The Government continues to strengthen its network of support for families, young people, the elderly and vulnerable groups including single parents, new arrivals, and the socially isolated. For example, single parent centres, post-migration centres, centres for new arrivals and extensive outreach

services for various socially disadvantaged groups are provided to meet individuals' emotional and social needs, and to help those in need overcome crises that may arise.

Young people are supported through peer group support networks and the enhanced provision of integrated teams and school social work teams. In addition, the Education Department (ED) places emphasis on the setting up of Parent-Teacher Associations to promote home-school collaboration to help students grow up healthily. These programmes are designed to help students build up positive self-images, improve their problem-solving skills, ability to cope with stress and crisis and to cherish the gift of life.

Elderly support teams from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Hospital Authority (HA) reach out to those elderly who are vulnerable and socially isolated. In this connection, a three-year project on Prevention of Elderly Suicide has recently been launched. Suicidal prevention services have been subvented to run befriending services to suicidal or depressed elderly as well as community education programmes.

Training and guidance for professionals are provided to enable them to handle clients with suicidal tendencies. Given the enormous importance of school-based intervention, let me use the case of students as an example for illustration purpose. The ED organizes programmes to equip teachers and student guidance officers with the skills to detect and handle students' problems. At the same time, the Department has also developed a Resource Package on Student Suicide for schools.

A two-year Family Education project was launched by the SWD in March 2001 to provide early identification of at-risk families that need assistance to strengthen their resiliency and problem-solving skills and to prevent the emergence or further deterioration of problems. The Department will also set up a Family Crisis Support Centre later this year which will be complemented by more outreach and network support to help families in need.

In addition, a number of hotline services are provided to those who need help by the SWD, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, the Samaritans and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The HA has a comprehensive range of services for those suffering from severe depression or stress and other psychiatric patients, ranging from psychiatric out-patient and in-patient service, community psychiatric service and psychogeriatric teams. These help to ensure the early detection and treatment of depression, schizophrenia and drug abuse and provide outreaching, psychiatric care, psychosocial rehabilitation and crisis intervention services.

A pilot programme will be conducted by the HA in 2001-02 to assess 1 400 young persons, with a view to identifying those suffering from psychotic problems and requiring early treatment. This will help reduce the suicidal tendencies of patients with psychiatric disorders.

For its part, the Department of Health organizes programmes on the prevention of post-partum depression for women and provides a comprehensive health assessment to the elderly and to students in terms of physical and psychosocial health. Those diagnosed with psychological problems are provided with counselling and referred to specialists such as psychiatrists or clinical psychologists for treatment.

To deal with the contagion effect mentioned by me earlier, public education and publicity campaigns are undertaken by many government departments and NGOs. This year, we will launch a campaign designed to Empower Families to Face Challenges. The aim is to help prevent tragedies by promoting social values and positive attitudes towards life, developing people's resilience to cope with stress, equipping them to handle adversities and encouraging those in need to seek early assistance.

In terms of handling completed or attempted suicide cases, we adopt a multi-discipline approach, involving emergency rescue by the police and the Fire Services Department, medical assistance from the HA, social assistance from the SWD and material assistance from other departments.

Family caseworkers from Family Service Centres will reach out to the families of individuals who have committed or attempted suicide. They provide counselling and material assistance to help resolve the personal and family problems encountered by them. Medical social workers similarly assist those hospitalized patients.

Given the time constraint, I cannot be exhaustive in my description of the services available. Nevertheless, I hope that I have given Honourable Members a rough idea of the comprehensive range of services that are currently available to the community.

In recent years, it is clear with all the intervention measures adopted by the Government that the issue of suicide has been placed firmly on its agenda.

We continuously review our strategies and programmes. To name one example, a number of research studies have been conducted. Three projects have been completed and one is in progress. The Government has provided support to NGOs and tertiary institutions in their research, for example, on elderly suicide.

I am grateful to Honourable Members for participating in this debate. We will seriously examine and consider suggestions advanced by Members in our review of the strategies and programmes in the prevention of suicide.

To conclude, no community can pretend that suicide will ever be completely eliminated; however, some suicides are, to an extent, predictable and preventable. The Government cannot fight the battle alone. We need the support and co-operation from all in the community. Here, I would urge everyone to consider how they personally can help their friends, family, colleagues in times of stress or illness. Such an approach can, in my view, have a significant impact on improving the well-being of the community and therefore, contribute to a reduction in the number of attempted or completed suicide cases.

Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Miss CHOY So-yuk to Mr Michael MAK's motion, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, who are present. I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Michael MAK, you may now reply and you still have three minutes 25 seconds.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam President, to start with, I would like to thank the 13 Honourable colleagues who have spoken on the question though the number of Members who chose to speak is fewer than I have expected. A number of Members have made an in-depth analysis of the problem from the perspective of their own constituencies. It is generally believed that the Government lacks long-term strategies in the formulation of policies with respect to society, culture, values of life, education, unemployment control, psychiatric services, youth and elderly services, and so on. I would also like to thank the Secretary, Dr YEOH, for giving us a lecture on the problem of suicide. Regrettably, I see that the Government does not have the least intention of attaching more importance to this problem. Indeed, I find the Government a bit cold-blooded!

Over the past few months, a lot of people have asked me why I chose to move such a motion. I want to tell Members that a cousin of mine committed suicide about 30 years ago because of changes associated with menopause. Recently, two colleagues of mine who belonged to my constituency ended their valuable lives because of emotional problems and problems associated with their work.

To the trouble-hearted, Hades calls;
A wrong decision, another soul is lost.
Regret ye who leave before the curtain falls,
Your parents are grief-stricken over your loss.

Feeling deep regrets for the deceased, I hope the Government can stop turning a deaf ear to the problem of suicide.

Madam President, I am grateful to Honourable colleagues for their concerns with the rising trend of suicide. Regrettably, even if my motion is passed, the amendment will make it impossible for my motion to push the Government to adopt long-term strategies to solve the long-term problem of suicide. As lives are of paramount importance, I would like to appeal to the Government to cherish its role and not to feel complacent, thereby ignoring the existence of this social time bomb. Again I would like to thank Honourable Members, particularly those who voted against the amendment, left the meeting or abstained from voting on the amendment.

Finally, I hope our discussion can in the long run help improve and solve this problem in a comprehensive manner. Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Michael MAK, as amended by Miss CHOY So-yuk, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, who are present. I declare the motion passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second motion: Quality of Dongjiang water.

QUALITY OF DONGJIANG WATER

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I now move a motion on the quality of Dongjiang water.

Madam President, although the potable water now supplied to local users by the Water Supplies Department (WSD) can meet the standards set in 1993 by the World Health Organization (WHO) in respect of potable water, studies conducted by many environmental groups and scholars in recent years indicate that the content of organic pollutants in the raw water of Dongjiang has been on continuous increase. The findings of these studies have aroused people's concern about the health impact of polluted watercourses on people living in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dongguan, whose main source of potable water is Dongjiang. Furthermore, ever worsening water quality has caused grave damage to the ecological environment of Dongjiang and Dongguan and Shenzhen along the river. To dispel public anxieties about water pollution, it is really necessary for the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong to eradicate the problem of pollution along the watercourse of Dongjiang.

The main purposes of my moving a motion on the quality of Dongjiang water today are: (1) to urge the Government to strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong authorities and make serious efforts to deal with the pollution along Dongjiang, and to propose to the Guangdong authorities that they should spend the charges paid by Hong Kong every year for purchasing Dongjiang water on the construction of sufficient sewage treatment facilities along Dongjiang as appropriate to cope with the ever-increasing discharge of industrial and domestic sewage, in order that the quality of Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong can meet the 1988 standards; (2) to urge the SAR Government to strengthen its co-operation with the Guangdong authorities for the preparation of an in-depth environmental impact assessment report on the construction of a closed aqueduct in Dongguan and Shenzhen in order to ascertain the extent to which the ecological environment and the quality of water in the water supply course have been affected by the sharp rise in the pollutant level in the water supply course and the back-flow of effluent into Dongjiang as a result of the closed aqueduct project, and to assess how much additional resources are required to remedy the damage done to the environment and the quality of the Dongjiang water by the project (otherwise, the construction of the closed aqueduct may just "bring about a temporary solution without effecting a permanent cure," while causing irreparable damage to the ecological environment along the watercourse and

supplying Hong Kong people with water of better quality at the cost of sacrificing the health of those living along Dongjiang); (3) in the long run, to urge the Guangdong authorities to step up efforts on education, legislation, enforcement and management in respect of environmental protection; and (4) to urge the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong to stipulate more clearly their respective obligations and rights in policy co-ordination and financial co-operation regarding the distribution of water, safeguards for water quality and environmental protection.

At present, Dongjiang is the main source of potable water for the 10 million or so people living in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dongguan. However, the sewage from towns and factories along Dongjiang and around Dongguan and Shenzhen is seriously polluting the water sources of Dongjiang. Although sewage treatment works are found around Dongjiang and Dongguan and Shenzhen, they are unable to cope with the ever-increasing sewage. As a result, the water quality of the river has been worsening.

The industrial and domestic effluent from areas along Dongjiang and Dongguan and Shenzhen is primarily responsible for polluting the water sources. Places like Shenzhen and Dongguan where the Dongshen Water Supply System (DWSS) is located are close to Hong Kong, with convenient networks of transport and transportation. So, over the last two decades, many factories with Hong Kong capitals have shifted northwards. The resultant increase in employment opportunities has also drawn huge numbers of migrant workers from all parts of China to these places. At present, most of the factories in the six towns along DWSS are engaged in industries that seriously pollute water sources, such as electroplating, bleaching and dyeing, producing serious industrial pollution caused by heavy metals and Chemical Oxygen Demand. All these constitute one of the major water pollution problems affecting Dongguan and Shenzhen.

Madam President, I have been to the drainage area of Dongjiang. There were animal faeces in the water. I also visited Tangxia Pumping Station, and I noticed that the water there was darkish green and yellowish, with a stink that could be detected even by one standing on the river bank.

According to environmental protection experts, houses or factories should not be built within 200 m from a watercourse supplying water or providing potable water lest industrial and domestic effluent may affect the quality of the

water source. However, many factories are found along Dongjiang. Even if all factories do treat their effluent before discharge as required by law, the ever-increasing number of factories along the river and the resultant increase in the volume of effluent discharged every day still produce a "cumulative effect" which may cause serious pollution to the river. What is more, many of the factory proprietors along Dongjiang are very inconsiderate and they just discharge the industrial effluent produced by their factories directly into the watercourses. There are some 6 000 factories around Shima River. The bulk of their industrial effluent is directly discharged into Shima River without treatment. This is the most striking example.

The domestic effluent from the 7 million or so residents along Dongjiang and Donnguang and Shenzhen is another cause of water source pollution. Less than 10% is treated, and the bulk of the remainder is directly discharged into the watercourses. Although sewage treatment plants are set up by the Guangdong authorities along watercourses supplying water, these plants are hardly enough to cope with the domestic effluent from a rapidly growing population and an ever-increasing volume of industrial pollutants. For example, the town Tangxia at Dongguan has a population of 300 000, but the sewage treatment plant there can only treat approximately 10% of the effluent discharged. As a result, organic pollutants in the water of Dongjiang, such as *E. coli*, and ammoniac nitrogen, often exceed acceptable standards. In 1998, when the loan agreement for the closed aqueduct project was concluded, Dongjiang water quality already fell short of some of the parameters of the 1983 standards. Sepcimens obtained from Muk Wu Pumping Station for the purpose of monitoring Dongjiang water quality show that the average level of ammoniac nitrogen rose from 0.89 mg per litre in 1995 to 2.49 mg per litre in 1998.

To improve the quality of Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong, the Guangdong Authorities also relocated the intake point of potable water supplied to Hong Kong upstream and completed the construction of Taiyuan Pumping Station in 1998 at a cost of \$300-odd million. This pumping station is located 200 m upstream from Dongjiang Pumping Station previously in use. The intake point is thus relocate from the heavily polluted Shima River, and it is hoped that the quality of Dongjiang water to be supplied to Hong Kong can be improved in the future. Statistics of the WSD show that during the period between the year 1993-94 and the year 1998-99, the WSD had to spend an additional recurrent expenditure of \$115 million on remedial measures to treat sub-standard Dongjiang water. Furthermore, for the purpose of improving water treatment works, an extra capital expenditure amounting to \$35 million had to be incurred.

Besides being concerned about the additional spending on the treatment of Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong, the public are also concerned about the health impact arising from the consumption of Dongjiang water. The average chlorine dosage applied by the WSD for the treatment of potable water has been increasing year after year, from 2.5 mg per litre in 1993-94 to 7.7 mg per litre in 1998-99, a three-fold increase. An increase in chlorine dosage will lead to a corresponding increase in Trihalomethanes (THMs), or chloroform, in treated potable water, and the latter is carcinogenic. Although the Department of Health has said that the proportion of THMs in treated potable water does not exceed the standard set by the WHO in 1993, if the Government of Guangdong and Hong Kong ignore the gravity of Dongjiang pollution, then the dosages of chemicals to be applied by Hong Kong for the treatment of potable water may have to go up correspondingly. This is indeed worrying.

To alleviate the public concern over water pollution, the DWSS Authority and the WSD of Hong Kong have denied the gravity of the water pollution affecting the DWSS, and, on the other hand, the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong implemented a closed aqueduct project at a total cost of RMB\$4.7 billion, of which HK\$2.3 billion comes from the SAR Government as an interest-free loan. The purpose of the said project is just to build a fully enclosed aqueduct to send Dongjiang water direct to Shenzhen Reservoir for onward transmission to Hong Kong. Although upon the completion of the project, there will be no further deterioration in the quality of Dongjiang water coming to Hong Kong, such a measure will just bring about a temporary solution without effecting a permanent cure, the reason being that upon the completion of the aqueduct project, the flow volume of Shima River, which is being used by the DWSS as the watercourse conveying water to Shenzhen Reservoir, will drop sharply, and its water flow will also be diverted to Dongjiang. The total quantity of discharged effluent is to remain unchanged, but there is to be a drop in flow volume. As a result, there will be a sharp rise in the concentration of pollutants in the watercourse that feeds into DWSS. The Guangdong authorities are confident that upon the completion of the closed aqueduct project, the quality of water supplied to Hong Kong will be able to meet the 1988 standards. However, the construction of the aqueduct will not in any way alleviate the water pollution now affecting Dongjiang. Worse still, the water supply authorities in Guangdong and Hong Kong, while trying to improve the quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong, are even prepared to make Mainland residents pay the price of deteriorating water quality and health hazards. This is totally unacceptable.

Regrettably, the Water Supply Agreement signed between Guangdong and Hong Kong in 1989 did not contain not any mechanism which can ensure that the water supplied to Hong Kong must meet the water quality standards set down in the agreement, that is, the 1983 standards; nor did the agreement contain any clauses on penalty and compensation in case of any breach of agreement terms by either party. For this reason, I suggest that the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong should ensure that in any new water supply agreement between Hong Kong and Guangdong, they should clearly set down the water quality standards required and the legal and financial liabilities for exceeding the pollution indicators.

The Guangdong authorities have recently released the test findings of water samples obtained from Taiyuen Pumping Station, the intake point of Dongjiang. The findings of all 20 items of testing are able to comply with state standards. Surely, it is encouraging that the Guangdong authorities have released information used to be regarded as state secret. But it is noted by many environmental experts and groups that the most polluted parts of Dongjiang are its middle course near Huizhou and its lower course near Shenzhen and raw water is supplied to Hong Kong via Shima River, Dongguang and Shenzhen. So, the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong is likely to get polluted. The water quality at Taiyuan Pumping Station cannot reflect the quality of the raw water supplied to Hong Kong.

Besides seeking to ensure the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong, the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong should also conduct continuing negotiations on introducing terms with more flexibility to future water supply agreements, so that the annual volume of supply can be adjusted to cease the supply of any water we think we do not need. That way, the brimming over of our reservoirs and the resultant waste of potable water can be avoided. Besides, we will need to spend less on pumping and treating water. It goes against the principle of cost effectiveness to dump potable water into the sea. Furthermore, this also violates the spirit of sustainable development.

Guangdong and Hong Kong are interdependent in their development. To eradicate the problem of water pollution along Dongjiang, the Guangdong authorities, besides boosting people's awareness of environmental protection, must also step up their legislative and enforcement efforts. At the same time, Hong Kong businessmen investing in the Mainland also have the duty to safeguard the quality of Dongjiang's water sources. Do not put profits before

everything and disregard the pollution of the watercourses. I think that it is absolutely necessary for the Hong Kong Government and the Guangdong authorities to discuss this issue.

Madam President, I so submit.

Mr Frederick FUNG moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, whilst Dongjiang has become Hong Kong's major source of potable water supply, the pollutant level of the raw water of Dongjiang often exceeds the standards, and that the cost of more than HK\$2 billion a year for purchasing Dongjiang water has not been appropriately spent on the construction of sufficient water treatment facilities in the Dongjiang basin, resulting in the quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong not being able to fully meet the standards stipulated in the water supply agreement; at the same time, the current construction of the closed aqueduct, which is being supported by the Hong Kong Government through an interest-free loan of HK\$2.3 billion, not only fails to safeguard the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong, but also disrupts the local ecological environment and may pollute the fresh foods supplied to Hong Kong; in view of the above, this Council expresses concern and urges the Government to:

- (a) strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong Authorities in order to critically assess and announce the extent to which the ecological environment and the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong have been affected by the sharp rise of the pollutant level of the original water supply course and the back-flow of the effluent into Dongjiang caused by the works on the closed aqueduct, and assess the additional resources required to remedy the damage to and the pollution of the local ecological environment and the Dongjiang water source;
- (b) propose to the Guangdong Authorities that the cost of purchasing Dongjiang water be appropriately spent on the construction of sufficient water treatment facilities in the Dongjiang basin until the water quality fully meets the standards;

- (c) ensure that the water quality standards and the legal and economic liabilities where the pollutant level exceeds the standards, are stated clearly in any new water supply agreement between Hong Kong and Guangdong;
- (d) strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong Authorities on waterworks, and stipulate more clearly the obligations and rights of each party in policy co-ordination and financial co-operation regarding the distribution of the quantity of water to be supplied, safeguards for water quality and environmental protection;
- (e) ensure that any large-scale joint waterworks projects with the Guangdong Authorities in future will be commensurate with the principle of sustainable development, and that extensive public consultation will be conducted before undertaking such projects; and
- (f) expeditiously formulate policies on recycling water resources, optimizing the use of local water sources and water conservation, and to conduct studies on alternative water sources."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Frederick FUNG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LAU Kong-wah and Mr LAW Chi-kwong will move amendments to this motion. Their amendments have been printed on the Agenda. The motion and the two amendments will now be debated together in a joint debate.

I will call upon Mr LAU Kong-wah to speak first, to be followed by Mr LAW Chi-kwong; but no amendments are to be moved at this stage.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): Madam President, ever since 1994, I have been going to Dongjiang with some groups and organizations to obtain water specimens for laboratory testing. I can thus say that I have always been concerned about the quality of Dongjiang water. All along, we have been calling upon the Government to release the laboratory findings on the quality of

Dongjiang water. After the passage of six or seven years, the governments of the two places have recently released a joint report on the quality of Dongjiang water. This is obviously the result of persistent public demand for government response.

I would look at the issue of Dongjiang water in this way: To unduly cover up problems with the quality of Dongjiang water will, in my opinion, veil the truth. Similarly, however, exaggeration is also not conducive to unveiling the truth. This is precisely one of the reasons for my amendments of the wording of Mr Frederick FUNG's motion. I am of the view that we must first objectively assess the gravity of the problems with Dongjiang water and then tackle them pragmatically.

One controversial point in this connection is about the closed aqueduct, an issue discussed for years by the Panel on Environmental Affairs and Finance Committee of this Council. The aqueduct is now under construction as we have already approved the funding. The closed aqueduct is meant chiefly to cope with the heavy pollution in Dongguan along Dongjiang caused by the direct dumping of all industrial and domestic effluent into the river in the course of industrial development. As such, the closed aqueduct can basically prevent pollutants produced around Dongguan from polluting the river. However, I have all along been pointing out in this Council that the completion of the aqueduct will not be able to solve all problems. The reason is that the upstream intake point at Taiyuan is in fact in the vicinity of Huizhou, which is going to follow a path development similar to that of Dongguan in the past. The construction of such a closed aqueduct simply cannot prevent pollutants coming from places above Taiyuan and around Huizhou from getting into the aqueduct. This, I think, this is the root of the problem.

Mr Frederick FUNG discussed the issue of building sewage treatment plants. Having listened very carefully to his speech, I noticed that he was actually referring to the construction of sewage treatment plants around Dongguan. When there is already a closed aqueduct, the capacity and effectiveness of the sewage treatment plants around Dongguan would simply produce no direct bearing on Hong Kong's intake of Dongjiang water. My concern is instead on whether or not sewage treatment plants are to be built around Huizhou. However, Mr FUNG did not say anything about this. But even if he had done so Well, this is precisely where our views differ. I mean, I really doubt whether we should put in any further resources to finance

the construction of more sewage treatment plants, to let the dirty water, albeit treated, keep flowing into Hong Kong via Dongjiang, and then to spend some \$100 million a year on treating the water. Must we still go through such a process and continue to get water from Dongjiang? Or, is it more advisable for us to look for an alternative water source with higher quality? This is precisely where my views and those of Mr FUNG differ.

My own experience and the information I have access to tell me that the best solution to the problem would be to get a new water source of Class 1 quality. In the amendment I put forward, I call upon the SAR Government to conduct further discussions with the Mainland government on enabling Hong Kong to get water from Xingfengjiang Reservoir. Located at Heyuan, Xingfengjiang Reservoir is farther away from the intake point of our closed aqueduct by more than double the distance. Built around 1960, the reservoir is about one third the size of Hong Kong, with a catchment area five times bigger than Hong Kong. The reservoir has an annual storage capacity of 14 billion cu m. Fresh water flowing into the reservoir amounts to 6 billion cu m annually. The volume of water Hong Kong needs annually is just 1 billion cu m. Given the fact that 6 billion cu m of water flows into the reservoir annually whilst Hong Kong only needs 1 billion cu m, there will definitely be no impact on the water source.

In the past, the Secretary for Works, in response to questions raised by us at Legislative Council meetings, stated that to do so might affect navigation and power generation. We have had some further discussions with the Mainland Government recently, and we now know that ever since the completion of Daya Bay Nuclear Power Station, the power generated by the reservoir has occupied just a negligible proportion. For navigation, they hold that the impact has been greatly reduced because unlike what happened in the past, when navigation depended heavily on waterways, Guangdong now has a lot of freeways. So these problems are no longer significant.

As a matter of fact, the Mainland government has already completed several reports which prove that it is feasible to draw water to Hong Kong from Xinfengjiang Reservoir. One of these reports was released in 1994 and entitled The Best Solution to the Water Supply Problem of Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Released in 1997, and entitled Feasibility Study Report on the Water Supply System of Xinfengjiang Reservoir Pipelines, the second report has been confirmed by quite a number of experts. Released in June 1997, the third

report is entitled Water Supply Planning Report on Xinfengjiang Reservoir-Hong Kong Pipeline. The three reports all reach the same conclusion, that is, it is feasible to supply water to Hong Kong from Xinfengjiang Reservoir. Mainland experts have already completed the relevant studies.

So we earnestly hope that the Government can conduct further discussions with the Guangdong provincial government, not least because there have recently been some new developments. Guangzhou has included the taking of water from Xinfengjiang Reservoir as one of the projects under its 10th Five-Year Plan. It cannot therefore be argued that taking water from the reservoir may affect navigation. If this argument holds, then why does Guangzhou not see any problems with taking water from the reservoir? In future, Guangzhou will draw water of Class 1 Standard from Xinfengjiang Reservoir. Now Shenzhen already has a closed aqueduct that goes all the way to the upper reaches at Huizhou to draw water. However, Hong Kong still has to draw water from the lower reaches at Huizhou. Do we wish to maintain such a situation or are we going to have fresh discussions on the matter with the Mainland government? Surely, I think it is necessary to uphold the concept of sustainable development. Consideration should, of course, be given to the ecological environment of the reservoir and the areas along the river. However, I am of the view that, with regard to the situation, the best approach is for SAR officials or the Chief Executive to have discussions with the Mainland government, especially with the Governor of Guangdong.

In fact, it seems that the Mainland Government is more anxious than us. Let me quote from recent reports of two newspapers. On 13 March this year, the *Oriental Daily* reported on what the Party Secretary of Heyuan said, quoting that "They suggested that the Hong Kong SAR Government submit a report to the Central Government for participation in the said water supply system so as to let Hong Kong people have quality tap water." "The said water supply system" refers to the drawing of water to Hong Kong from Xinfengjiang Reservoir. On 20 April, *Ming Pao* quoted words spoken by Deputy Director LI of the Guangdong Environmental Protection Bureau: "He stated that 70% to 80% of Hong Kong's potable water is supplied by Guangdong. The authorities may consider drawing water direct from Xinfengjiang so as to provide Hong Kong with quality water".

Madam President, I understand that the Secretary for Works have to face a lot of difficulties in the course of negotiations. But does the Secretary for

Works agree that he should still uphold the interests of Hong Kong and stand up for its case? Does he agree that negotiations should be renewed? I think this is the best time to do so. If we do not renew negotiations this year, then "the boat will be gone and a golden opportunity will be missed." It is, therefore, my hope that the Secretary for Works can conduct further discussions on the matter with the Mainland Government.

It is hoped that Honourable colleagues, after listening to what I just said, will support my amendment, which, I believe, offers the best solution. I understand that the Government is considering the option of desalination, but in my opinion, this is not as good as drawing water from Xinfengjiang Reservoir. The said reservoir has been in use for 40 years and has been well protected as a Class 1 water source. Why let the opportunity slip by so easily?

Madam President, I call upon colleagues to support my amendment.

MR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, it is an undeniable fact that in recent years, because of rapid urbanization and industrialization along the DWSS, the quality of Dongjiang water has been deteriorating.

In 1998, we granted an interest-free loan of \$2.3 billion to the Guangdong government for the construction of a new closed aqueduct, so as to eliminate the pollution hazard posed to the existing open aqueduct of DWSS. However, the closed aqueduct along Dongguan and Shenzhen may adversely affect the natural environment in the vicinity, particularly the quality of the water used by local residents for drinking, irrigation or fish farming. The Democratic Party calls upon the Government to expeditiously assess the impact of the closed aqueduct project on the ecological environment and to actively co-operate with the Mainland authorities in conducting regular monitoring and formulating mitigation measures. The said closed aqueduct project is expected to complete by 2003.

The Democratic Party believes that for the next five to 10 years, the closed aqueduct will be able to effectively improve the quality of water supplied to Hong Kong. It therefore urges the Government to expedite the project. However, the people of Hong Kong do not wish to see the local ecological environment, and people's livelihood suffer as a result of the project. The Democratic Party thinks that to avoid damage to the environment and adverse

impacts on the health of Mainland residents, the Dongjiang Water Quality Protection Special Panel, which was set up in February this year, should of extend its scope of work to the monitoring of the closed aqueduct's impact on the nearby ecological environment.

The Democratic Party urges that apart from building sewage treatment facilities, the Mainland authorities should enhance the work of enforcement, planning and management, so as to curb and outlaw activities that pollute the environment. Although the Mainland authorities already drew up regulations on the protection of the quality of Dongjiang water in Guangdong in 1991 in a bid to protect the quality of Dongjiang water, and to safeguard the quality of water for domestic use by those living in towns and villages along the river as well as the quality of water supplied to Hong Kong. Dongjiang water has still been polluted due to inadequate planning and laxity in enforcement. Because of this, Hong Kong has to spend some \$30 million more annually. The Democratic Party calls upon the Government to step up co-operation with the Mainland so as to put an end to pollution through enforcement and the planning of facilities.

Furthermore, the Democratic Party calls upon the Government to expeditiously bring into effect the recommendations made by the Audit Commission in its 1999 report on the purchase of Dongjiang water. It is also hoped that the Government and the Mainland authorities can increase transparency, so as to let people know clearly the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong and the ecological environment along the river on the Mainland. Another point worth noting is that since many factories and farms along Dongjiang are run by Hong Kong businessmen, the Hong Kong Government should offer term the technical know-hows to monitor the quality of Dongjiang water, and it should also consider setting up funds with Mainland banks to help Hong Kong businessmen invest in environmental protection projects, so as to improve and alleviate the problem of pollution.

There have been occasions on which we still took in Dongjiang water whilst our reservoirs were overflowing, thus wasting huge sums of taxpayers' money. So, my amendment calls upon the Government work with the Guangdong authorities on the introduction of more flexible terms and conditions with regard to the quantity of water to be supplied and financial arrangements.

The Democratic Party also urges the Government to consider making good use of our water resources by means of recycling and reuse as a long-term

guideline for formulating the policy on water supply. According to figures for the period between 1996 and 1998, the average annual storage capacity of our reservoirs can already meet 55% of Hong Kong people's demand for water. As far as the supply of potable water is concerned, we in fact have more than enough. Therefore, the Government should work out a long-term development strategy on the basis of our different uses of water, that is to say, to see whether it is possible to separate potable water from water for general uses. For potable water, which needs to be of a higher water quality, we can use the water collected by our reservoirs and send it to users' homes after treatment. To reduce our reliance on Dongjiang water and to develop our system for using recycled water, water for general uses, such as bathing and laundry, may come from other sources, including fresh water from Guangdong and treated recycled water.

Madam President, Mr LAU Kong-wah asks for the release of the laboratory test findings in respect of the sledge on the seabed. The Democratic Party is very supportive of this. According to a test and study conducted by the Open University of Hong Kong on river bed pollution, carcinogenic sledge is a very serious problem. The Government must not ignore the long-term impact on human health of carcinogenic sediment on the riverbed of Dongjiang through the food chain.

In his original motion, Mr Frederick FUNG expresses concern over the extent to which the ecological environment has been affected by the sharp rise of the pollutant level of the original water supply course and the back-flow of the effluent into Dongjiang caused by the works. I have also consulted the studies conducted non-government bodies. However, some scholars still have reservation over the outcome of the study. The Democratic Party has, therefore, amended the wording, urging the SAR Government and the Mainland government to comprehensively assess and monitor the adverse effects of the works on the local ecological environment, so as to formulate appropriate mitigation measures.

In his amendment, Mr LAU Kong-wah proposes that efforts be made to bring in water from Heyuan's Xinfengjiang Reservoir. The Democratic Party is of the view that the selection of intake point should be based on the water quality of the water source. It is, in the opinion of the Democratic Party, not appropriate to specify the location of the intake point in a Legislative Council motion. On the one hand, it is not flexible. On the other hand, it encroaches

upon administrative decision. Though the Democratic Party is very supportive of Mr LAU's other proposals, we will have to abstain from voting on his amendment.

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, both Hong Kong and Guangdong have all along been relying on Dongjiang as a source of potable water. As a result of rapid economic growth in the Pearl River Delta in the recent 10 years, there has been much concern over the pollution of Dongjiang water. The population along Dongjiang is well over 1.2 million, with factories, such as electroplating workshops and tanneries numbering over 3 000, and producing pollutants (for example, waste water and waste matters from factories engaged in electroplating, metalwork, production of plastic bags and tanning). Furthermore, there are lots of farmland and livestock farms along the river. Consequently, industrial effluent, domestic effluent, livestock waste, and even agricultural chemicals all eventually find their ways into Dongjiang. The Investigation and Research Report on the Protection and Utilization of Xinfengjiang Water Resources, prepared by the Guangdong People's Political Consultative Conference together with experts from provincial offices in charge of environmental protection, navigation, climatology, and irrigation, also states that the water quality in the lower reaches of Dongjiang "is worrying".

It has come to the notice of some Hong Kong experts who have been tracking Dongjiang water quality in recent years that even Dongjiang's head-water, which used to have better water quality, also contains chloroform, a carcinogenic substances, the level being as high as 60 mg to 70 mg per litre. Though it is still within the safety limit of 200 mg, it is somehow worse than before. At present, Hong Kong gets 75% of its potable water from Dongjiang. The annual amount spent by the WSD on water quality control has risen from \$33 million in 1987 to almost \$170 million this year. The deterioration of Dongjiang water quality has not only damaged the Pearl River Delta ecological environment, but has also impaired the whole region's mariculture and tourism and posed inherent health hazards to those living in Guangdong and Hong Kong.

In view of the hazards posed by the deteriorating quality of Dongjiang water to people's livelihood and the economy, the Finance Committee of the Provisional Legislative Council approved in April 1998 the allocation of an interest-free loan amounting to \$2.364 billion to the Guangdong People's Government, so as to finance the construction of a closed aqueduct with the

intake point at Qiaotou in Dongguan as a means of alleviating the pollution affecting Dongjiang water. Although the sending of water direct to Shenzhen and Hong Kong from Dongguan through the closed aqueduct can prevent the water supplied to Hong Kong from being polluted along the river around Dongguan and Shenzhen and reduce Hong Kong's expenditure on water purification, this cannot solve the pollution problem of Dongjiang water. To begin with, distant water cannot put out a fire close at hand, as the works will require two to three years to complete. What is more, there is also the question of whether or not the pollutant level in the lower reaches will rise because of a drop in the water flow caused by the diversion of water to the closed aqueduct from the upper reaches of Dongjiang. The Hong Kong Progressive Alliance (HKPA) calls upon the SAR Government to strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong authorities to ensure that the closed aqueduct comply with the principle of sustainable development, and to closely monitor the water sources around the lower reaches of Dongjiang to see if the water quality will deteriorate when the closed aqueduct is put to use.

The Government should, at the same time, review the current mechanism of its co-operation with the Guangdong authorities to see if it has been working as effectively as desired. For instance, the work of the Hong Kong-Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group should not just place emphasis on exchanging information and visits. Instead, it should seek to make finalized decisions on environmental protection co-operation plans between the two places, which should include finding ways to motivate businessmen operating factories in Guangdong to reduce the discharge of industrial pollutants, stating clearly in future water supply agreements between Hong Kong and Guangdong the water quality standards required and the economic and legal liabilities incurred where the pollutant level exceeds the standards, and offering advice and encouragement in Guangdong on the construction of more waste disposal facilities and sewage treatment plants, so as to prevent pollutants from flowing into channels carrying potable water. In this way, there can be safeguard for the quality of our potable water; the cleanliness of potable water used by Guangdong residents can also be improved.

Besides being concerned about the quality of Dongjiang water, the Hong Kong people also have much to say about the price of Dongjiang water. With regard to the price of Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong in recent years, it was \$1.2 per cubic metre in 1989, going up to \$1.94 per cubic metre in 1994, \$2.405 per cubic metre in 1996 and \$3.09 per cubic metre now. Given the fact

that the quality of water supplied is not improving or is actually getting worse, the people of Hong Kong are going to have more and more criticism against any rises in water price. It is unlikely that Hong Kong people will entertain further requests for higher price for Dongjiang water. In the long run, the HKPA calls upon the SAR Government to expeditiously look into the matter with the Guangdong authorities, so Class 1 Standard potable water of the state can be taken from Xinfengjiang and supplied to Hong Kong through pipelines. That way, people can enjoy clean water at low prices.

It is a matter of great urgency to protect the source of raw water and the course of delivery from pollution. This is also a reliable method to safeguard the quality of potable water.

Madam President, I so submit.

MR NG LEUNG-SING (in Cantonese): Madam President, with regard to the quality of Dongjiang water, Honourable Members may probably remember that in Report No. 33B of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) last year, this Council put forward a number of requests and recommendations to the Government. Among the major recommendations are to secure from the Guangdong side the inclusion of more flexible terms and conditions allowing for adjustments to annual supply quantities in future water supply agreements, and to strive for terms and conditions stipulating that potable water supplied to Hong Kong must comply with the 1988 state standards.

According to the reply given later by the Government in response to the Report, a short-term arrangement to be effective from April 2004 on reducing the daily supply quantities has been secured from the Guangdong authorities. Furthermore, there is confirmation from the Guangdong side that upon the completion of the new water supply works in 2003, efforts will be made to ensure that the quality of the water supplied will comply with the state standards of 1988.

Having looked at the account of the Government's efforts mentioned above, one cannot say that the Government has failed to make any progress. However, the efforts made are still not able to meet the PAC's requests and recommendations. The existing water supply arrangement between Guangdong and Hong Kong is based on the 1989 Water Supply Agreement between the two

sides. The PAC's conclusion is very clear. Under the said agreement, there is no mechanism to permit adjustments to the actual yearly supply quantities; nor is there any mechanism to ensure that the water supplied can comply with a lower standard, that is, the 1983 state standard of water quality. Although there came an opportunity when the 1998 loan agreement was to be concluded, Hong Kong still did not try to fight for more favourable terms and conditions that include a requirement to raise water quality to the standards of 1988.

The PAC has already criticized the Government for its inadequate efforts as described above. However, the objective reality is that under the existing agreement, Hong Kong is not in any favourable bargaining position. We naturally hope that all the terms and conditions can be in our favour, that they can permit flexible supply quantities, eliminate the rigid restrictions contained in the original agreement, set down strict water quality standards, and, better still, strictly prescribe the legal and financial liabilities in case of failure to comply with the standards. But one cannot possibly solve a problem simply by clinging to one's own wishes. Nor should one think that money is almighty. After all, the Mainland is our main water source. Furthermore, to deal with the pollution affecting water sources, it is necessary to depend on the effective co-ordination on the part of the relevant Mainland authorities. So we should still try to be co-operative, and address the problems with goodwill and mutual understand and accommodation, in the hope that the other side will do likewise, and seek to tackle the problem of water supply quantity and pollution control in particular.

In the long run, there should be no conflict of interests between Guangdong and Hong Kong. Quite the contrary, their relationship should be marked by interaction and mutual assistance. Hong Kong needs an adequate supply of water and stable and reliable safeguards for water quality. For Guangdong, it needs reasonable returns to deal with the problem of pollution and maintain sustainable economic growth. That being the case, both sides should try to tackle the problems, to eradicate pollution, on the basis of mutual co-operation. Neither side should stress solely its own interests in total disregard for the other's. Nor should they be short-sighted in dealing with long-standing matters. Quite the contrary, arrangements should be made to improve both water quality and quantity through close and honest contacts and liaison between the two sides, so as to bring benefits to people of the two places.

Madam President, I so submit.

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, Dongjiang water has always been the main source of our potable water, representing more than 80% of the total quantity of local water supply. However, because of continuous development in the Pearl River Delta, the pollution affecting the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong has been worsening in recent years. According to test data from the WSD, the fluoride level of Dongjiang water has been on the increase since 1997. Its ammoniac nitrogen level also rose sharply between 1995 and 1998. The levels of some heavy metals have also gone up.

Although the Guangdong government has started to look squarely at the gravity of pollution and has put in place quite a number of remedial measures in recent years, such as banning pollution-causing factories from places close to rivercourses supplying water, carrying out sewage disposal, and building sewage treatment works. However, there has been no obvious effect. Furthermore, since Guangdong is unable to deploy additional resources to improve the quality of Dongjiang water, the sewage treatment rate along the river is just about 30% only. In other words, the bulk of the water that we buy is polluted. This is unacceptable to all in Hong Kong.

We maintain that, the Guangdong government, as the seller, is duty-bound to guarantee the quality of the commodity. What is more, every year, Hong Kong has to spend more than \$2 billion on the purchase of Dongjiang water. Moreover, in 1998 Hong Kong granted to Guangdong an interest-free loan of \$2.4 billion to help finance part of the closed aqueduct project. The Liberal Party holds that Hong Kong, as the lender, must resort to different channels and conduct discussions with Guangdong on different strategies for improving the quality of Dongjiang water, monitor their effectiveness, and seek to secure terms and conditions to ensure that the quality of the water supplied is up to standard, so as to prevent any further pollution of Dongjiang water.

Madam President, Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment mentions the feasibility of taking state Class 1 standard surface water (that is, water of a higher standard) from Xinfengjiang Reservoir in Heyuan City for supply to Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, in early 1998, Guangdong and Hong Kong did conduct discussions on further relocating the intake point northwards to Xinfengjiang Reservoir. However, the proposal was turned down by Guangdong on the ground that the reservoir is more than 200 km from Hong Kong and the cost of building the pipeline is exorbitant. Although Shenzhen, which, like Hong Kong, mainly depends on Dongjiang for its water supply, is

now drawing water from the upper reaches, and Guangzhou is also planning to draw water from Xinfengjiang, it is still uncertain whether Hong Kong can do likewise.

The Liberal Party believes that it is will do good to the people to draw water from the upper reaches, where the water sources are cleaner. But is this an ultimate solution? If Hong Kong and Guangdong are not willing to co-operate with each other to eradicate the causes of pollution, then will this cause even more harm to others and ourselves? In the long run, the Government should, in conjunction with the Mainland, explore ways to alleviate the pollution affecting the lower reaches of Dongjiang. The only effective way to improve the quality of Dongjiang water is to alleviate pollution.

In his amendment, Mr LAW Chi-kwong proposes that more flexible terms and conditions be introduced into the water supply agreement between Guangdong and Hong Kong. Though a mechanism designed to increase the supply quantity of Dongjiang water in the event of necessity is found in the 1989 Water Supply Agreement, there is no provision allowing for a cut in water supply in the event that the growth rate of our water consumption drops. As the WSD over-estimated the growth rate of our use of water, our reservoirs has had to store water beyond their capacity in recent years, and as a result, there is a need to discharge water to the sea. The value of potable water thus discharged between 1994 and 1998 amounted to \$1.718 billion. To do that is to drain our money into the sea. Although Guangdong did agree to reduce the annual increase in supply quantity for the period between 1998 and 2004, Hong Kong still has to pay the same amount anyway. The Hong Kong Government should therefore make every effort to urge Guangdong to use the energy cost thus saved to improve the quality of the water supplied.

Besides the Liberal Party also agrees that when any water supply agreement is to be concluded in the future, the Government must fight for more flexible terms and conditions that can allow for adjustments to the annual supply quantity in accordance with demand and reservoirs storage, or even bring in penalty clause and compensation provision to safeguard Hong Kong people's rights and benefits, and avoid the recurrence of a situation in which surplus water has to be drained into the sea and thus wasted.

Madam President, in addition to addressing the issue concerning the cleanliness of the sources of Dongjiang water, we also have to improve the

technology used locally to disinfect potable water. According to quite a few environmental protection academics, the technology used locally to disinfect water is very backward. At present, many advanced countries are no longer using chlorine to purify water. They are using ozone instead. Though ozone costs more than chlorine, it leaves less harmful substances in potable water than chlorine does. The Government should refer to methods being adopted by advanced countries, so as to improve the technology used to purify and disinfect potable water, and it should also actively explore the feasibility of using ozone.

I so submit. The Liberal Party supports the original motion as well as the two amendments.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

MISS EMILY LAU (in Cantonese): Madam President, I speak in support of Mr Frederick FUNG's motion. I am also a member of the PAC, which was mentioned by Mr NG Leung-sing just now. We released a report in April last year. At that time, we held very lengthy discussions with the Secretary for Works. We discussed the price of water and we also paid great attention to water quality. In our opinion, in the past, the Government failed to supply enough information to this Council or its predecessor to enable us to understand the whole matter. Because of this, criticism was levelled against the Government by the PAC then. Here I am not going to read out the details. Madam President, I am not trying to threaten anyone. Is the water quality up to standard? Is that really value for money in view of the huge sums already paid by us? All these are worth discussing.

According to what the Secretary for Works said on different occasions, our potable water can comply with the standard. However, I cannot help asking, "How much have we paid to purchase and purify such water? How many millions or billions of dollars we have paid for the purpose of bringing water quality up to standard? It is hoped that the Secretary for Works will provide us with some explanation when giving his reply later. Since we, as pointed out by some Honourable Members just now, have been paying billions of dollars for Dongjiang water — according to Mr FUNG's motion, it costs us \$2 billion a year — then why should we still spend so much on purification?

Madam President, as mentioned by Mr NG Leung-sing, we have made the request that the quality of Dongjiang water should be made to meet to the standards of 1988 again. However, according to the reply of the Government, we must until 2003, and there is no guarantee that the standards can definitely be complied with. I call upon the Secretary for Works to give a concrete response to this. If we are to tell others that there will not be any possibility of meeting the standards of 1988 until 2003, they will definitely be baffled. I do agree with Mr NG that we probably do not have a very strong bargaining power. However, given the huge sums already spent by us, I think the Guangdong government ought to understand that as they are charging so much, the quality of the potable water supplied by them should not be "substandard". They should supply potable water of up-to-standard quality.

Madam President, I also wish to visit the Mainland to take a look, just like other Honourable Members. However, you probably understand that it is impossible for us to do so. But I really wish to go there to take a look. Though I cannot go to the Mainland for site visits, I can still get information from media reports. The water there is indeed terribly dirty. Madam President, you probably have seen that. So, the Secretary for Works often asked us not to read those reports, saying that all we have to do is to turn on the tap to see the quality of the water ultimately available for consumption. The Director of Water Supplies even said that he actually drank tap water. I urge him not to do so anymore; he should not "risk his life like that". I just do not understand why the quality of the Dongjiang water that we buy is still so bad even though we have paid so much for it.

Madam President, I notice that Green Peace has handed us a paper, and I believe all Members have received a copy of it. Green Peace asks us to oppose the amendment moved by the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), saying that Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment deletes from Mr Frederick FUNG's motion almost all the criticism against worsening water quality and policy mistakes. Green Peace holds that this is the same as giving up a legislator's due commitment in respect of his duty to supervise the government. I fully agree with the views of Green Peace. Madam President, in fact it is rare for Mr Frederick FUNG to make criticisms so severely. However, the first paragraph of his motion is, in my opinion, very correct. Unfortunately, someone has attempted to delete it. I concur with what Green Peace says, and I

also very much agree to its views. One of the ways to go at the root of the issue is to relocate the factories so as to move them away from the water source. The Secretary for Works once wrote to me in reply to my inquiry, saying that actions to relocate factories had been taken. But how many factories were relocated? According to Mr FUNG, there were originally some 6 000 factories. It is not sure whether the figure is the most accurate one or not. If just 100 factories have been relocated or if just 60 food establishments have been closed down — food establishments also produce a lot of effluent, can this be said to be a solution? Can the target be achieved?

Furthermore, I am of the view that the ultimate solution should be to build sewage treatment plants. According to the reply given to me by the Secretary for Works, the Government has built three sewage treatment plants. However, according to information supplied by Green Peace (I am not sure whether or not the information is up-to-date and accurate), there is more than 900 000 cu m of effluent, and the few sewage treatment plants mainly have to treat 60 000 cu m of domestic effluent. Madam President, these figures are perhaps out of date. I call upon the Secretary for Works to update us on this in due course. If those sewage treatment plants only treat domestic effluent, then, as pointed out by Mr Frederick FUNG and other Members, how and where will the industrial effluent be treated?

Madam President, the closed aqueduct is also highly controversial topic. It has come to my notice that the National People's Congress (NPC), when in session early this year, also wanted to raise query on this. However, a query was not raised probably because there were not enough proposers. I, therefore, presented a written inquiry at the Legislative Council meeting of 4 April to ask the Secretary for Works whether or not he knew of any recent attempt by Hong Kong NPC deputies to raise query on works in connection with the construction of the closed aqueduct. The reason is that those NPC deputies opined that upon the completion of the aqueduct, the quality of the water in the lower reaches of Dongjiang might deteriorate. In fact, according to Green Peace, there is such a possibility. However, the Secretary for Works opined otherwise, saying that the authorities concerned had already taken some measures. The solutions mentioned by the Secretary for Works, however, cannot allay people's anxieties.

Madam President, water in the lower reaches is also for use by Chinese people. It is my hope that all Chinese people can have clean water for their use. That is why doubts over the construction of such a closed aqueduct are inevitable. What is more, we do not want people in the Mainland to say that: "Hong Kong people's need for clean potable water renders it necessary for people along the lower reaches to have even dirtier water." Madam President, unlike us, these people probably cannot afford to spend millions or even billions of dollars to purify water. Such water, however, is not for their use only. It will find its way back to Hong Kong as the Mainland supplies Hong Kong with food that they grow. It is therefore hoped that we can put in real efforts to do something about it and try to solve the problem by going to its root.

With these remarks, I oppose the DAB's amendment.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

(No Member responded)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG, you may now speak in response to the two amendments, and you have five minutes.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, with regard to the two amendments, the one moved by Mr LAW Chi-kwong of the Democratic Party is roughly similar to my original motion. However, he probably thinks that different environmental protection groups or experts would draw different conclusions in their analyses. He therefore deletes from my motion paragraph (a). I, however, basically agree to the amendment moved by Mr LAW Chi-kwong.

Turning now to the amendment moved by Mr LAU Kong-wah. I wish to discuss a few key points. As a matter of fact, the proposals mentioned in Mr LAU's amendment concern matters that are still not definite, matters that are pending, matters with uncertain technical feasibility, and matters with unknown prices. If water is indeed to be drawn to Hong Kong from Xingfengjiang Reservoir, then, just as Mr LAU said earlier on, the distance involved will be more than doubled. Mr LAU Kong-wah has yet to make clear one point,

namely, whether we are to use a closed aqueduct to send water to Hong Kong when the time comes or whether a canal is to be constructed to link up with Dongjiang water.

What problem may stem from such a proposal? Suppose that we are to use a closed aqueduct. At present we already have to spend \$4.7 billion. How much is it going to cost for the doubled distance? Should we build another canal to send the water to Hong Kong, or is there to be again a link-up with Dongjiang water for supply to Hong Kong via the Dongjiang rivercourse? The problem arising from such options is that even if they are to be put into effect, it is probably going to be some 10 years away. What are we going to do during the 10 years? I think such a proposal actually involves something quite different. Let me use an example to illustrate my point. Suppose the Hong Kong people have spent money on growing an apple tree. They notice that the tree is infected with pests that are eating into the fruits. So someone proposes that money be spent on getting rid of the pests. However, Mr LAU Kong-wah says: "No, let us not grow our tree here. Let us grow the tree somewhere further away." What he suggests is, therefore, a different matter. However, here is the problem. Money has already been spent to get rid of the pests and the people are working on it. What should be done with regard to the work done? My motion actually says something like this: Let us continue with the work of killing the pests! Here lies the difference between my motion and the amendment moved by Mr LAU Kong-wah. Work is now in progress. We have spent our money. We are, however, powerless, and do not know what the result will be. The quality of water probably may get better in the end, but we are not sure whether or not those in the Mainland will have to use polluted water because of the deterioration in their water quality caused by the improvement in our water quality.

I have learnt from a certain organization that in October the United Nations will release a paper about a study to find out whether or not the riverbed of Dongjiang has been contaminated by various dioxins or toxic substances. If the findings are positive, then there is greater need for the Government to carefully consider the matter.

Furthermore, there is another point in Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment that I consider to be questionable. On the one hand, he proposes an alternative approach, under which cleaner water from another place is to be drawn by other means (that is, not using closed aqueduct). On the other hand, he preserves

recommendations (b) and (c) of my original motion, which are about how Dongjiang water is being delivered. So, to a certain extent, Mr LAU lumps the new and the old suggestions together. The situation is such that we do not know whether or not the Guangdong government will accept the suggestions, and are uncertain about technical feasibility and the cost and time required. That being the case, I think that the amendment moved by Mr LAU Kong-wah can in fact be taken as a separate motion. This is better than having an amendment to my motion. This is practicable. For instance, the Hong Kong Government may recommend that desalination of sea water be adopted. In my motion, I suggest recycling water resources. Mr LAU may amend my motion with reference to the idea of recycling. There will not be conflict in meaning. However, what Mr LAU now proposes is something else.

In order to make the message clearer so as to tell the governments of Hong Kong and Guangdong that we attach much importance to the supply of Dongjiang water to Hong Kong, and that we are not just concerned about the potable water that Hong Kong people use, as we are also concerned about the potable water used by Mainland people, I call upon Honourable Members to support the original motion. I am going to vote against Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment. This does not mean that his suggestion is not practicable. I think that it requires further careful consideration.

Thank you, Madam President.

SECRETARY FOR WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have listened carefully to Members' remarks and appreciate the valuable suggestions that Members have made. First of all, I have to point out that there has always been a lack of fresh water sources in Hong Kong. Starting from the 1960's, water from Dongjiang has been drawn in to meet our increasing demand. However, for various reasons, the intake of water from Dongjiang was very small initially and could only serve as a stopgap measure. From the 1960's up to the early 1980's, Hong Kong people still lived under the threat of water rationing.

With the growth in our population and the development of commerce and industry, the Hong Kong Government, in the light of its assessment of the prevailing situation and the projections made, came to the conclusion in the late 1980's that Hong Kong needed a permanent and reliable source of fresh water supply to sustain its long-term development, otherwise people's daily life and the commercial and industrial activities would be greatly hampered.

Against this background, the Hong Kong Government started negotiations with the Guangdong authorities on a long-term water supply agreement, and the two sides finally signed the 1989 Water Supply Agreement.

The quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong had been satisfactory until the mid-90's when the water quality began to show signs of deterioration. This was mainly because the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong through an open aqueduct, the Dongshen Water Supply System (DWSS), was polluted as a result of rapid economic development along the DWSS. The most effective way to immediately separate the pollutants from Dongjiang water was to construct a closed aqueduct to prevent Dongjiang water from being polluted and directly transfer it to Hong Kong.

The Guangdong and Hong Kong sides both recognize that to uproot the pollution problem in the long run, the source of pollution has to be dealt with first. All sewage has to be collected and properly treated before discharge. However, the environmental protection facilities required cannot be established overnight. A certain period of time is needed for the planning and building work, and resources have to be injected for the construction and operation of such facilities. It is therefore difficult to yield instant results within a short time.

Nevertheless, when the Guangdong and Hong Kong sides discovered in the middle of the 1990's that the water quality started to deteriorate, they immediately began to explore and implement water improvement measures, as well as set in place a series of arrangements. For example, in September 1998, the intake point was relocated to the upper reaches of Dongjiang where water of better quality could be obtained. In early 1999, a bio-nitrification plant was commissioned at Shenzhen Reservoir, and since then the water quality has showed marked improvement. Meanwhile, desilting works were also carried out at Shenzhen Reservoir to remove the silt at the bottom which might affect the water quality. The desilting works will ensure the stability of the water quality even if water has to be drawn from the lower level of the reservoir in future.

We have also discussed with the Guangdong side the idea of drawing water from the Xinfengjiang Reservoir, which is 200 km to the northeast of Shenzhen. According to the information provided, the Xinfengjiang Reservoir plays vital and multiple roles in regulating the flow of Dongjiang, improving the environment on the lower reaches, assuring the quality of life and supplying water for industrial and agricultural use on its lower reaches, protecting navigation, and so on.

The Guangdong side points out that the Guangdong Province has all along attached great importance to the protection of Dongjiang. At present, the water quality at Taiyuan Pumping Station, that is, the intake point in the mainstream of Dongjiang, complies with the requirement of the water supply agreement as well as the national standard, and the intake point is suitable for us as a source of supply of potable water. As such, it would not be cost-effective to spend a huge sum of money on the construction of another water supply system to draw water directly from the Xinfengjiang Reservoir instead of keeping up with the existing efforts to maintain and improve the quality of Dongjiang water. Besides, if Hong Kong initiates such an action, then Shenzhen, Dongguan, Huizhou and Guangzhou will follow suit. As a result, the Xinfengjiang Reservoir will be over-strained, and the environment, water supply and navigation on the lower reaches will all be adversely affected. It will be unfair to the people living in the towns and villages on the middle and lower reaches. It will not be commensurate with the principle of sustainable development, either. Hence drawing water directly from the Xinfengjiang Reservoir is not the best option under the present circumstances. But we are not ruling out this option all together. With regard to this option, we have to continue our discussion with the Guangdong side to establish its feasibility and its cost effectiveness.

To enable the limited water resources of Dongjiang to be distributed and utilized in the most effective and rational manner, the right step to take is to safeguard the quality of Dongjiang water, enhance protection for the water resources and carry out unified management.

The closed aqueduct project discussed by Members just now is one of the measures taken as a result of enhanced co-operation between the Guangdong and the Hong Kong sides to improve the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong. In 1998, a loan agreement was signed between the two sides. Under the agreement, the Hong Kong side provided a loan of \$2,364 million to the Guangdong side to help fund their closed aqueduct project, while the Guangdong side consented to reduce the agreed supply quantities, thereby reducing Hong Kong's intake of unneeded water and directly lowering the cost to us each year.

After in-depth discussion of the options concerned and consideration of the aforesaid factors, both sides agreed that construction of the closed aqueduct was the best way to resolve instantly the problem of pollution of Dongjiang water along the DWSS.

Apart from the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong, the design of the closed aqueduct project has also taken into account the water demand of the towns along Shima River in the DWSS. Various tapping points are included in the project to supply water to these towns for domestic use. An adequate amount of water will also be reserved for irrigation purpose. Indeed, the closed aqueduct project has not only catered for the water demand of both Guangdong and Hong Kong but has also initiated measures to eliminate any possible adverse effect on the environment.

In discussing the options concerned, the Guangdong side realized that the water quality of the lower reaches of Dongjiang would be affected if no measures were put in place to tie in with the reversion of the existing aqueduct (mainly the Shima River) into a natural streamcourse upon the commissioning of the closed aqueduct. As such, a "Comprehensive Wastewater Management Scheme for the Catchment of Shima River" has been implemented alongside the closed aqueduct project to improve the water quality of Shima River. The major components of the scheme will be completed in 2003 to accord with the operation of the closed aqueduct so as to mitigate the adverse effect on the water quality of the lower reaches of Dongjiang.

The measures of the "Comprehensive Wastewater Management Scheme for the Catchment of Shima River" include:

- (1) Management of the scattered point sources of pollution from industrial and catering activities, stipulating that sewage cannot be discharged unless meeting the specified standard. Efforts are being stepped up to strictly enforce the requirement;
- (2) Government authorities at all levels are required by the Guangdong Provincial Government to reserve additional funds each year for the prevention and management of water pollution. The funds are mainly used for treatment of sewage and cleaning up of streamcourses;
- (3) Prohibition against the approval of establishment of heavily polluting and high discharge industrial or agricultural activities along the DWSS;

- (4) Development of effective initiatives to prevent secondary pollution caused by the discharge of surface pollutants into the streamcourses; and
- (5) Comprehensive demolition of livestock farms.

The wastewater management scheme and water protection measures mentioned above, together with the closed aqueduct project, will ensure the quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong. They will also ensure that no damage or pollution will be caused to the local ecology and the water sources in Dongjiang.

We have all along been conducting stringent tests on the quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong. In addition, information on the water quality of the Muk Wu Pumping Station was published on the website of the Water Supplies Department (WSD) in August last year and will be updated on a yearly basis. With the consent of the Guangdong side, information on the water quality of Dongjiang mainstream at the Taiyuan Pumping Station was added to the WSD's website in May this year. We hope that provision of such information can help enhance transparency and meet the ever-increasing expectations of the community.

As regards the proposal of constructing water treatment facilities in the Dongjiang basin, the Guangdong Provincial Government has actually been laying strong emphasis on the protection of Dongjiang water and has put the issue at the top of their agenda. This is because the water sources in Dongjiang not only provide fresh water to Hong Kong but also supply water for domestic use to tens of millions of people in the areas along the DWSS. Protecting Dongjiang and improving the water quality of the DWSS are the long-term commitments of the governments of both sides. Apart from the above, additional sewage collection and treatment systems will continue to be provided, and enforcement actions and planning work will be stepped up. We will continue to strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong side and follow up the progress of such work. To expedite the construction of these sewage facilities, we have taken the initiative to discuss with the Guangdong side the feasibility of giving them assistance in terms of technical support, sharing of our experience in financing, and examining whether there is room for mutual co-operation in this aspect.

In the motion, it is proposed that the water quality and liabilities in all other aspects should be clearly stated in any new water supply agreement signed between both sides. In fact, the water quality standard is stipulated in the current water supply agreement. At present, the water quality of Dongjiang mainstream at Taiyuan Pumping Station complies with the requirement of the water supply agreement as well as the national standard, and the intake point is suitable for use as a source of supply of potable water. However, owing to the pollution of Dongjiang water in the transportation process, some parameters of the water supplied to Hong Kong fail to meet the standard completely. The closed aqueduct is seen as the best option to avoid pollution of Dongjiang water on its way to Hong Kong. It can also help improve the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong, making it on a par with the high quality water in the mainstream of Dongjiang.

When a new water supply agreement is prepared in future, we will strive hard for the inclusion in the agreement of more specific provisions on the water quality standard and the liabilities where the pollutant level exceeds the standard. As for future joint waterworks projects, we will also strive for a clearer definition of the obligations and rights as proposed in the motion.

Whether it is an agreement or a joint project, either side has to obtain the consent of the other side as regards the rights and obligations involved. Without such consent, the agreement or joint project cannot be finalized. During the negotiation, such as the negotiation on a more flexible arrangement, the Guangdong side may put forward other terms and conditions or insist that the new request made by the Hong Kong side should be reflected in the water price. We will therefore carefully proceed with the negotiation in the overall interests of Hong Kong.

We support the motion's proposal that extensive consultation should be carried out before any large-scale waterworks projects are undertaken in conjunction with the Guangdong side. In carrying out such joint projects in future, we will certainly adhere to the principle of sustainable development and conduct extensive consultation with various parties, including the Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies, the Legislative Council Panels and the Finance Committee.

We will conduct on-going reviews of our water resources policy. Recently we have started a preliminary study on long-term water resources, including the enhancement of our water gathering and storage capacity, water reuse and seawater desalination. We hope that the preliminary findings will be available early next year. Then we will solicit views extensively before formulating in detail our long-term policy on water resources.

I would also like to point out that the Guangdong side has all along underscored their concern about our problem of lacking potable water sources. Appreciating the importance of adequate potable water supply to our economic development, our prosperity and stability, they have always adopted a highly co-operative approach in the supply of water to Hong Kong.

We will, through different channels, maintain dialogue with the Guangdong side to strengthen communication at all levels so that we may closely monitor the quality of Dongjiang water and follow up on the progress of the sewage system construction projects. We will further request the Guangdong side to enhance the transparency of their monitoring system over the quality of Dongjiang water by increasing the water quality data to be published so as to give the public a clearer picture of the situation. Besides, co-operation between both sides will be enhanced to speed up the progress of the sewage works. It is anticipated that we will have an adequate supply of Dongjaing water of higher quality under the principle of sustainable development.

Lastly, I would like to stress that once the Dongjiang water reaches our reception point, the Muk Wu Pumping Station, it will be closely monitored by us. Such monitoring is carried out in the treatment process, in the water supply network, and even at the taps of the end users. To ensure the water quality, more than 150 000 tests are conducted by the WSD every year. The treated water has all along complied with the World Health Organization guidelines and is safe for long-term consumption.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Mr LAU Kong-wah to move his amendment to the motion.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that Mr Frederick FUNG's motion, as printed on the Agenda, be amended.

Mr LAU Kong-wah moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add "in the water quality tests conducted in the past, several items pertaining to" after "Hong Kong's major source of potable water supply,"; to delete "often exceeds" after "the pollutant level of the raw water of Dongjiang" and substitute with "had exceeded"; to delete "and that the cost of more than HK\$2 billion a year for purchasing Dongjiang water has not been appropriately spent on the construction of sufficient water treatment facilities in the Dongjiang basin, resulting in the quality of the Dongjiang water supplied to Hong Kong not being able to fully meet the standards stipulated in the water supply agreement; at the same time" and substitute with "and, in the long run"; to delete "not only fails to safeguard" after "an interest-free loan of HK\$2.3 billion," and substitute with "is also unable to ensure that"; to delete ", but also disrupts the local ecological environment and may pollute the fresh foods supplied to Hong Kong; in view of the above," and substitute with "will not have been contaminated before it is drawn at the Tai Yuen Pumping Stations; this Council therefore considers that the Government should actively strive for the supply of the surface water of the Xingfengjiang Reservoir, which meets the national Class I standard, to Hong Kong; at the same time,"; to delete "expresses concern and" after "this Council"; to add "take the following actions" after "urges the Government to"; to add "(a) expeditiously explore with the Guangdong Authorities the feasibility of supplying to Hong Kong the surface water of the Xingfengjiang Reservoir in He Yuan City which meets the national Class I standard;" after ":"; to delete "(a)" and substitute with "(b)"; to delete "to critically assess and announce the extent to which the ecological environment and the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong have been affected by the sharp rise of the pollutant level of the original water supply course and the back-flow of the effluent into Dongjiang caused by the works on the closed aqueduct, and assess the additional resources required to remedy the damage to and the pollution of the local ecological environment and the Dongjiang water source" and substitute with "that, apart from continuing to regularly publish the test results of the water drawn at the intake point of the closed aqueduct, the information on the test items relating to the sediments on the river bed will also be made public, so that Hong Kong people will be

further informed of the conditions of the quality of Dongjiang water"; to delete "(b)" and substitute with "(c)"; to delete "(c)" and substitute with "(d)"; to delete "(d)" and substitute with "(e)"; to delete "(e)" and substitute with "(f)"; to delete "and" after "before undertaking such projects;"; to delete "(f)" and substitute with "(g)"; and to add "; and (h) expeditiously implement the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation, published in its Report No. 33B tabled in this Council in April 2000, that the Administration should, "in line with international best practice, actively consider legislating on the standard of quality of treated water in accordance with the WHO Guidelines, so that consumers are given a statutory undertaking as to the quality of treated water" " after "and to conduct studies on alternative water sources"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Mr LAU Kong-wah to Mr Frederick FUNG's motion be passed.

I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(Members raised their hands)

Mr Frederick FUNG rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for three minutes.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please proceed to vote.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop and the results will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Kenneth TING, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr Bernard CHAN, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr LAU Wong-fat, Mr Abraham SHEK, Miss LI Fung-ying, Mr Henry WU, Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr IP Kwok-him voted for the amendment.

Miss Margaret NG and Mr Michael MAK voted against the amendment.

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr SIN Chung-kai and Mr LAW Chi-kwong abstained.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Dr TANG Siu-tong, Mr NG Leung-sing and Mr Ambrose LAU voted for the amendment.

Miss Cyd HO, Miss Emily LAU, Mr Frederick FUNG and Ms Audrey EU voted against the amendment.

Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Dr YEUNG Sum, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr SZETO Wah, Mr Albert CHAN and Mr WONG Sing-chi abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mrs Rita FAN, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 16 were present, 11 were in favour of the amendment, two against in and three abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 19 were present, seven were in favour of the amendment, four against it and seven abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, she therefore declared that the amendment was negated.

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): In accordance with Rule 49(4) of the Rules of Procedure, I move that in the event of further divisions being claimed at this meeting in respect of the motion "Quality of Dongjiang Water", or any amendment thereto, this Council do proceed to such divisions immediately after the division bell has been rung for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mrs Selina CHOW be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, who are present. I declare the motion passed.

In the event of any division being claimed in respect of this motion, the Council shall proceed to such division immediately after the division bell has been rung for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LAW Chi-kwong, you may now speak and move your amendment.

MR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that Mr Frederick FUNG's motion be amended as printed on the Agenda.

Mr LAW Chi-kwong moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To delete "critically assess" after "(a) strengthen co-operation with the Guangdong Authorities in order to" and substitute with "monitor"; to delete "the extent to which the ecological environment and the quality of the water supplied to Hong Kong have been affected by the sharp rise of the pollutant level of the original water supply course and the back-flow of the effluent into Dongjiang caused by" and substitute with "regularly the adverse effects of"; to delete ", and assess the additional resources required to remedy the damage to and the pollution of"; to delete "and the Dongjiang water source" and substitute with ", and to formulate appropriate mitigation measures"; to delete "until" after "water treatment facilities in the Dongjiang basin" and substitute with ", and that the enforcement, planning and management work be enhanced, so that"; to add ", as well as introduce more flexible terms" after "the Guangdong Authorities on waterworks"; and to delete "co-operation" after "rights of each party in policy co-ordination and financial" and substitute with "arrangements"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Mr LAW Chi-kwong to Mr Frederick FUNG's motion be passed.

I now put the question to you as stated. Will Members please proceed to vote. Will those in favour please raise their hands.

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

Mr LAU Kong-wah rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LAU Kong-wah has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please proceed to vote.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop and the result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Kenneth TING, Miss Margaret NG, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr Bernard CHAN, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Mr LAU Wong-fat, Mr LAW Chi-kwong, Mr Abraham SHEK, Miss LI Fung-ying, Mr Henry WU, Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr Michael MAK voted for the amendment.

Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr WONG Yung-kan and Mr IP Kwok-him abstained.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Miss Cyd HO, Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Dr YEUNG Sum, Miss Emily LAU, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr SZETO Wah, Mr Albert CHAN Mr WONG Sing-chi, Mr Frederick FUNG, Ms Audrey EU and Mr NG Leung-sing voted for the amendment.

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Dr TANG Siu-tong and Mr Ambrose LAU abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mrs Rita FAN, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 16 were present, 13 were in favour of the amendment and three abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 19 were present, 12 were in favour of the amendment and six abstained. Since the question was agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, she therefore declared that the amendment was carried.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG, you may now reply and you have up to two minutes 25 seconds.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, only six Members spoke on this motion. Though only a few Members spoke on it, this does not mean that the motion is insignificant; nor does it mean that we do not attach importance to the matter. The reason is that the cup of water that each of us has on the desk today has Dongjiang water in it.

I am pleased that the Secretary for Works has just presented many views, telling us the approaches to be adopted in taking up the matter with the Guangdong authorities. With regard to suggestions (a) to (e) in my original motion, the Secretary for Works openly expressed his endorsement and support.

I hope that he will really do what he said. According to the Secretary for Works, there will be co-operation with the Guangdong authorities in areas such as the training of Shima River, and reduction in the water supply quantity. I hope that he can get all this. We attach particular importance to the training of Shima River. Will the Secretary for Works, after recommending to the Guangdong authorities these five suggestions, report to us regularly on the progress of implementation, so as to set our minds at ease.

Turning now to the proposal on a closed aqueduct. We still hold divergent views. As far as I understand, this will involve many issues. It is hoped that the Secretary for Works can later conduct an environmental impact assessment of this issue and submit the report to the relevant panels of this Council for discussion, so that we can present our views.

Basically, I totally agree with Members and the Secretary for Works. Dongjiang water is not just a concern for Hong Kong. It is also a concern of Guangdong. In order that there can be quality water, there must be mutual co-operation between the two sides. At the same time, human resources and financial resources of the two sides have also to be deployed. While we hope that there can be quality water, we are also concerned about environmental protection. So, we particularly hope that the Secretary for Works will consider options like desalination of sea water and the recycling and reuse of water. The problem concerning Dongjiang water is in fact very complicated. We really have to spend time on it. What the Secretary for Works just said is, in my opinion, new information for Hong Kong people. It is also very encouraging. I just hope that in future we will be able to use water coming naturally from the river without having to conduct too much testing.

Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Frederick FUNG, as amended by Mr LAW Chi-kwong, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, who are present. I declare the motion as amended passed.

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now adjourn the Council until 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 27 June 2001.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Six o'clock.