

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 27 November 2002

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 JAMES TIEN PEI-CHUN, G.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID CHU YU-LIN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CYD HO SAU-LAN

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT HO CHUN-YAN

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

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, G.B.S., J.P.

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

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

THE HONOURABLE NG LEUNG-SING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARGARET NG

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

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TO KUN-SUN

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG MAN-KWONG

THE HONOURABLE HUI CHEUNG-CHING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUEN-HAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE BERNARD CHAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KAM-LAM, J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG YIU-CHUNG

THE HONOURABLE SIN CHUNG-KAI

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

DR THE HONOURABLE PHILIP WONG YU-HONG

THE HONOURABLE WONG YUNG-KAN

THE HONOURABLE JASPER TSANG YOK-SING, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HOWARD YOUNG, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE YEUNG SUM

THE HONOURABLE YEUNG YIU-CHUNG, B.B.S.

THE HONOURABLE LAU CHIN-SHEK, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU KONG-WAH

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

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

THE HONOURABLE AMBROSE LAU HON-CHUEN, G.B.S., 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

DR 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., J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL MAK KWOK-FUNG

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT CHAN WAI-YIP

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

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.

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, J.P.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

THE HONOURABLE LEE CHEUK-YAN

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

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING:

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL SUEN MING-YEUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
THE CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION, AND
SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS

THE HONOURABLE STEPHEN IP SHU-KWAN, G.B.S., J.P.
THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY, AND
SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR

THE HONOURABLE ELSIE LEUNG OI-SIE, G.B.M., J.P.
THE SECRETARY FOR JUSTICE

THE HONOURABLE HENRY TANG YING-YEN, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

PROF THE HONOURABLE ARTHUR LI KWOK-CHEUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER

DR THE HONOURABLE YEOH ENG-KIONG, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR SECURITY

DR THE HONOURABLE SARAH LIAO SAU-TUNG, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MR LAW KAM-SANG, J.P., DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL

MRS JUSTINA LAM CHENG BO-LING, ASSISTANT SECRETARY
GENERAL

MR RAY CHAN YUM-MOU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

TABLING OF PAPERS

The following papers were laid on the table pursuant to Rule 21(2) of the Rules of Procedure:

Subsidiary Legislation/Instruments	<i>L.N. No.</i>
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Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2002 (31 of 2002) (Commencement) Notice 2002	172/2002
Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes (Amendment) (No. 2) Ordinance 2002 (29 of 2002) (Commencement) Notice 2002.....	173/2002
Massage Establishments (Amendment) Ordinance 2001 (28 of 2001) (Commencement) Notice 2002	174/2002
Places of Public Entertainment Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 1) Regulation 2002 (L.N. 120 of 2002) (Commencement) Notice 2002	175/2002

Other Papers

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| No. 26 | — | Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation
Annual Report 2001/2002 |
| No. 27 | — | Hong Kong Productivity Council
Annual Report 2001/2002 |
| No. 28 | — | Police Welfare Fund
Annual Report 2001/2002 |
| No. 29 | — | Estate Agents Authority
Annual Report 2001/2002 |
| No. 30 | — | Secretary for Home Affairs Incorporated Audited
Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2002 |

- No. 31 — Report of the Brewin Trust Fund Committee on the Administration of the Fund for the year ended 30 June 2002
- No. 32 — Occupational Deafness Compensation Board Annual Report 2001-2002
- No. 33 — Annual Report of the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund Board 2001-2002
- No. 34 — Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board Annual Report 2001

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Questions. First question.

Amendment to Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance

1. **MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the number of complaints lodged about contravention of the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (Cap. 390) (the Ordinance) in each of the past three years; among these cases, the number of prosecutions instituted and their outcome; and*
- (b) *whether it will amend the Ordinance to increase the penalty for contravention in order to deter the mass media from selling obscene and indecent articles; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President,

- (a) The complaints received by the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) about contravention of the Ordinance in the past three years was 495 in 2000, 470 in 2001 and 309 in 2002

(from January to October). The number of prosecutions instituted by the TELA (including cases arising from public complaints and routine surveillance of the TELA) was 229 in 2000, 366 in 2001 and 463 in 2002 (from January to October), and 163 cases were convicted in 2000, 388 convicted in 2001 and 406 convicted in 2002 (from January to October), with penalties meted out ranging from a fine of \$500 to \$100,000 and imprisonment ranging from seven days to 12 months.

- (b) In deciding whether the penalty for contravention should be increased to deter the publication of obscene and indecent articles, we will strive to strike a proper balance between protecting public morals and our young people on the one hand and preserving the free flow of information and safeguarding the freedom of expression on the other hand. In fact, we consulted the public sometime earlier on a review of the Ordinance, including a proposal to increase the penalties under the Ordinance so as to enhance the deterrent effect. Over 3 700 submissions were received in the consultation. The views received on the review were diverse. We are now examining the proposals carefully. We will fully consider the views presented by all parties before coming to a prudent decision.

MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, will the Secretary tell us the time required for each of the following procedures, concerning the receipt of complaints, adjudication, review, hearing and the ultimate enforcement of the decision? And have studies been conducted on streamlining the procedures and shortening the lead time?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, according to the existing procedures, upon receipt of a complaint, the Obscene Articles Tribunal (OAT) will adjudicate the case as soon as possible. An interim classification will usually be made after adjudication, and the parties concerned may apply for a review within five days of the interim classification made. The OAT will make the final decision as soon as the review is completed and institution of prosecution will only be considered at this stage. As for the time required, it depends entirely on the complexity of individual cases. If the case is straight forward, it will be

completed very soon. However, if it is a complicated one or if it involves several appeal procedures, the time required will be longer. However, I do not have the figures on the time required for each of the procedures on hand. I am willing to provide such information in writing to Members if they wish. (Appendix I)

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in part (a) of the Secretary's main reply, a comparison between the number of prosecutions instituted by the TELA and the number of convicted cases during the past three years is stated. I notice that the ratio of convicted cases has been on the rise. However, in 2001, the number of convicted cases was more than the number of prosecutions instituted. Why? For example, in 2001, the number of prosecutions instituted was 366, but the number of convictions was 388. Why is there a discrepancy of over 20 cases? Is it just a typographical error or are there other reasons?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the prosecution procedures may last more than a year. For complicated cases or cases against which appeals are lodged by the defendants, the prosecution procedures may extend into the subsequent year, and thus the discrepancy in terms of time.*

MR ANDREW CHENG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, part (b) of the main question asked the Secretary if consideration would be made to amend the Ordinance which empowers adjudicators of the OAT to adjudicate obscene and indecent articles under complain. In respect of amendments to the Ordinance, has the Secretary considered to amend the existing appointment system of OAT adjudicators? Under the existing appointment system, some two hundred persons on the list will take turns to be adjudicators. However, they are not obliged to take up the appointment and may turn it down if they are not available. Therefore, the adjudicators so appointed are often limited to that several dozens available. If an amendment is made to the Ordinance, should the authorities also consider the representativeness of such adjudicators, such as adopting the juror system applicable to civil proceedings, so that all persons aged 18 or older in Hong Kong will have the opportunity to become an adjudicator of the OAT?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, in the first place, the some two hundred persons selected must be willing to accept the appointment of the OAT. Those who are often unavailable will be screened out in the next change of membership. As to whether the OAT should also adopt the juror system applicable to the Courts, we consider there is a difference between the two systems. Many people may in fact not be willing to serve as a juror, but are obliged to do so if selected. They will be exempted only if they can offer a reason acceptable to the Court. On the other hand, adjudicators of the OAT are voluntary in nature, and we have to refresh the membership constantly. Moreover, the membership includes members coming from different strata of society, such as professionals, businessmen and housewives. We thus consider the current system fairly satisfactory. During the review of the Ordinance, the Legislative Council will be consulted. By then, Mr Andrew CHENG and other Members are most welcome to put forward their views and concrete proposals.

MR JASPER TSANG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary mentioned in his main reply that the Government had consulted the public sometime earlier on a review of the Ordinance, and I believe he was referring to the consultation conducted in April 2000. According to the Government, over 3 700 submissions were received. Now it has been more than two years since April 2000, if five submissions were studied each day, it should have read all the submissions long ago. Why is the consultation result still not available? Moreover, the Secretary said that diverse views were received, there seems to be no conclusion yet. May I ask the Secretary when the Government will announce the consultation result?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, Mr Jasper TSANG is right. If five submissions were studied each day, we should have sufficient time to finish them all. However, if we can study only three submissions each day, then we do not have enough time. In fact, there is a great diversity of opinions received. Two particularly controversial points are: first, the setting up of an independent statutory obscene article classification board to subrogate the OAT in respect of its classification function; and second, the setting up of a serial publication order system. Proposals like "printing a red diagonal line" on publications are rather controversial. Not that we do not have time to study the submissions, but that

we need time to think it over and examine how the review should be conducted. We have not yet reach a conclusion to date, but we will certainly consult the relevant panel of the Legislative Council in the future before making a final decision.

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the question I am going to raise is also related to figures. It is stated in part (a) of the main reply that the number of complaints received during January to October 2002 was 309, but the number of prosecutions instituted during the same period this year was 463. There was a significant difference between the two. Just now, the Secretary already said that the figures might vary because the working procedures involved might straddle two years, but will the Secretary give an account of the backlog accumulated? And why does it take so long to initiate prosecution?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, as I have said earlier, this is mainly due to the fact that the processing of some cases may extend into the subsequent year, depending on the complexity of individual cases. I do not have the number of backlog cases accumulated to this day on hand. I will give a written reply to Ms Cyd HO. (Appendix II)

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, given a maximum fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment up to 12 months, it seems that the penalties are rather stringent. However, we all knew that two publications, ignoring the penalties imposed by the Court, continued to publish indecent photographs earlier and that the public demand for the two publications is still keen. The Secretary said that public morals should be balanced. In this connection, how should the authorities educate the public to develop a healthy culture, so that they will decline to read those publications?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, the OAT does adopt certain criteria in classifying an article. Apart from the balance mentioned by me earlier, the criteria adopted also include standards of morality, decency and propriety that are generally accepted by members of the community. We also apply a set of standards to

consider such issues as the overall effect of an article, the audience of the article, the location where the article is publicly displayed, the persons likely to view such matter, and whether the article has an honest purpose or whether it is merely camouflaged to render any part of it acceptable.

We have to protect our young people. In respect of the means to educate our young people to learn to judge certain articles as being obscene or indecent and to decline such articles, I believe we have an education system in place. On the other hand, we do not have a pre-censorship system in place for our mechanism is founded on press freedom and freedom of information. A pre-censorship system will be needed if prior classification is adopted to let parents tell their children that they should decline articles classified as Class II or above. Therefore, as far as the existing situation is concerned, I consider an appropriate balance has been achieved.

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I should not have raised this supplementary question as it is related to education issue. However, since the Secretary referred to the education system just now, my supplementary question is now relevant. As the Secretary agrees that the education system should form the basis of this mechanism then what is the provision for education on media literacy? Has the Government taken the initiative to take forward the relevant work through education, if so, what has been done?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, do you have such information?

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I do not have information on the amount of provision on hand. However, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify that education does not merely refer to school education, it may also be parent education. Ms Cyd HO is also a parent, and she will teach her child which articles are suitable for children and which are not. Therefore, education refers to both education at home and in school. However, as I have just said, we have to strike a balance. Since we do not have a pre-censorship system in place, we cannot classify each publication on release. Thus, we have to rely on parents to assist their children in deciding the readability of a certain publication. Many a

time such publications may not necessary contain obscene or indecent pictures, but the textual content may be so.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms HO, has your supplementary question not been answered?

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I would like the Secretary to clarify if he will provide a written reply on this after the meeting. Moreover, we have mentioned previously that education on media literacy should not be restricted to school education, and it should also include parent education. Therefore, will the Secretary give us a reply on the amount spent on parent education in the provision for media literacy education?*

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Cantonese): Madam President, after the meeting, I will consult the Secretary for Education and Manpower to see if he has such breakdown figures. (Appendix III)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has spent more than 16 minutes on this question. We shall now proceed to the second question.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second question.

Road Maintenance and Resurfacing Works

2. **MR CHAN KAM-LAM** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I notice that the surface of many carriageways become damaged and rugged shortly after maintenance and resurfacing, which may affect traffic safety. In this regard, will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the average life span of the surface of various categories of carriageways;*

- (b) *the average interval between two rounds of maintenance and resurfacing works on busy carriageways; and*
- (c) *the mechanism in place for monitoring the quality of road maintenance and resurfacing works?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President,

- (a) Carriageways in Hong Kong are paved with either bituminous materials or concrete. The life span of the surface of a carriageway mainly depends on the material used and the category of the carriageway. Generally speaking, the design life span of a bituminous road surface is 15 to 20 years and that of a concrete road surface is 30 to 40 years. The Highways Department (HyD) will carry out repair works according to the condition of the road surface in order to ensure road safety and serviceability.
- (b) The wear and tear of the surface of a carriageway will be affected by the traffic flow encountered and the age of the carriageway. The staff of the HyD regularly inspect all public roads to identify the degree of damage and prioritize maintenance works accordingly.

Road maintenance works can be broadly classified into remedial repair works and planned maintenance works. Remedial repair works are carried out to repair damages identified during road inspections. Such works include filling potholes and repairing the damages that may pose an immediate risk to traffic or pedestrians.

Planned maintenance works mainly include road resurfacing and reconstruction. These works are usually of a larger scale and more costly, but will keep the road serviceable for a longer period of time. Take the bituminous road surface as an example. The HyD will decide whether to resurface or reconstruct a road in the light of the wear and tear of its surface and sub-base, its usage and the environmental factors in its neighbourhood. Normally, a busy road paved with bituminous materials needs to be resurfaced every three to five years to ensure road safety and serviceability. A road

paved with concrete normally does not need resurfacing in a period of 30 years. However, if the road sub-base is damaged, reconstruction works on a larger scale will have to be carried out.

- (c) When maintenance works are carried out, the HyD will arrange its staff to oversee all aspects of the works for quality assurance. It will also test and examine the materials used and the workmanship in order to ensure that the specifications are met. Moreover, the HyD will also dispatch independent monitoring teams to conduct random checks on works underway or completed so as to ensure their quality in terms of procedure, materials and workmanship.

MR CHAN KAM-LAM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I note that the Secretary has mentioned the life span of bituminous roads in both parts (a) and (b) of her main reply, but there are contradictions in the two parts. In part (a), the Secretary pointed out, "Generally speaking, the design life span of a bituminous road surface is 15 to 20 years", but in part (b), he pointed out, "Normally, a busy road paved with bituminous materials needs to be resurfaced every three to five years." Therefore, is it the case that using different materials to pave the roads of different traffic flows can ensure the so-called design life span of bituminous roads? If the general life span of the roads is 15 to 20 years, but they have to be resurfaced every three to five years, then I feel that the life span is too short.*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, as the hardness of the bituminous road surface is lower, so when we choose bituminous as the material for paving busy roads, we know that it will be necessary for us to carry out maintenance and repair works more frequently. However, we still choose bituminous for many reasons. When vehicles are running on the roads, bituminous roads will give greater comfort to the drivers, and the time required for their construction is shorter. Besides, we also base our decisions on various safety reasons, for example, the light reflection of bituminous roads is lower, and the noise generated is also lower. I know there are pros and cons in this. But we have balanced various factors before choosing bituminous roads. If bituminous roads are driven over by a lot of heavy vehicles, the degree of damage will be higher. When we say

the roads have to be resurfaced every three to five years, we mean to re-paving the road surface, rather than reconstructing the entire road. We know bituminous roads will have such an effect, but they do have advantages.

MR IP KWOK-HIM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary mentioned in part (b) of her main reply that road maintenance works can be classified into remedial repair works and planned maintenance works. Remedial repair works are carried out to repair damages identified during road inspections. May I ask generally how long it will take to remedy the problem after it has been identified in road inspections? Does this category include problems raised in complaints lodged by members of the public?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, for remedial repair works, apart from places warrant repairs in the opinion of our inspection teams after inspection, we would also dispatch staff to inspect the road conditions on receipt of complaints from members of the public. There are often some potholes on certain roads after heavy downpours, and if such potholes pose dangers to the public, we will carry out the remedial works as soon as possible. In urgent cases, where immediate dangers are posed to the public, we can complete the urgent maintenance works within 48 hours. However, if the works involve resurfacing the entire road, then it depends on the size of the road and the area involved, as well as the materials to be used. If concrete is chosen, it will take longer, because concrete takes a longer time to "cure", that is, to finish the resurfacing process.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr IP, has your supplementary question not been answered?

MR IP KWOK-HIM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered my supplementary question. What I was asking the average time required for the works generally. Can the Secretary give me a more accurate time, such as three days or one week?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, it really depends on the area and the type of road surface involved. I think I really cannot say in specific terms how many days or weeks are required.

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said in part (c) of her main reply that the HyD would arrange its staff to oversee the works. We notice that the problems do not emerge in three or six months' time. We find the surface of the road rugged on the day the resurfacing works of the road are completed. The cause is the joining point between the newly re-paved section and the old section of the road was absolutely uneven. In this connection, may I ask the Government if it has noted this problem? If it is a road for slow traffic, then it may not be a problem even if there is a half-an-inch gap at the joint. However, if it is an expressway, such a gap will make vehicles fly up in the air.*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I know Mr IP Kwok-him has also mentioned this point, that is, the carriageways are rugged soon after the resurfacing works are completed, and it appears that there are some damages. In fact, such problems will be found in remedial repair works. In other words, in consideration of public safety, we have to proceed with repair works immediately, for example, filling up potholes or carrying out temporary road surface repair works by using quick-drying concrete. Such measures serve some short-term functions, that is, enabling the roads to be re-opened as soon as possible. But it does not have any long-term effects, that is, they cannot be used to repair some damages that would constitute dangers. Therefore, the effect of remedial repair works may not be so good, but I can assert that such works will not cause any safety problems. This is because remedial repair works is carried out precisely to solve the problems of public safety. The roads, which have been repaired in a temporary manner, will have to undergo full-scale repair works in the next stage. Formal major road works will only be conducted after road arrangements have been made, that is, we would first finalize a design plan and co-ordinate with public utility companies on details of the resurfacing works and re-routing arrangements and then we shall make temporary traffic arrangements. The public may have a misconception that newly repaired roads are already so rugged. But in fact, that is just a temporary measure.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Government once told us that some of the carriageways are constructed with a special material which can reduce noise. That is, after the roads are paved with this material, the noise produced by vehicles running over it will be reduced greatly. However, as the durability of this material is not very good, so repair works have to be carried out more frequently. May I ask the Secretary what the repair arrangements for roads paved with this type of material are? What are the inspection arrangements? How are these arrangements made to ensure that these roads would not be made rugged by damages?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the special material mentioned by Ms LAU is called open-textured road surface, that is, a layer of high porosity material paved on the roads. For this reason, the material is not compact. Once driven over by vehicles, the degree of damage suffered will be higher than that suffered by ordinary roads. However, as it can reduce noise by three to four decibels, we would still use it. As for monitoring, the HyD will also conduct regular tests to ensure that the damages of such road surfaces are under control. Unfortunately, repair works have to be carried out more frequently on roads using this material.*

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, concrete road surface takes a longer time to repair, the noise generated is louder and it would also have greater wear-and-tear effect on tyres, while bituminous roads can be repaired during the night-time and re-opened in the following morning, why does the Government not consider using bituminous to pave new roads and converting existing concrete roads into bituminous ones when the right opportunities emerge? As for precast elevated vehicular roads, is it possible to use bituminous instead of concrete to connect the uneven joints of different sections, so that future repair works can be carried out in an easier manner?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): *Madam President, as concrete roads are more durable, so they offer advantages in different aspects, and the repair works required in a full cycle can be reduced. Besides, for heavy vehicles, the degree of safety of concrete*

roads is higher because its resistance is greater when the brake is applied. Therefore, if certain roads are used by a greater number of heavy vehicles, we will opt for concrete roads. As for the supplementary question raised by Dr Raymond HO, does he mean to say: If we use bituminous in place of concrete in the part joining up two concrete sections, then we do not have to break up the whole road when repair works are carried out? I am sorry, I have not caught his supplementary question clearly.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, please sit down first. Dr HO, please elucidate.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, may I explain a little further? My supplementary question may have been too concise. Sometimes, there may be uneven levels on two sections of an elevated bridge. So very often the joints have to be repaired, and this would cause obstruction to the traffic flow. Can we use bituminous at the joints, that is, removing part of the concrete? Some overseas countries have done this. Can Hong Kong follow this practice?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam President, what Dr Raymond HO means is whether we can adopt this method for the joints. We do not use this method at the moment. But I would convey this opinion to my colleagues in the HyD. (Appendix IV)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has spent more than 15 minutes on this question. This is the last supplementary question.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the thrust of Mr CHAN Kam-lam's main question is: Roads start to have problems soon after resurfacing. I heard the Secretary say that it could be a temporary, short-term problem and that it was just a misconception. It may not be the case with some roads, but there are really roads which have rugged surfaces, possibly only two*

or three months after a full-scale resurfacing. In view of this, has the Government really studied the issue carefully? Are there problems with the workmanship of certain companies? If so, what is the warranty period offered by these companies in order that the government resources will not be wasted?

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I think maybe sometimes there are really some quality problems with the works. Their workmanship should not make the roads rugged. There is a one-year warranty period for all road works. During this period, we can require them to carry out the works all over again. But we certainly do not wish to see this happen, because it will cause inconvenience to the public.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third question.

Impact of New Housing Policy on Employment Market of Construction Industry

3. **DR TANG SIU-TONG** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, regarding the measures taken by the Government to implement its housing policy, including recommending to the Housing Authority that the production of Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats should cease indefinitely from 2003 onwards, halting all scheduled land auctions, suspending the Application List system until the end of 2003, co-ordinating the pace of property developments by the two railway companies, and so on, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the numbers of jobs in the construction and related industries arising from the production of public rental housing, HOS housing and private domestic housing respectively, in each of the past three years;*
- (b) *whether it has assessed the number of jobs in the construction and related industries that will be reduced as a result of the*

implementation of the above measures; if so, of a breakdown of the jobs that will be reduced by industries and types of work; if not, whether it plans to make such an assessment; and

- (c) *of the ways to alleviate the impact of the above measures on the employment market in the construction and related industries?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese):

Madam President, my reply to Dr TANG's question is as follows:

- (a) According to the Census and Statistics Department, an annual average of about 46 000 workers were employed in the construction of public and private residential flats during the past three years. A breakdown by year is shown at the Annex. Because of the wide coverage of construction-related industries, the number of relevant jobs in these industries cannot be identified. Therefore, relevant statistics are not available.
- (b) In deciding to cease the HOS, stop scheduled land auctions, suspend the Application List and better co-ordinate the property developments of the two railway corporations, we have carefully considered all the implications, including possible impact on construction employment. Since ongoing construction projects will not be affected by the new measures, there will be no immediate reduction in job opportunities for construction workers. In the future, housing production will be market-oriented. Apart from the provision of public rental housing for low-income families, residential flats will be provided by the private sector, with the overall supply of flats to be determined by developers having regard to market demand. The shortfall arising from the reduced production of public housing flats will be made up by the private sector.
- (c) As mentioned in part (b) of my reply, generally speaking the new housing policy will have no significant adverse impact on the employment opportunities of construction and related industries.

Annex

Number of workers employed in the construction of residential buildings

	<i>Public residential building sites¹</i>	<i>Private residential building sites²</i>	<i>Total</i>
1999	22 187	23 429	45 616
2000	23 020	26 280	49 300
2001	12 738	31 652	44 390
		Average	46 435

- 1 Public residential building sites include the Housing Authority's public rental housing and HOS sites, with a few residential sites (for example, departmental quarters) undertaken by other government departments, such as the Architectural Services Department.
- 2 Private residential building sites include private residential or commercial/residential composite building sites approved by the Buildings Department.

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary mentioned in part (c) of the main reply that the housing policy would not have any adverse impact on the construction and related industries. However, the Government's adoption of such measures as ceasing land auctions, suspending the Application List and co-ordinating the property developments of the two railway corporations will certainly impede the development of the construction industry; moreover, the number of private sector construction projects will also be reduced due to poor sales and obviously, this will have a very great impact on the construction industry. Why did the Government say that it would not have adverse impact? What statistics have the Government got in support of this argument?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, this question is mainly on how much impact would be brought about by such measures. Our main argument is the current measures of the Government are targeted mainly at the enormous supply of private housing in the coming year. Since all these housing units are under construction, the Government has adopted corresponding measures in respect of land auctions, suspension of the Application List and other areas. These are all our current

measures. The overall demand for housing in future would not be affected by such measures for it would be determined by the market. As I pointed out earlier in part (b) of the main reply, in future all housing developments would be divided into two parts, namely the private sector and the public sector. As regards public housing, I have clearly indicated that the authorities will continue to build public rental housing units for low-income families while other residential housing units will be provided by private developers. As regards the overall demand, we are of the view that since the demand is determined by the market, the government measures will not lead to any increase or decrease in demand. If it is a natural decrease, then whether or not these measures are in place, the effect will be the same. Therefore, we do not think that the demand will decrease as a result of our measures and that is why I have provided such a reply.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr TANG, has your supplementary question not been answered?

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, my question was on the employment situation of workers, but the Secretary has given me a reply on housing demands. I think they are not related.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, please let me explain the relation between the two again. If everyone accepts that housing demand is determined in this way, then the employment opportunities brought about by the demand is actually the same. If we accept that the two are not related and there will be no impact, then such measures will not have any impact on the employment opportunities.

MR WONG YUNG-KAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary mentioned in part (b) of the main reply that even if the number of existing construction works were reduced, there would not be any immediate impact on*

job opportunities. As such, did the Secretary imply that though there would not be any impact in the short run, it would still have impact on the job opportunities in the long run? Can the Secretary tell us what plans the Government has to ensure that there will not be any impact on construction workers in the long run?

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, I said there would not be any impact in the short run, but in the long run, it has to depend on the overall supply in housing. As I mentioned earlier, if the overall housing supply is only of a certain level, and this is a fact, then there would not be any changes despite our measures. Therefore, we estimate that such measures would not have any impact on the job opportunities.

DR DAVID CHU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, may I ask the Secretary whether it is necessary to review the training places for the construction industry? Certainly, as evident in the main reply by the Secretary, he may think that there is no need to do so. If the Secretary thinks that it is not necessary to do so because there are no changes in demand, then may I ask the Secretary how the Government could be so brilliant as to setting such an accurate number of training places for construction workers on the basis of the housing construction volume in the past? (Laughter)*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr CHU, this question is on whether the job opportunities in the construction industry will be reduced, but your supplementary is on training. Can you rephrase your supplementary question so that it is related to the Secretary's reply or the main answer?

DR DAVID CHU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, this is because the training places will have an impact on the supply of construction workers. The higher the number of training places, the greater will be the supply of construction workers. If there are changes in the demand for construction workers in the future, then the training places should also be adjusted accordingly, therefore, I have asked the Secretary this question.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fine, please be seated. Dr CHU, the logic of other people is in one direction while the logic of your supplementary question is in the opposite direction. Since I cannot follow your logic, Dr CHU, I am sorry you cannot ask this supplementary question.

MS LI FUNG-YING (in Cantonese): *Madam President, this housing policy will, in a large measure, result in an indefinite suspension of the sale of HOS flats. Though the Secretary stressed in part (b) of the main reply that any shortfall arising from the reduced production of public housing flats would be made up for by the private sector, we are all well aware that there is a great gap between the prices of public and private housing, and this would be tantamount to increasing the burden of the public. If members of the public cannot afford such prices, then naturally the market will be affected. Therefore, the suspension of the sale of HOS flats will certainly impact on the job opportunities of workers in the construction and decoration industries. How could the Secretary assert that those measures would not have any impact on the job opportunities of workers in the construction and related industries? Is this due to the fact that the Government has not conducted an in-depth study or that the reply of the Secretary is rather arbitrary? Can the Secretary provide us with some statistics to support his statement?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, if Members had studied the nine government measures carefully, they would realize that we have actually provided an answer to Ms LI's question. Firstly, we have clearly pointed out that there is great overlap between the HOS and private residential market, particularly in respect of the types, sizes and prices of HOS flats. In the past, the size of the flats built by private developers was much bigger than that of public housing, but we now discover that the sizes of private flats are much smaller. Secondly, as regards prices, we can see that private housing priced between \$1 million to \$2 million is also in supply and this has overlapped with the prices of HOS flats. Thirdly, in respect of locations, in the past, only HOS flats were available in many districts where there were no private flats, but now HOS and private housing developments are often located side by side. Such overlap in the markets will bring about enormous impact for such products are already provided by the private housing market.

Furthermore, Members may be aware that though the Government has indicated that it will cease the construction and sale of HOS flats, it will still continue to offer home assistance loans to members of the public. If members of the public want to purchase their own flats, even if they cannot purchase HOS flats in future, they can still apply for home assistance loans. If they have such needs, the Government will help those members of the public to purchase the flats they want in the private residential market. Therefore, we have already catered for the needs of both parties. So precisely for this reason, we feel that the volume of housing construction in future should be determined by the needs of the public. However, cases where some people wish to purchase their own flats but do not have the opportunity to do so or because the Government has not offered them assistance will not occur. Therefore, we think that we have already taken such factors into account.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered part (b) of Dr TANG Siu-tong's question. That part of the question was: If so, of a breakdown of the jobs that will be reduced by industries and types of work; if not, whether it plans to make such an assessment. Obviously, the Secretary has not provided a direct reply to the questions of several colleagues. For example, the Secretary said the supply of private residential flats would be increased as a result of the cessation of the construction of HOS flats. However, many people have indicated that they would not purchase private residential flats because they could only afford the HOS flats and not private residential flats because of the prices. If the public could not purchase HOS flats, has the Government ever assessed its impact on the housing market? If fewer people purchase HOS flats, the number of jobs will be reduced. Therefore, I think that the Government has not given a direct reply to part (b) of Dr TANG Siu-tong's main question, that is, if there is impact, what will happen; if not, what will happen. Does the Government only care about the property market, but not the job opportunities of workers?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, I think that it is really somewhat arbitrary to say whether the market will and will not react in a certain way. As I said earlier, the Government has analysed and explained why we think that the demand will not decrease on the basis of the objective factors and the measures introduced by us.

If the demand does not decrease, then the volume of housing construction will also not decrease; if the volume of housing construction does not decrease, then the job opportunities for workers will similarly not decrease.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Miss CHAN, has your supplementary question not been answered?

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *The Secretary has not answered my supplementary question. He has only assumed that job opportunities would not decrease, but I said they would be reduced. How would the Secretary assess my views?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Miss CHAN, please be seated. Miss CHAN, I would not ask the Secretary to answer the question again because I think that this is a matter of difference in opinion. You have not asked the Secretary for information on facts; and during question time, Members can only ask the Secretary to provide information on facts.

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, on part (c) of the main question, may I ask the Government if it has considered adopting any specific measures to speed up infrastructure projects, so as to alleviate the impact of the relevant measures on the employment market in the construction and related industries?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LAU, your supplementary question is about expediting infrastructure projects. In what way is it related to the main question? Please elucidate.

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it is closely related to the main question because I have referred to part (c) of the main question. Would the President please refer to part (c) of the main question, that is, "of the ways to alleviate the impact of the above measures on the employment market in*

the construction and related industries"? Though the Secretary has indicated in the main reply that there would not be any impact — of course, I am not going to debate this — I would like to ask the Government that even if it thought that there would not be any impact, would it consider speeding up the infrastructure projects if there were any impact, so as to alleviate the impact of those measures. I have cited the wordings of part (c) of the main question and that is, "of the ways to alleviate the impact of the above measures on the employment market in the construction and related industries".

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): You said it is related to part (c), may I ask part (c) of which part?

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it is part (c) of the main question.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): In this connection, the Secretary has already said that there would not be any impact.

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): *The Secretary said there would not be any impact and I do not wish to debate on this point. I only wish to ask the Government, even if the Secretary said that there would not be any impact, has he ever considered that should there be impact, would consideration be given to speeding up infrastructure projects? The problem might thus be solved. Of course, the Government may choose whether or not to answer the question, but Madam President, the Secretary might have considered this question. As such, my supplementary question was based on part (c) of the main question.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fine, Mr LAU, please be seated. I would like to explain to Members here that the Government has the right to decide how to answer a question. As the President, I am obliged to ensure that Members' questions do not deviate from the subject of the question. If Members' supplementary questions are basically out of the scope, then I am obliged to bring them back to the scope of the question asked. This is my responsibility.

Therefore, Mr LAU, I am sorry that I would not direct the Secretary to answer your supplementary question.

MR LAU PING-CHEUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I am going to ask a pertinent supplementary question. I believe many people will support the "nine measures" approach of Mr SUEN, but "Mr SUEN's nine measures" will certainly have some impact on the employment situation in the construction industry in the short run. We fully appreciate this point and people in the trade to which I belong also understand that there will be some short-term impact. The Chief Executive has recently paid his regards to me on one occasion and enquired after the situation of my trade. For example, which projects for which contracts have been signed are involved in the current cessation of HOS flats construction; and as the Government has already signed contracts with these companies, including professional companies like architecture firms, and as such projects have now been suddenly terminated, will those companies be compensated accordingly? Dr TANG Siu-Tong asked the Secretary for specific statistics, but the Secretary did not provide us with the relevant information. I would now like to cite an example and that is, the recent design competition for a HOS estate in Shui Chuen O, Sha Tin, in which the prize for the competition was presented by the Chief Executive. Now that it was decided that the construction of HOS flats should be ceased, I am not sure whether or not the Government would make any arrangement compensations.*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Cantonese): Madam President, I understand that no contract has been awarded for the construction of that project. As Mr LAU Ping-cheung has said, that was only a design contract. Though the design for that project has already been completed, the construction works has not yet commenced. Generally speaking, if a contract has already been signed and the construction works is underway, the contract would definitely not be terminated. As such, we explained back then that some HOS flats had been completed or were under construction in the government stock. For items which contracts have been signed, we would certainly enforce the contracts. What we are talking about at the moment are projects for which contracts have not been signed or which would be cancelled if they have been scheduled for open tender. However, the situation where

projects for which contracts have been signed and are under construction being cancelled will not occur. Therefore, the issue of compensation would not arise.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has already spent 17 minutes on this question. Obviously, many Members would like to ask supplementary questions and there are still six Members waiting for their turns. I trust Members can follow up through other channels because there are actually many restrictions during Question Time and it is not possible to let Members ask the questions they have in mind freely.

Fourth question.

Staging of Petitions Outside Main Wing and East Wings of Central Government Offices

4. **MR MARTIN LEE** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, regarding the staging of petitions outside the Main Wing and East Wing of Central Government Offices (CGO), will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the number of petitions staged at the above location each year since 1995;*
- (b) *the criteria for vetting and approving applications for staging petitions at that location; and*
- (c) *the stipulations on the detailed arrangements for staging petitions at that location?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, my reply to Mr Martin LEE's question is as follows:

- (a) Since January 1995, the number of petitions staged inside the area of CGO is enumerated in the papers circularized to Honourable Members which I am not going to repeat.

<i>Year</i>	<i>No of petitions</i>
1995	198
1996	105
1997	95
1998	263
1999	294
2000	249
2001	298
2002 (up to end October)	183

- (b) The CGO are the office premises of the Government Secretariat. It is incumbent upon us to ensure the effective operation of the Government Secretariat and to maintain services to the public. At the same time, we understand and accept the right of the public to openly express their opinions at the CGO. Therefore, we need to strike a balance between the two.

Since January 2002, we have designated an open space at the CGO West Gate near Battery Path as a public activity area. Any individuals or groups may carry out peaceful and lawful petitions at that area.

Requests to organize petitions outside the main entrance of the Government Secretariat on working days are generally not allowed. Nevertheless, we have put in place special arrangements to facilitate direct expression of opinions to Members of the Executive Council during the Council's meetings on Tuesday mornings. Representatives of interested groups are arranged to voice their opinions or hand in petition letters to Executive Council Members at the designated area outside the main entrance of the Government Secretariat.

When considering requests to hold petitions inside the CGO area during Sundays or public holidays, we take into account the nature and objective of the activity, the sentiments and number of participants, the proposed time and location and similar activities in the vicinity.

- (c) The organization concerned should apply to the Director of Administration for permission to use the CGO area for holding petitions during Sundays or public holidays two clear working days in advance of the activity. If the application is approved, the applicant organization and participants must comply with the conditions stipulated by the Director of Administration, and organize the event according to the specified date, time and location.

If the public meeting involves more than 50 persons, or the public procession involves more than 30 persons, in addition to securing permission from the Director of Administration to use the CGO area, the applicant organization will of course need to notify the Commissioner of Police seven days in advance of the activity, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Order Ordinance (Cap. 245).

MR MARTIN LEE (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in fact, staging petitions outside the CGO or the Legislative Council Building has become the usual practice among the people of Hong Kong in the past few decades. Moreover, regardless of the colonial era or the time after the reunification, no restrictions have been imposed so far. Why should the Government impose so many restrictions now? Is it a result of the administrative blunders of the Chief Executive and the continual decline of his popularity that he has no confidence in facing the public at all?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, I think I have made it very clear in the main reply that we "accept the right of the public to openly express their opinions at the CGO". However, it is also "incumbent upon us to ensure the effective operation of the Government Secretariat and to maintain services to the public". The organization concerned should apply to the relevant authorities prior permission to hold activities such as public meetings or public processions inside the CGO. The objective is crystal clear, that is, to ensure the safe and sound operation of the Government Secretariat. Generally speaking, in view of the number of participants in public meetings, organizers may not necessarily be able to master or control the sentiments of individual participants. Incidents in the past showed that public meetings staged on working days in the CGO would affect the safety and operation of the Government Secretariat if the sentiments of individuals were

agitated or violent actions were taken. For this reason, the current arrangements are made after careful consideration of all the related factors, and they may ensure the effective operation of the Government Secretariat on working days on the one hand, and cater to the need of the public to express their opinions freely on the other.

MR MARTIN LEE (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Chief Secretary has not answered my supplementary. I asked if it had been a result of the administrative blunders of the Chief Executive and the continual decline of his popularity that he had no confidence in facing the public? The Chief Secretary may give a "yes" or "no" answer, or explain that the popularity of the Chief Executive has not declined, or even they have immense confidence. However, the Chief Secretary has not answered my supplementary at all.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Chief Secretary, do you have anything to add?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, it would be really simple for me to give Mr Martin LEE an answer of "yes" or "no". However, I consider that the argument of Mr LEE has no justification at all.

MR ALBERT HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, on 21 May this year, I made an appeal to the Appeal Board on Public Meetings and Processions (the Appeal Board) on behalf of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (the Alliance) that the police had rejected an application for a 4 June commemorative meeting to be held by the Alliance in the open area before the Government Secretariat. A representative of the Administration Wing indicated in the hearing that being the administration authority of the Government Secretariat, the Administration Wing did not have any comment on public meetings held before the Government Secretariat, and the final decision would be left to the police. Eventually, the appeal was allowed. However, the Administration Wing subsequently changed its mind suddenly and objected to all applications on behalf of the police by virtue of its administration authority. In view of the fact that the applicant is entitled to making an appeal*

to a non-official Appeal Board, may I ask the Secretary whether the authorities are trying to circumvent the Public Order Ordinance provision for redress to the appeal mechanism by going back on their words, with a view to depriving the applicant of the right to stage a public meeting?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, the case is actually not as Mr Albert HO has just said. Regarding the case cited by Mr Albert HO, there were initially some arguments on the question of whether the site of the Government Secretariat was a public place and whether the land right should go to the Administration Wing. Therefore, as far as the land right is concerned, there were some ambiguities from the legal point of view since the land right was not yet granted to the Director of Administration. Subsequently, with the benefit of legal advice, we requested the Lands Department to formally grant the Director of Administration the land right of the CGO. Afterwards, there was another application of a similar nature. On 3 August, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) applied to the Government for the staging of a public demonstration and procession, but the application was rejected. The DAB subsequently similarly appealed to the Appeal Board. During the relevant hearing, a representative of the Administration Wing explained that since the DAB applied to hold a public meeting during office hours at the Government Secretariat, the normal operation of the Government Secretariat would be affected. The representative of the Administration Wing also explained that since the Administration Wing possessed the legal estate of the Government Secretariat, therefore it might exercise its decision-making power in scrutinizing applications for holding public meetings or processions at the Government Secretariat. After deliberations, the Appeal Board unanimously ruled that the application for staging the public meeting in question had not been dealt with unreasonably, and the appellant had not been treated unfairly or unjustly. Furthermore, the Appeal Board also agreed that the Administration Wing possessed the legal estate of the Government Secretariat and might exercise its decision-making power in examining all applications for holding public demonstrations at the Government Secretariat.

MS EMILY LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary..... I am sorry, I should call him the Chief Secretary. The Chief Secretary has provided*

the number of petitions held inside the CGO area in the past few years in tabulated form in his main reply. Although he did not read the numbers out, we could still see that the number of petitions has doubled since the sovereignty transfer and the growth rate has been very great. Even though the Chief Secretary said it was not a result of administrative blunders, may I still ask the Chief Secretary if the Government had conducted an internal study on the issue of why the people of Hong Kong have been so frustrated and the number of public demonstrations has increased since the transfer of sovereignty?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, the number of public demonstrations and petitions might vary from one year to the next, but the overall level was more or less the same. As to the table in the main reply, only the numbers of petitions staged in the CGO area were listed. I believe we should look at the figures holistically and compare them with the numbers of petitions held elsewhere in the territory. According to the result of the comparison, we considered that there was nothing unusual at all.

MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the reason for the Government to prohibit the staging of petitions in the area outside the CGO was "to ensure the effective operation of the Government Secretariat and to maintain services to the public". Will the Government inform this Council how public petitions staged at the area outside the Government Secretariat will affect the effective operation of government officials working inside the Government Secretariat and services to the public? The two things should be totally irrelevant. Is it because senior government officials are disgusted by the sight of petitions beyond their windows, thus affecting their mood and efficiency, so the petitioners should be driven away to the West Gate so that the officials may improve their efficiency as the petitioners are out of their sight, out of their minds?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, the answer is no. We have to determine the extent of disturbance that may be caused the petition. We can see in several cases that petitioners had caused substantial disturbance inside the Government Secretariat area, which

included the demonstrations on the right of abode case, and I think Honourable Members should have a deep impression about that. It is evident that once the situation runs out of hand, it will not only cause disturbance to the operation of the Government Secretariat but also pose a major threat to the security of the Government Secretariat. Therefore, we should not treat the matter lightly. Moreover, we have to look at the purpose of the public demonstrations and processions. I consider there are two purposes. Firstly, petitioners may wish the Government to take notice of their cases, therefore they have to express their opinions. Insofar as the purpose is concerned, it would be served no matter the petition is held at the West Gate or the Main Wing of the Government Secretariat. Another purpose is to express opinions to the public through the mass media. In this respect, we consider that the arrangements now or in the past can achieve the same effect. Of course, from our past experience, we should not treat certain matters lightly, so we feel that we are obliged to put a measure in place in order to strike the right balance. We consider that the measure presently adopted by us can make the best of both worlds, as both the right of holding public meetings and our responsibilities are taken care of.

MR JAMES TO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, is the Chief Secretary aware of the fact that the Appeal Board raised a third viewpoint regarding the case cited by Mr Albert HO, which was different from the two points mentioned by the Chief Secretary just now? The Appeal Board considered that the staging of petitions outside the Government Secretariat carried a symbolic meaning, because the place was the entrance of the organ and corridors of power. While respect should be paid to the right of peaceful petitions and so far no problems have occurred in decades past, may I ask the Government why it should state that applications to stage petitions on working days would generally be rejected just because of several cases? Is it because the Government has finally found a technical reason to grant the land right to a certain authority, so that the right to stage peaceful petitions could be placed at the other end of the scale and kept at a distance from the symbolic meaning, that is, the right to stage peaceful petitions at a place of symbolic meaning?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, talking about symbolic meaning, I believe nothing will carry more

symbolic meaning than the direct presentation and submission of petition letters personally to officials who come from the organ of supreme power within the Government during the Executive Council's meetings on every Tuesday morning. I have explained in my main reply that we have to strike a balance between the two. Of course, we are not opposing the important principle Mr James TO has just mentioned. Therefore, we can manifest this important principle once every week. Besides, on every Sunday, provided that we consider it is safe and controllable, the staging of more demonstrations and petitions would be allowed in the middle of the Government Secretariat compound. In recent months, a number of demonstrations with huge public participation have taken place there. Therefore I do not consider that we have overlooked anything in that respect.

MR JAMES TO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the symbolic meaning mentioned by the Appeal Board was referred to the symbolic meaning of the locality of the Government Secretariat, however, the Executive Council was not mentioned. Does the entire Executive Council represent the entire Government? Is it the opinion of the Government?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Chief Secretary, do you have anything to add?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, the West Wing is also part of the Government Secretariat, I do not understand why Honourable Members consider that it is not within the boundaries of the Government Secretariat and carries no symbolic meaning.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has spent more than 17 minutes on this question. This is the last supplementary question.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, according to the explanation of the Government, the area was a place of government operation on weekdays, therefore petitioners may affect the work of government officials. However, why should meticulous regulations, just as those cited in part (c) of the main reply, be imposed on applicant organizations on Sundays? Why does the*

Government only permit petitions by certain organizations? I consider that it is unfair to those applicant organizations whose applications were rejected, since they would not understand why the Government only permits the staging of petitions by certain organizations and rejects theirs. Given the same status, why were organizations from the film industry allowed to stage a public meeting outside the Government Secretariat, and why were women's organizations were rejected? Why were children's organizations allowed to stage petitions there, but labour unions were rejected? May I ask the Government why there are so many stringent regulations in spite of the fact that Sundays are not working days?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have not said no in my reply. Our main consideration is that when more than three organizations are going to stage petitions in the Government Secretariat, then co-ordination should be made in terms of manpower deployment, traffic control, and so on. The most important point is to let different organizations arrive at the Government Secretariat at different times. These are the arrangements I meant, so that petitioners may demonstrate in an orderly manner. There is no question of allowing a certain type of organizations to stage petitions at the Government Secretariat. Certainly, if an applicant organization insists on certain conditions which are unacceptable to us, we would of course not approve the application.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Miss CHAN, has your supplementary question not been answered?

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, yes. The Chief Secretary has not indicated in the last section of part (b) and part (c) of the main reply that all applicant organizations would be entertained. Instead, he said that the Government would "take into account the nature and objective of the activity, the sentiments and number of participants, the proposed time and location and similar activities in the vicinity". We could therefore see that there are differences. My supplementary question was why the Government had not afforded the organizations equal treatment.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Chief Secretary, do you have anything to add?

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have nothing to add. All of these are factors we would consider. In every application, we would take the same factors into consideration.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fifth question.

Gas Leakage Incidents in Residential Units

5. **MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, regarding gas leakage incidents in residential units, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *how, according to the Code of Practice issued by the Fire Services Department (FSD), fire officers should handle incidents of suspected gas leakage in residential units;*
- (b) *whether it is provided in the Code that, in handling incidents of serious gas leakage in residential units, fire officers should advise residents of the neighbouring units to stay indoors or evacuate from the scene as quickly as possible, and should advise residents to avoid acts that may cause an explosion; and*
- (c) *whether it will step up publicity to educate the public about matters that they should pay attention to in case of suspected gas leakage in neighbouring residential units?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President,

- (a) All fire officers have received professional training in handling incidents involving suspected gas leakage in residential units. The FSD has also drawn up appropriate operational guidelines on how to deal with such incidents.

The relevant operational guidelines set out clearly the importance of avoiding sparks in handling incidents of leakage of inflammable gas.

For instance, fire officers must not carry with them any electronic equipment that might cause an explosion. Should there be a need to break into the affected unit in order to stop the leakage, fire officers must take all necessary precautionary measures to ensure that the use of tools in the breaking-in process will not produce sparks. In addition, fire hoses must be deployed at suitable positions for emergency use. If there is a risk of producing sparks in the breaking-in process, fire officers should apply water to prevent this from happening.

To ensure the safety of the public, fire officers will consider whether there is a need to evacuate the residents nearby and cordon off the area, taking into account the actual circumstances at the scene. Considerations include whether the leaking gas is toxic, whether the leakage has been kept under control, whether the residents are sheltered in areas protected by fire resisting walls, and whether evacuation will expose the residents to greater danger. For instance, considerations should be given to the possibilities that the evacuation might produce sparks which could in turn cause an explosion, and that the residents being evacuated, without protection of fire resisting walls, might be injured by the flames and blast waves resulting from an explosion.

The number of fire officers entering the affected unit must be kept to the minimum. They must put on protective clothing and be equipped with breathing apparatuses to carry out the rescue operation. After entering the affected unit, fire officers will immediately take care of the injured, if any, and stop the gas leakage as well as ventilate the premises as quickly as possible.

After that, fire officers will use instruments to detect the level of inflammable gas left in the air of the affected unit. If the level is within the safety standards, the fire officers will hand over the scene to the police or gas suppliers for follow-up.

- (b) It is already provided in the relevant operational guidelines that fire officers, in handling this kind of incidents, must consider whether they should evacuate the residents nearby. The officer-in-charge at the scene should, based on his professional knowledge and taking

into account the circumstances at the time, make a risk assessment in order to decide whether he should evacuate the residents or advise them to stay indoors. As the circumstances and human factors vary from case to case, it is not appropriate to stipulate hard and fast rules.

Fire officers, through their regular training, clearly know how to avoid producing sparks in operations. They will render appropriate advice to the residents at the scene and stop them from doing anything that might cause an explosion.

- (c) The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) and gas suppliers have prepared publicity leaflets to advise the public to avoid doing anything that might produce sparks in case of gas leakage. In addition, Announcements of Public Interest are broadcast on television to educate the public. The FSD will work with the EMSD proactively to step up the publicity on this front.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said in the third paragraph of part (a) of the main reply that to ensure the safety of the public, fire officers will consider whether there is a need to evacuate the residents nearby and cordon off the area, taking into account the actual circumstances at the scene. What guidelines, procedures or measures are there for fire officers to follow to ensure the safety of residents when advising them to remain at home and not to leave? In this connection, will the Secretary tell us what measures will be taken to protect the personal safety of residents when rescue personnel consider it necessary for the residents to remain at home?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, the FSD does not have any hard and fast rules on the order of the relevant procedures in handling gas leakage incidents, rather, it must be decided by the officer-in-charge at the scene according to the information available to him. For example, should a gas leakage incident occur, the fire officers will have obtained some preliminary information before entering the unit in question, that is, on receiving the report, they will know the nature of the leaking gas (for example, if it has any smell or seems to be toxic), and the surroundings of the scene (such as whether

the corridors are narrow), and so on. I believe fire officers fully understand that, if there is a possibility of an explosion being caused by inflammable gas, using an electrical saw or an axe to break open the door, or opening and shutting iron gates or turning on or off electrical appliances by residents is extremely dangerous for sparks may be produced.

In addition, fire officers have to consider the surroundings of the scene, for example, whether the corridors are very narrow, since if an evacuation is announced, a lot of people may jostle to get out. Another important factor is that if fire officers know that an explosion may occur and there is no fire-resisting wall providing cover, greater harm will be caused if fire officers do not handle the gas leakage first by cutting off the source of leakage and opening the windows to ventilate the unit but request residents to evacuate regardless of the situation. Therefore, the relevant procedure has to be decided by the officer-in-charge at the scene according to the information available to him.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Miss CHAN, has your supplementary not been answered?

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered my supplementary. The thrust of my question is: If residents are requested to remain at home, what measures are there to ensure the safety of residents? This is the crux of my supplementary which the Secretary has not addressed.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I will give a brief reply. One fundamental consideration of fire officers is that in the event of an explosion, it would be far better if there is a fire-resisting wall providing cover rather than going out into the corridor and remaining there. This is one of the considerations of fire officers.

MR FRED LI (in Cantonese): *Madam President, on 30 October, three persons were killed and 10 other injured in the explosion that occurred in Tsui Chuk*

Garden. The Secretary said openly afterwards that fire officers had taken appropriate actions in handling the incident. May I know if the Secretary is telling us that the FSD officer-in-charge at the scene had taken appropriate actions according to the guidelines but, unfortunately, it still resulted in so many deaths and injuries? Has the Secretary conducted an assessment of the incident?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, on the day of the incident, the fire officers concerned and I both responded to questions from the mass media since we have a duty to explain the matter to them. Of course, we made the explanations based on the information available at that time. I explained that there was no problem with the procedure, and by that I mean the procedure adopted by fire officers in breaking into the flat to carry out the rescue. When I arrived at the scene on that day, the Director of Fire Services briefed me clearly that when breaking into the flat, the prescribed procedure of sprinkling water had been followed. However, this does not mean that we consider the approach to handling the incident is free of problems. I believe Mr Fred LI is also aware that this incident is criminal in nature and a man has been charged with murder and committal proceedings were conducted in the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts on 25 November. Since accidental deaths were involved, the police will submit a death report to the Coroner. After studying the report, the Coroner will decide if an inquiry is necessary, and the FSD has also set up a task force to investigate the incident. Therefore, whether any mistake was made or whether there is any room for improvement is a matter subject to investigation.

MR CHAN KAM-LAM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Tsui Chuk Garden incident tells us that if the fire officers, in advising residents to remain at home, had done something more, for example, to request residents to close all windows and doors, the outcome would have been different. Does the Secretary agree that there is also room for improvement to the relevant guidelines drawn up by the FSD for fire officers handling incidents at the scene?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I think the assumption made by Mr CHAN Kam-lam is precisely contrary to that made by Miss CHAN Yuen-han. Miss CHAN Yuen-han asked why the residents were not advised to evacuate whereas Mr CHAN Kam-lam said that it would have

been safer if the residents had been requested to remain at home rather than leave. These are already two different views and assumptions. As I have said, on the question of what the most appropriate approach is, according to the practice of the FSD, it is up to the officer-in-charge at the scene to make judgements according to the information available to him. As to whether there was any mistake in the fire officers' actions in that particular incident, this will be examined by the task force and reported to the Coroner's Court, therefore it is not possible to pass any judgement now.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in fact, the assumptions made by Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Miss CHAN Yuen-han are applicable in different situations. The Secretary said that if residents do not stay at home but leave after closing the doors and turning off electrical appliances, this may cause a fire. This is a professional viewpoint. However, I wish to ask a question from the viewpoint of a layman. If the residents detect a strong smell of gas before the arrival of fire officers at the scene, should they leave their homes? According to the Secretary, if they do, closing of doors may produce sparks, but if they do not, a situation similar to that in Tsui Chuk Garden, that is, that of perishing at home, may occur. May I know what is the most appropriate course of action before the arrival of fire officers?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, in this case, I believe it is still up to the fire officers handling the incident at the scene to decide. The fire officers will determine whether the first and foremost task should be dealing with the gas leakage by cutting the source of the leakage and opening the windows to ventilate the unit, according to the information received and the nature of the leaking gas. There is no doubt that if fire officers advise residents to evacuate, the following situation may occur in corridors which are particularly narrow: the residents immediately switch off their television sets, air-conditioners as well as opening and closing the iron gates, therefore producing sparks which may immediately trigger an explosion. If an explosion occurs immediately, the death toll may be even higher with so many residents crowding the exposed passageways. However, Madam President, the above is only an imaginary scenario. Therefore, the Director of Fire Services and I have agreed to set up a task force to conduct an in-depth investigation into what approach should be adopted. Apart from fire officers, members of the task force also include one representative each from the Hong Kong Institution of

Engineers and the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors respectively, a fire services engineer and two fire investigation experts from the United States.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered my supplementary. I asked whether residents at the scene should leave before the arrival of fire officers.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I can only reiterate that ultimately, it is up to the fire officer in charge of handling the case to give instructions to residents at the scene according to the information available to him.

MR JAMES TO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the view of the Secretary in answering many of the supplementaries is the same: it is entirely up to the fire officers at the scene to judge whether the residents should be evacuated, but in the main reply, it is said that the considerations include whether the leaking gas is toxic, whether the leakage has been kept under control, and so on. I wonder if the Secretary will include another consideration, that is, the concentration of the leaking gas at various places at the scene, such as in a certain flat, several flats away or even further? This is because after the incident, a person claiming to be a fire officer called into a radio programme and said that at present, the equipment used by the FSD was only capable of detecting whether there was any gas, but the equipment used by the gas company, although small, could detect the concentration, for example, the concentration of the gas outside the flat, next door, in the corridor, and so on, which will be helpful to fire officers in judging whether an evacuation would be necessary. I believe this is very important. Is the Secretary aware of such comments or complaints? Moreover, I do not know if the instruments used by the gas company are too heavy and clumsy or too expensive, so that they are not used by the authorities, and if they are employed, will they help solve the problem?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as I know, the equipment of the FSD, including the instruments used to detect gas, is

adequate. I do not wish to comment on what was said by the person who called the radio station and claimed to be a fire officer as mentioned by Mr James TO, since I have not looked into this matter. As to the best approach to handling the incident, we will have a clearer picture after a report is submitted after a thorough investigation.

MR JAMES TO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I hope the Government can at least confirm one thing. The Secretary has said that the equipment of the FSD is adequate; however, specifically, is the equipment capable of gauging the concentration of gas at the scene? The answer is either yes or no, and this is just a factual matter and will not affect the investigation of the incident. I am only asking about the general situation, not specifically about the incident.*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as I know, the equipment in question is certainly capable of gauging the concentration of gas and more importantly, the instruments can detect when fresh air has diluted the gas in a flat to such an extent that the inflammable gas will not cause an explosion. It is definitely possible to detect such a state.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has spent more than 16 minutes on this question. This is the last supplementary.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I found that the Secretary, in answering the supplementaries of Honourable colleagues, invariably assumed or believed the conditions to be so and so and replied on the basis that she was not at the scene at that time. However, the Secretary said openly after the incident that there was no problem with the entire procedure. Compared to the Secretary's earlier answer, that is, everything could be ascertained only after the task force has submitted the report, did the Secretary make a mistake in her comments on that day?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I clarified on the day of the incident and the day after that what I had meant was the

procedure followed in breaking into the flat and so have I just now. As regards whether there is any problem with the procedure itself, I have already said that we will know only after an in-depth investigation.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Last oral question.

Forecast of Unemployment Rate by Executive Council Member

6. **MR SIN CHUNG-KAI** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it has been reported that on several occasions an Executive Council Member forecast the unemployment rate prior to the Government releasing the monthly figure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *Executive Council Members are in receipt of the relevant data prior to the release of the unemployment rate; if so, of the number of days prior to the Government's release do they receive such data in advance, and whether the Executive Council Member making these comments is in breach of the rule of confidentiality imposed on Executive Council Members;*
- (b) *taking forecast of unemployment rate as an example, it has assessed if the making of relevant comments by Executive Council Members prior to the Government's releasing the unemployment rate is proper and may affect the financial and stock markets (the markets); if an assessment has been made, of the outcome; and*
- (c) *it has issued guidelines to Executive Council Members about making sensitive comments which have a bearing on the markets; if so, how the guidelines concerned regulate the making of such comments and those who are in breach of the guidelines and how it assesses the effectiveness of such guidelines; if no guidelines have been issued, the reasons for that?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, my reply to Mr SIN's question is as follows:

- (a) Apart from the relevant Principal Officials, the Government has not provided the unemployment statistics to other Members of the

Executive Council prior to the public release of the relevant data. As the dates on which the statistics are released each month are public knowledge, reporters often interview people who are highly regarded in the relevant sectors to obtain their views on the issue around those dates. The wording in the main question alleges that an Executive Council Member "forecast the unemployment rate prior to the Government releasing the monthly figure". However, our information shows that the Member concerned was merely expressing his personal wishes and views on the trend of unemployment in general. We understand that when pressed by reporters, he had indicated that he did not have the relevant statistics. In general, if Members of the Executive Council respond to issues of public concern according to their grasp of the market situation, experience or professional knowledge, there is no question of confidentiality being breached.

- (b) Members of the Executive Council should exercise judgement and care when expressing their personal views on issues of concern to the public. There is, however, nothing improper if a non-official Member, as an experienced representative of a particular sector, expresses personal views in matters of concern to his sector without breaching the confidentiality rules. We do not consider it necessary to assess the impact of those views on the markets.
- (c) The Executive Council adopts the long-established principles of "confidentiality" and "collective responsibility". Under these two principles, Members of the Executive Council cannot disclose to anyone directly or indirectly information on Executive Council business, agenda and related documents. These are also reflected in the Oath of Fidelity which Executive Council Members are required to take.

Apart from matters discussed by the Executive Council, the Government frequently makes public announcements on a wide range of issues. The relevant bureaus and departments will decide whether it is necessary to inform Executive Council Members in advance. If the information is required to be kept confidential prior to the information being released to the public, the bureaus and departments will also inform Members of this restriction.

MR SIN CHUNG-KAI (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I have asked this question not to pinpoint at any Executive Council Member but only because the public thinks that Executive Council Members, as members of the highest policy-making body of the Government, will have access to a lot of information. Remarks made by the Executive Council Members are very often rather influential especially on the market. The Secretary has mentioned upholding the principle of confidentiality in part (c) of his main reply, but the question remains that some information may not have been discussed in the Executive Council but the public may think that Executive Council Members know such information. Is it appropriate for the Government not to draw up any guidelines? Is it suitable for Executive Council Members to make comments or forecasts on some market-sensitive information that has not been discussed in the Executive Council so that people may think that they know such information?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I have stated clearly in part (b) of my main reply that Members of the Executive Council should exercise judgement and care when expressing their personal views on issues of concern to the public. However, the assumption just made by Mr SIN Chung-kai involves issues that are not generally discussed in the Executive Council but the Executive Council Member concerned is interviewed as he has the professional knowledge and status, experience or knowledge in the sector. What he said in interviews does not involve the internal operation of the Government but it is interpreted as sensitive information that only some insiders will know. In my view, members of any sector should be alert to such matters and they will be very careful when similar cases take place.*

Mr SIN Chung-kai said just now that his question is not pinpointed at any Executive Council Member, but it is stated very clearly in the main question that on several occasions an Executive Council Member forecast the unemployment rate prior to the Government releasing the monthly figure, and that is certainly targeted. As regards this pinpointing question, we have looked up the reports in each month and found that, under those circumstances, quite a few other people including Legislative Council Members had been asked by reporters of their views on unemployment and several Members had expressed their views in newspapers before the unemployment rate was released. Other people such as the banking sector, members of business associations and societies, academics and economic analysts were also asked the question for their professional knowledge and expressed the relevant views on different occasions.

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary indicated in his answer just now that the people concerned would respond to the relevant question on the basis of their professional knowledge or experience. This I will not argue. Mr SIN Chung-kai's question is about the expression of views on the eve of the release of the monthly unemployment rate by the Government. In foreign countries, the "eve" is regarded as a sensitive juncture and guidelines for comments not to be made are drawn up to avoid making other people misunderstand that the persons concerned have access to information. Of course, it is impossible for them not to say anything on ordinary days, but the market usually reacts on the eve or the following morning of the release of figures. Will the Chief Secretary consider drawing up suitable guidelines for Executive Council Members in respect of such sensitive information to avoid causing misunderstandings?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I have said earlier that everybody will have his professional judgement and no misunderstandings should be caused. Besides, there are so many such reports and the media usually interview different professionals, Members or academics for their views before the release of the unemployment rate. We have seen many similar comments in this respect. Of course, we will not think that the chances of causing misunderstandings have reduced. We will suitably reflect the outcome of this question to the people concerned.*

MR SIN CHUNG-KAI (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I wish to cite an example to illustrate my opinions. According to the Listing Rules, the senior management of a listed company cannot make comments on the performance of their company within a certain period of time before the release of its performance report because the public thinks that the senior management of a listed company will have access to the information on the company. The principle is adopted to avoid the release of market-sensitive information causing fluctuations in share prices and enabling some people to reap profits. The market may not know that Executive Council Members do not have such confidential information and they will be deemed as having access to such information. Based on the same principle, will the Government draw up guidelines for such cases or situations? Our three-tiered structure has adopted this principle for regulating listed companies, will the Government do something about this?*

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Madam President, as I have just said, we have drawn up very clear guidelines for all matters related to the Executive Council and we will not draw up other new guidelines because of this question today. The case mentioned by Members today can certainly not be equated with the case in which views are expressed by the directors of a listed company before the release of its performance report. Members have mentioned information related to unemployment, which cannot be equated with the confidential information of a listed company. Nevertheless, I have also said that since Members have expressed concern about this, we will suitably reflect their views within the Government in the hope that the people concerned will be more careful when making relevant remarks in future.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Question time ends here.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Staffing of Intermediaries Supervision Department of SFC

7. **MR HENRY WU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:*

- (a) *the entry requirements and salary scales applicable to the various levels of staff (including senior and front-line staff) of the Intermediaries Supervision Department (ISD) of the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC);*
- (b) *the rank structure and strength of the ISD at present; and*
- (c) *under normal circumstances, the rank of staff deployed to intermediaries or intermediary organizations to carry out investigations or discharge duties; and their longest, shortest and average length of service?*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Chinese): Madam President, in response to the Honourable Member's question, we have sought relevant information from the SFC, as follows:

- (a) The entry requirements for staff of the ISD of the SFC are that staff at senior manager level are required to have a university degree and minimum eight years of proven relevant work experience in financial services, auditing or risk management. Staff at manager level are required to have a university degree and minimum five years of proven relevant work experience. Those with fewer years of relevant experience will be considered for position of Assistant Manager. For staff at Associate Director and Director levels, more than 10 years of proven relevant work experience are usually required.

In determining the salary, the SFC largely draws reference from the prevailing market rates and the availability of people with the required experience and skill set. The overall pay objective of the SFC is to ensure that the SFC's pay is in line with the market rate to attract and retain high quality employees.

- (b) The rank structure and strength of the ISD are as follows:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Staff Number</i>
Director	1
Associate Director	3
Senior Manager	8
Manager	29
Assistant Manager	15
Secretaries and clerical staff	12
Executive trainee and manager trainee	4
Total	72

- (c) Staff deployed to intermediaries to carry out investigation or discharge duties work in teams. The teams usually consist of assistant managers and managers led by senior managers or associate directors.

In terms of years of service in the SFC, staff of the ISD have on average 3.7 years of service. Amongst existing staff, the longest length of service is 13.5 years and the shortest is 1.15 years.

In terms of years of relevant work experience, staff of the ISD have on average 9.8 years of relevant work experience. The longest work experience is 23.4 years and the shortest is 2.6 years.

Review of Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance

8. **MR TIMOTHY FOK** (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *it will consider reviewing the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) (the Ordinance) to enhance the protection of public figures' privacy and clarify the relationship between the right to know and the right to privacy; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (b) *it will strengthen communication with the media industry and encourage the industry to formulate a self-regulatory mechanism, so as to avoid producing press reports in breach of the community's ethical standards?*

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) The main purpose of the Ordinance is to protect the privacy of individuals in relation to personal data, and such protection is extended to all living individuals. There is no express provision directly relating to the degree or extent of protection to be afforded to public figures.

The six data protection principles in the Ordinance delineate the protection in relation to personal data. They stipulate, among other things, that data users should collect adequate but not excessive personal data by fair and lawful means, and that the data collected must be directly related to a function or activity of the data user. Data users are also required to ensure that the personal data used are accurate, that appropriate security measures have been taken to protect the data and that the data are not being kept longer than necessary.

We believe that the Ordinance has already provided appropriate protection to the privacy of an individual's personal data in relation to the collection and use of them. We are reviewing the provisions in the Ordinance, and shall propose legislative amendments to address the technical difficulties encountered in implementation.

The right to privacy and the right to know are protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and at a constitutional level under Article 30 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Articles 27, 28, 29 and 30 of the Basic Law also stipulate that Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of the press and other privacy-related rights, thus enhancing the rights under Article 39. We note that the relationship between the right to privacy and the freedom of speech and of the press was one of the issues raised in the public consultation on "Civil Liability for Invasion of Privacy" held in August 1999 by the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong (LRC). On release of the LRC report, the Government will study the recommendations therein carefully.

- (b) Press freedom in Hong Kong has always been recognized and highly acclaimed by the international community and in foreign reports. We believe the professional ethics of the press would be best assured by self-regulatory measures. The Government is committed to upholding freedom of the press. We maintain good communication with the industry. Nevertheless, we would distance ourselves from the subject of a self-regulatory mechanism by the industry in order to pre-empt unnecessary speculation that the Government is trying to influence the industry or interfere with press freedom.

On control of articles consisting of or containing obscene or indecent materials, any person who publishes an obscene article or an indecent article not in accordance with the law commits an offence and is liable to prosecution under the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance. In relation to broadcasting, the television and radio Codes of Practice issued by the Broadcasting Authority require licensees to observe at all times certain basic standards in the presentation of programmes, including news broadcasts. A licensee should not include in its programmes any

material that is indecent, obscene, or of bad taste and which is not acceptable to ordinary viewers.

The general public also has an important say on the standard of reports in the media. The industry cannot possibly ignore the community's aspirations and violate the acceptable ethical standards.

Restrictions on Non-franchised Bus Services

9. **DR LUI MING-WAH** (in Chinese): *Madam President, I have received complaints alleging that the Administration restrains the scope of operation of non-franchised bus services (including residents' bus, free shuttle bus and employees' bus services), by taking measures which include refusing or delaying the operators' applications for operating new routes, modifying the existing routings and establishing additional pick-up/drop-off points, and so on. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *given that the above non-franchised buses have already been issued with the passenger service licence by the Transport Department (TD), of the reasons for requiring the operators to make individual applications for operating new service routes;*
- (b) *of the respective numbers of applications for operating new non-franchised bus routes received, approved and rejected by the TD over the past five years, together with a breakdown of the rejected cases by the reasons for rejection;*
- (c) *whether it has undermined the role and scope of non-franchised bus services in the public transport system; if so, of the reasons for that, and whether it has held prior discussions with the trade;*
- (d) *whether it has assessed how the restrictions imposed on non-franchised bus services have affected the livelihood of the operators and their employees in the current critical economic environment, as well as the public's right to choose the means of transport; if it has, of the outcome of the assessment; and*

- (e) *whether it will consider relaxing the scope of operation of non-franchised bus services?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Chinese): Madam President, under our transport strategy, franchised bus provides mass transportation means in the reticulate network (to complement the railway backbone) and the operators are required to provide universal service to ensure that public needs are met. Non-franchised bus services play a supplementary role by providing services primarily during the peak hours to help reduce passenger demand for mass carriers. There are different types of non-franchised bus services serving specific needs such as tour services, hotel services, student services, residents' services and employees' services. The service provided by non-franchised buses must be balanced against other minor modes of licensed public transport, for example, minibuses and taxis.

The operation of non-franchised bus services is regulated by passenger service licences (PSLs) issued by the Commissioner for Transport under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374). Holders of PSLs are authorized to operate one or more types of non-franchised bus services as specified in the PSLs. However, for residents' services, employees' services and free bus services which are operated on the basis of fixed routeing or destination, individual applications for new routes have to be submitted to the TD for approval to ensure efficient use of our limited road space and to avoid duplication of services.

In examining applications for non-franchised bus services, the TD is required by law to take into account all relevant factors. These factors include *inter alia* the need for the service to be provided by the applicant, the level of service already provided or planned by other public transport operators, traffic conditions in the areas and on the roads where the service is to be provided, and the standard of service to be provided by the applicant.

In the past five years, the TD approved a total of 2 044 applications for non-franchised bus services. During the same period, 531 applications were not approved. These applications were examined according to the basis as set out in the third paragraph above and those which were not approved were due to traffic and transport reasons, for example, existing public transport services are available to meet passenger need, the proposed services would aggravate

congestion in busy corridors, and so on. The yearly breakdown figures are given below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of applications approved</i>	<i>No. of applications not approved</i>
1998	419	82
1999	463	111
2000	467	134
2001	361	123
2002 (January to September)	334	81

In providing appropriate choices of services for commuters, we are also mindful of the need to minimize wasteful competition, to reduce congestion in busy corridors and to ensure efficiency of public transport services. The TD maintains regular contact with the non-franchised bus trade to hear their views and to seek their understanding of our policy and considerations. Regular meetings are held with the trade to facilitate communication and to address operational issues and their concerns.

We have a comprehensive public transport network serving the general public, and there is continuous improvement in the quality of public transport services. We continue to monitor passenger demand closely to ensure that service provision matches with demand.

For the considerations set out above and in order to maximize the efficient use of our limited road space, regulatory controls on non-franchised bus services are justified and we will continue to process applications with the factors set out in the third paragraph above.

Provision of an Expensive Drug to Patients of Hospital Authority

10. **DR LAW CHI-KWONG** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it has been reported that a pharmaceutical firm is supplying Queen Mary Hospital with a new drug specially for treatment of chronic myelogenous leukaemia (CML) for*

free trial. While the trial period will expire next month, the Hospital Authority (HA) has no plans to purchase the drug for the patients taking part in the trial. Also, some other patients of the HA are paying \$20,000 per month for purchasing the drug. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:

- (a) the countries in which the drug has been widely used by medical institutions;*
- (b) if the HA has statistics on the number of patients who were fit to take the drug last year; and, among them, the number of patients who experienced a deterioration or a relapse of the illness after taking other drugs or regimen;*
- (c) if the HA will negotiate with the pharmaceutical firm concerned, including requesting the continued supply of the drug free of charge to patients who have participated in the trial scheme until the completion of their whole regimen, or a reduction of the selling price of the drug; and, before the negotiation has been concluded, of the arrangements the HA will make for those patients who are fit or need to take the drug; and*
- (d) if the HA will purchase the drug to supply to the patients in need, particularly those who have no improvement after changing medication and receiving other regimens; if so, of the implementation timetable; if not, of the treatment to be provided by the HA to the patients concerned so as to honour the policy that "no patients will be deprived of appropriate medical care because of financial hardship"?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Chinese):
Madam President,

- (a) The drug referred to in the question is "Imatinib". According to information available to the HA, Imatinib has been approved for use in Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore,

Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States for the treatment of CML. The extent of which the drug is used by medical institutions in these places depends on their respective licensing conditions for the use of the drug, health financing system and policies governing the cost-effective use of the drug having regard to the assessment of research evidence for the risks and benefits of using the drug under different clinical conditions.

- (b) Imatinib was only registered in Hong Kong in 2002. Thus far, local experience on the use of the drug is limited to clinical trials. As such, the HA has not estimated the number of patients who were fit to take Imatinib last year. Currently, 18 patients are participating in the clinical trial scheme operated by the Queen Mary Hospital on the use of Imatinib.
- (c) The HA is discussing with the pharmaceutical firm concerned to explore if a patient assistance scheme could be put in place to assist those patients who have participated in the clinical trial scheme and cannot afford to pay for the drug. Pending the outcome of discussions, the HA is exploring with the firm the possibility of extension of the pilot scheme in the interim.
- (d) It is the Government's established policy that no one should be deprived of adequate medical care because of insufficient means. In the context of aiming to provide an adequate level of care for all Hong Kong citizens, public subsidies should be targeted towards providing cost-effective interventions having regard to the limited public resources available.

The HA has, with the support of charitable trusts, developed a pilot scheme to expedite the introduction of medical items of new technology or technology-based new services into mainstream HA service. Patients who cannot afford to pay for new medical items or services would be offered financial assistance. The HA is discussing with charitable organizations the possibility of including Imatinib under the pilot scheme. In the meantime, the HA will continue to provide medical treatment to all CML patients.

Dumping of Inert Construction Waste at Landfills

11. **MS MIRIAM LAU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it is learnt that some drivers transport inert construction waste, such as debris covered with refuse, to landfills for dumping. Such waste should have been dumped at designated public filling areas. Such a misuse of landfills will shorten their life. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) of the number of such incidents detected in each of the past three years;*
- (b) of the monitoring mechanism in place to prevent such misuse; and*
- (c) whether it will consider improving the monitoring mechanism; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS
(in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) We estimate that about 6 000, 2 500 and 1 000 truckloads of inert construction and demolition (C&D) materials mixed with waste were delivered to the South East New Territories Landfill in 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. We have not detected such incidents at the North East New Territories Landfill and the West New Territories Landfill.
- (b) Currently, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) does not have the legal authority to refuse delivery of mixed waste to landfills, irrespective of the amount of inert materials therein. Hence, landfills have to accept all mixed waste delivered to them. Nonetheless, the EPD and the Civil Engineering Department have been advising dump truck drivers not to dispose of inert C&D materials at landfills. In addition, government works departments require contractors of government works projects to properly dispose of inert C&D materials at public filling areas instead of landfills. Relevant departments will also continue to step up enforcement of the trip-ticket system, which governs the disposal of waste and inert C&D materials, and closely monitor contractors' work in waste sorting and recycling.

- (c) We are preparing legislative proposals to provide the EPD the legal authority to refuse delivery of mixed waste with large amount of inert C&D materials to landfills. We also plan to introduce the landfill charging scheme for C&D waste. This could create an economic disincentive for waste producers and dump truck drivers to dispose of mixed waste at landfills.

Cases of Unemployed Persons Receiving CSSA Payments

12. **MR CHAN KWOK-KEUNG** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding cases of unemployed persons receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payments, will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *a breakdown of such cases by*
 - (i) *recipients' age profile, in groups each covering five years,*
 - (ii) *the trades, types and positions of jobs held as well as the monthly salaries they earned (in groups of \$500 apart) prior to becoming unemployed; and*
 - (iii) *their household size;*
- (b) *the average domestic expenses of the recipients, broken down by household size;*
- (c) *details of the assistance the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and relevant agencies provided to the recipients last year in seeking employment, including the numbers of job interviews arranged and job placements provided, the trades to which such jobs belong and the average monthly salaries of such jobs; and*
- (d) *the number of recipients who stopped receiving CSSA payments last year after securing employment, and its percentage in the total number of CSSA cases of the "unemployment" category at the end of last year?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Chinese):
Madam President, according to statistics of the SWD, information regarding unemployed CSSA recipients as requested is as follows:

- (a) (i) As at the end of September 2002, of the unemployed CSSA recipients, the group aged 45 to 49 has the highest percentage at 20%. The next two highest groups are the groups aged 50 to 54 and aged 40 to 44 which represent 18% and 17% respectively. For details, please refer to the table at Annex I.
 - (ii) As all unemployed CSSA recipients are required to join the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) Programme under the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme, information on these participants indicates that 42.5% were employed in elementary occupations such as cleaners, office assistants and domestic helpers, and so on, while 23.3% worked as service workers and shop sales workers before they were unemployed. For details, please refer to the table at Annex II. We do not have information on the income they earned in their last employment.
 - (iii) As at the end of September 2002, among the CSSA unemployment caseload, 48% are singleton cases while the next two highest groups are cases with four eligible members and three eligible members which represent 16% and 12% respectively. For details, please refer to the table at Annex III.
- (b) Households with one, three and four eligible members account for the majority of the CSSA unemployment caseload. According to the results of the 1999-2000 Household Expenditure Survey on CSSA Households, their average monthly household expenditures^{Note} are \$3,500, \$7,100 and \$8,400 respectively.

Note

The result should be interpreted with caution because the sub-sample sizes for CSSA unemployed households are relatively small as compared with the sample size of the whole Household Expenditure Survey on CSSA households and would be affected by extreme values.

- (c) All unemployed CSSA recipients are required to participate in the SFS Scheme. Under the AEA Programme, Employment Assistance (EA) Co-ordinators provide personalized service and act as facilitators to help the participants get access to up-to-date labour market information, including employment related information, training/retraining opportunities and other support services. Over 100 000 CSSA recipients have participated in the AEA Programme since June 1999.

The EA Co-ordinators also refer those needy participants to join the employment assistance programmes run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (namely the projects funded by the Intensive Employment Assistance Fund (IEAF) and the Special Job Attachment Programme (SJAP)). The services provided by these programmes include intensive counselling, job matching and placement and post-placement service, aimed at assisting the participants to overcome barriers to work, enhance their employability and rejoin the workforce. As at the end of September 2002, 2 736 CSSA recipients have participated in IEAF projects and 1 897 recipients participating in the SJAP. According to the information provided by NGOs, the total number of job interviews arranged by them as at the end of September 2002 is 4 200, and the number of job vacancies identified is 8 500. However, information regarding the job nature and salaries of the job vacancies is not routinely collected.

In addition, we have referred about 19 900 AEA participants to seek employment services from the Labour Department since June 1999.

- (d) As at the end of September 2002, the number of participants of the AEA Programme who have taken up paid employment is about 12 800, representing 13% of the total AEA participants. 5 050 of them or 5% of the total AEA participants have left the CSSA Scheme after securing employment. The other 7 700, constituting about 8% of the total AEA participants, have moved from the CSSA "unemployment" category to the "low-earnings" category due to paid employment.

Annex I

Percentage of unemployed CSSA recipients by age group

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Percentage of unemployed recipients</i>
15-19	6
20-24	5
25-29	5
30-34	6
35-39	9
40-44	17
45-49	20
50-54	18
55-59	14

Note: There were about 36 000 unemployed CSSA recipients as at the end of September 2002.

Annex II

Percentage of AEA Participants' Occupation
before Unemployment by Category

<i>Occupation Category</i>	<i>Percentage of occupation before unemployment by category</i>
Elementary Occupations	42.5
Service Workers and Shop Sales Workers	23.3
Craft and Related Workers	7.7
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	7.4
Clerks	5.4
Associate Professionals	1.0
Managers and Administrators	0.7
Professionals	0.2
Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers and Occupations not Classifiable	11.9
Total:	100.0

Note: there were about 41 000 persons participating in the AEA Programme as at the end of September 2002.

Annex III

Percentage of CSSA Unemployment Cases
by Number of Eligible Members

<i>Number of eligible members</i>	<i>Percentage of cases</i>
1	48
2	9
3	12
4	16
5	9
6 or above	5

Note: Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Statistics on Import of and Duty Collected on Wine

13. **MR JAMES TIEN** (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the quantity of wine imported to Hong Kong and the total amount of duty collected, as well as the quantity of wine which attracted duty of over \$600 per bottle and the amount of such duty collected, in the last financial year and the current financial year up to the present; and*
- (b) *whether there is any difference between the four figures recorded in the current financial year up to the present, as referred to above, and the relevant figures in the same period in the last financial year; if so, of the details?*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) In 2001-02, 12 246 210 bottles of wine were imported by licensed traders for consumption in Hong Kong and the duty collected

amounted to \$226.46 million. Of these, 7 299 bottles attracted a duty of over \$600 per bottle, and the duty collected amounted to \$7.27 million.

In 2002-03 (April to October), 6 226 098 bottles of wine were imported for consumption and the duty collected amounted to \$139 million. Of these, 5 104 bottles attracted a duty of over \$600 per bottle, and the duty collected amounted to \$5.23 million.

- (b) Comparing the figures for April to October in 2002-03 with those for the same period in 2001-02, the quantity has dropped by 278 593 bottles, or about 4%, while the amount of duty collected has increased by \$20.97 million. As regards wine attracting a duty of over \$600 per bottle, the quantity has increased by 724 bottles. However, the latter is not a like-with-like comparison because the duty rate, hence the amount of duty per bottle, has been higher since 6 March this year.

The average ex-factory price for a bottle of wine consumed in Hong Kong was \$30 in 2001-02. The average duty was \$18 per bottle based on the duty rate of 60%. After the duty increase on 6 March this year from 60% of ex-factory price to 80%, additional duty payable on an average bottle of wine is only \$6 per bottle. This underlines the point that the effect of the duty increase is mild. After the adjustment in duty rate, the quantity of wine imported for local consumption has held stable, while the tax revenue from wine duty has increased.

Division of Work after Merger of Education and Manpower Bureau and Education Department

14. **MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the arrangements for division of work after the implementation of the proposed merger of the Education and Manpower Bureau with the Education Department, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *whether degree and sub-degree (including higher diploma and associate degree) programmes of universities will be supervised by*

statutory or government committee(s); if so, of the committee(s) concerned; and whether the Government has considered if the supervision by such committee(s) may undermine the academic autonomy of the universities; if it has, of the results;

- (b) whether courses of various levels run by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) will be under the policy area of education or manpower, and supervised by statutory or government committee(s); if so, of the committee(s) concerned; whether such arrangements are different from the existing ones and, if so, of the reasons for such changes; and*
- (c) whether the implementation of the arrangements mentioned in (a) and (b) above will affect the mode of funding from the Government for courses of various levels run by the universities and VTC; if so, of the details?*

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) Following a review of Hong Kong's higher education conducted by the University Grants Committee (UGC), the Administration has decided that the UGC will be responsible for co-ordinating the overall development of the education sector at and above degree level. The Manpower Development Committee (MDC) is tasked to oversee the provision of sub-degree programmes. In developing this framework, the Government is aware of the need to strike a careful balance among the needs to respect the academic freedom and autonomy of the institutions, to ensure public accountability in the use of public funds and to maintain a vigorous quality assurance mechanism.
- (b) The VTC is a statutory body that provides vocational education and training. The courses provided by the VTC have been and will continue to be under the policy of manpower training.

The MDC was established in October 2002 with the aim of improving the co-ordination and regulation of vocational training

and retraining. In future, the MDC will advise the Secretary for Education and Manpower on development of all vocational education and training courses, including those to be provided by the VTC.

- (c) The UGC will continue to advise the Government on the funding of programmes at or above degree levels. The triennial funding system and process will remain largely unchanged, although the detailed funding formulas and mechanisms will be adjusted following the higher education review. The UGC will discuss with the Government and MDC on the timetable and arrangements for handing over the responsibility and funding for sub-degree sector.

The VTC is working on its development strategy taking into account the establishment of MDC and the changes following the higher education review. When the Council has completed this exercise, the Government will discuss with the VTC on its future plans and the funding arrangement for its courses at various levels.

Application for Land Grant by Asia Society

15. **MISS CHOY SO-YUK** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it has been reported that the Asia Society, with its headquarters in the United States, has applied to the Government for the grant of the site of the former British armoury at Admiralty by way of a private treaty, for setting up the Society's branch office in Hong Kong. Underneath the site is a military cable which was used for transmitting highly confidential information in the past. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *whether it is aware of the existence of a military cable underneath the site; the present condition of the cable; and whether it is being connected to any apparatus;*
- (b) *in considering the above land grant application, whether it has consulted the Central Government's organ which is responsible for the defence of Hong Kong; if it has, when it was consulted and whether the Central Government has consented to the application; if it has not, how jeopardy to national security will be prevented; and*

- (c) *of the general procedures for processing applications for land grant by private treaty and the normal processing time for each procedure; and whether the Asia Society's land grant application is dealt with in accordance with these procedures?*

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Chinese): Madam President, the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre (the Asia Society) has submitted an application to the Lands Department for a private treaty grant of the former Explosives Magazine site at Justice Drive, Admiralty for it to set up a multi-purpose centre, so as to preserve the historical buildings and structures there, and to provide facilities for organizing various programmes and activities to promote the arts and culture as well as to enhance public understanding of the Asia Pacific Region.

At present, the application by the Asia Society is being processed by relevant departments. The Security Bureau and the Lands Department have indicated that they have no records showing the existence of any military cables underneath the site. In processing the application, we will pay attention to this issue. If necessary, we will consult the relevant bodies.

In general, when the Government receives an application for a private treaty grant of land, it will negotiate with the applicant. As the issues discussed vary from case to case, there is no specific timetable for processing an application. This application from the Asia Society is also processed in accordance with the established procedures.

Inspection on Structural Safety of Buildings After Fire

16. **MR FRED LI** (in Chinese): *Madam President, a serious incident of gas explosion which caused a blaze took place at Tsui Chuk Garden on 30th last month. After the fire was put out, the police sealed off the entire building temporarily, pending inspection on the structural safety of the building by staff of the Buildings Department (BD). I saw that the BD staff did not arrive at the scene until nine o'clock in the evening, which was six hours after the incident. Moreover, I learnt that such staff and the most senior police officers there were not of the ranks authorized to issue premises closure orders. In this regard, will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the reasons for the BD staff's taking as long as six hours after the incident to arrive at the scene;*
- (b) *the reasons for the BD and the police not having sent to the scene senior officers who were authorized to issue the relevant orders, so as to avoid delays in follow-up actions; and*
- (c) *the department responsible for on-site co-ordination that day; and the established mechanism for determining the department to be tasked with co-ordinating such unforeseen events?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Chinese): Madam President, in accordance with section 27 of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123), a closure order of a building is made by the Court. Nevertheless, the Court did not make any building closure order in the Tsui Chuk Garden incident.

As regards the three parts of the question, our reply is as follows:

- (a) The Duty Officer of the BD received a notification by the police at 7.46 pm on 30 October requesting an officer of the BD to attend the scene for an inspection of the building concerned. The Duty Officer arrived at the scene at 9.21 pm.
- (b) Generally speaking, the BD assigns professional Duty Officers to attend the scene and assess the building safety conditions after receiving reports of emergency incidents which may affect building safety.

With respect to the Tsui Chuk Garden incident, the police had already taken action to temporarily evacuate the residents of the whole building when the Duty Officer of the BD arrived at the scene. Following an inspection of the affected building, the Duty Officer of the BD considered that there was no building structural danger overall. However, for the more immediately affected 14th, 15th and 16th floors, more thorough inspection and assessment had to be carried out to ascertain whether there was any localized structural problem. Therefore, the next morning, the BD dispatched officers

to conduct detailed inspections. The inspections confirmed that there was no problem with the structural safety of the three floors.

All Duty Officers of the BD possess sufficient professional qualification and experience to handle the relevant emergency matters at the scene. The question of inappropriateness of ranking of the officer concerned does not arise.

As regards the action taken by the police, under section 2 of the Fire Investigation Ordinance (Cap. 12), a police officer at the rank of Superintendent or above may take possession of any premises in which a fire has occurred and place it under police guard until released by the written order of a Magistrate in accordance with section 6A of the Ordinance. Exercise of these powers should normally be confined to fires of doubtful or suspicious origin, that is, fires suspected to have been caused by arson or to have involved any other criminal offence, or the cause of which cannot be determined after initial investigation.

On 30 October 2002, the Police Divisional Commander of Tsz Wan Shan (at the Superintendent rank) attended the scene shortly after the incident and ordered the premises in question, that is, only 15th Floor of Block 2 of Tsui Chuk Garden, once cleared by the Fire Services Department (FSD), to be placed under police guard for investigation due to the suspicious cause of the fire in accordance with section 2 of the Fire Investigation Ordinance. Upon the conclusion of investigation at the scene, the police immediately applied to a Magistrate to release the premises under section 6A of the Fire Investigation Ordinance. The order was issued at noon on 2 November 2002.

- (c) In this incident, the FSD was responsible for rescuing trapped people, fighting fires and providing first aid to injured persons at the scene whilst the police were responsible for crowd and traffic control, providing escort of injured persons to hospital, and maintaining law and order in the affected area. Throughout this incident, the police maintained close liaison with the FSD and Wong Tai Sin District Office of the Home Affairs Department.

The Home Affairs Department co-ordinates and oversees the setting up of an Inter-departmental Help Desk at the scene of major emergency incidents for providing emergency relief services. On the day of the gas explosion incident, the Wong Tai Sin District Office immediately co-ordinated the setting up of the inter-departmental help desk, registered households affected by the incidents and offered assistance. A hotline service was also set up to handle public enquiries.

Telecommunications Network Equipment in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

17. **MR SIN CHUNG-KAI** (in Chinese): *Madam President, under the present arrangements of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) in relation to telecommunications network equipment, exhibitors who wish to install telecommunications facilities (for example, telephone lines, fax lines and Internet access facilities) may apply for the services from any fixed network operators. The fixed network operators, upon their agreement to provide the services, are required to hire the interconnection facilities (for example, copper cables and optical fibre) for telecommunications network from the management company of the HKCEC to effect interconnection between their telecommunications network equipment and that in the exhibition venues. The management company of the HKCEC requires that fixed network operators may not connect their telecommunications network equipment directly to the exhibition venues. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:*

- (a) the reasons for the management company of the HKCEC disallowing fixed network operators to connect their telecommunications network equipment directly to the exhibition venues, where technically feasible;*
- (b) the rentals of various interconnection facilities for telecommunications networks fixed by the HKCEC and public exhibition venues in Hong Kong respectively and the revenue they received respectively from renting out these facilities, in each of the past three years; and*
- (c) if any mechanism will be put in place for conducting regular reviews of the rentals of interconnection facilities for telecommunications*

networks in public exhibition venues, in order to prevent increasing the exhibitors' costs for hiring exhibition venues due to the high level of rentals for such facilities?

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) As advised by the HKCEC (Management) Limited (the company), it is the policy of the company to allow fixed network operators appointed by exhibitors to install interconnection facilities from the plant room of the HKCEC to the exhibition booths concerned. The company will not impose additional charges on the exhibitors or the operators for the arrangement of such works. The fixed network operators are, however, required to observe certain conditions, including the installation works should not affect the functions taking place at the HKCEC, and the operator should remove the facilities concerned before the exhibitors' leases expire (normally one day following the close of the exhibition). The company does not allow any fixed network operators to install interconnection facilities at the HKCEC on a long-term basis.

In practice, to control the hiring costs, exhibitors normally complete the move-in of exhibits within three days before the exhibition starts and the move-out of exhibits one day after the exhibition closes. Nearly all of the exhibitors choose to have the telecommunication services arranged by the company. Under such scenario, the fixed network operator appointed by the company makes use of the interconnection facilities of the HKCEC.

A few exhibitors designated other fixed network operators for the provision of telecommunication services. However, the designated operators, having regard to the cost, preferred hiring the interconnection facilities of the HKCEC, rather than installing the facilities on their own.

- (b) The HKCEC offers two types of interconnection facilities: copper cable and optical fibre. The respective rentals of a copper cable and an optical fibre link per event per connected line are \$650 and

\$1,750. The annual revenue received from renting out interconnection facilities, as a percentage of the HKCEC's annual income, has been declining over the past two years, and in 2001, the percentage was less than 0.1 %.

As regards rentable exhibition venues managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, including those in the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, City Hall and Hong Kong Central Library, no rental service in respect of interconnection facilities is provided.

- (c) The company operates on commercial principles. It takes account of the market situation and costs in determining service charge levels. The Government will monitor the situation closely.

Use of Refuse Chutes in PRH Estates

18. **MR ALBERT CHAN** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it is noted that, although the refuse collection rooms in some public rental housing (PRH) estates are equipped with chutes connecting all floors of the block, some cleaners do not make use of the chutes to transport the collected refuse. Moreover, as the refuse collection rooms in some PRH estates are often locked, residents dump their rubbish into the collection bins at the lift lobbies or place it outside their units outside the specified refuse collection hours. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the number of existing PRH estates that are equipped with refuse chutes, and their names by districts;*
- (b) *among the PRH estates listed in the reply to (a), of the PRH estates in which the refuse chutes are not fully utilized, and the reasons for that; and*
- (c) *whether it will consider allowing residents of the PRH estates to pour their rubbish into the chutes directly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND LANDS (in Chinese):
Madam President, my reply to the three-part question is as follows:

- (a) Only four out of 148 PRH estates of the Housing Authority are not equipped with refuse chutes, namely, Sai Wan Estate in Hong Kong Island, Ngan Wan Estate and Lung Tin Estate on Lantau Island, and Cheung Kwai Estate on Cheung Chau.
- (b) Of the 144 public housing estates equipped with refuse chutes mentioned above, the refuse chutes of some or all blocks in nine estates are not in use because of tenants' objection and geographical constraints. Specific reasons include nuisance to nearby residents as a result of noise generated by the chutes when in use, frequent blockage of refuse chutes causing inconvenience to tenants, and lack of direct vehicular access to remove rubbish from the collection points of refuse chutes. Details are set out at the Annex.
- (c) To ensure safety and avoid blockage, refuse chutes should be used by cleansing workers who are familiar with the operational procedures. Hence, it is not appropriate to allow residents to use the refuse chutes to dispose of rubbish. As refuse chutes are installed inside the refuse rooms on each floor, to forestall occurrence of accidents and crimes inside the refuse rooms, the Housing Department should lock the doors of refuse rooms at all times.

Annex

Estates with refuse chutes in disuse in some or all blocks

<i>Estates</i>	<i>Blocks involved</i>	<i>Reasons for Disuse</i>
Upper Wong Tai Sin Estate	Seven blocks	In view of residents' complaints about noise nuisance caused by the refuse chutes when in use, after consultation with the Estate Management Advisory Committees, use of those refuse chutes has stopped.
Sha Kok Estate, Sha Tin	Two blocks	
Leung King Estate, Tuen Mun	} All blocks	
Kwong Yuen Estate, Sha Tin		
Fu Shin Estate, Tai Po		
Tsui Lam Estate, Tseung Kwan O		

<i>Estates</i>	<i>Blocks involved</i>	<i>Reasons for Disuse</i>
Wah Fu Estate (I), Aberdeen	All blocks	In view of residents' complaints about noise nuisance from refuse chutes and inconvenience resulting from frequent blockage of the chutes, use of those refuse chutes has stopped.
Shek Kip Mei Estate	One block	The building is located on the top of a slope. Refuse collection vehicles cannot reach the refuse chutes directly for removing refuse from the huge collection bins used with the chutes. Wicker bins are used for collecting and transporting rubbish instead.
Kam Peng Estate, Pen Chau	All blocks	As the estate is in Peng Chau, there is no vehicular access to the chutes to remove refuse from the huge collection bins. Wicker bins and plastic bags are used for collecting and transporting rubbish instead.

Problem of Speeding Among Public Light Bus Drivers

19. **MR LAU KONG-WAH** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the problem of speeding among public light bus (PLB) drivers, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the number of prosecutions against PLB drivers for speeding in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown of such cases by the districts in which the offences were allegedly committed;*
- (b) *whether it knows the current number of PLBs throughout the territory which have been installed with speed warning devices (SWDs), and whether it has assessed the effectiveness of SWDs in deterring PLB drivers from speeding;*
- (c) *whether it will consider enacting legislation to make the installation of SWDs on PLBs mandatory; if not, of the reasons for that; and*
- (d) *whether, in vetting applications by operators to continue to operate green minibus routes, it will consider making reference to their drivers' record of conviction for speeding, so as to make them step up their supervision over the driving of their drivers?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Chinese): Madam President, the number of prosecutions against PLBs for speeding in 1999, 2000 and 2001 were 1 151, 1 555 and 1 499 respectively. The police do not maintain statistics on the breakdown of these cases by districts.

The programme for installing speed display units on green minibuses commenced in August 2002. So far, about 120 green minibuses have installed such a device among which 62 are providing overnight services. Feedback from both the operators and passengers is positive. They generally consider the device useful in monitoring the speed of minibuses and deterring drivers from speeding.

The initial target of the Transport Department (TD) is to install speed display units on all green minibuses providing overnight services and the Department has already written to the concerned operators in this regard. As the installation programme has only commenced for a few months, the TD will thoroughly review the effectiveness of the scheme upon completion and consider whether and how to extend it to other PLBs.

In considering applications for renewal of passenger service licences for green minibus services, the TD takes into account the operators' capability and

records in managing and regulating the driving behaviour of their drivers. During the past three years, a total of 12 warning letters were issued to six green minibus operators in respect of their drivers' speeding problem. The TD will continue to closely monitor the situation and liaise with the operators as appropriate.

Prevention and Cure of Cancer

20. **MS EMILY LAU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the prevention and cure of cancer, will the executive authorities inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the membership list, terms of reference and work portfolio of the Cancer Co-ordinating Committee (CCC), and the efforts the Committee has made in the prevention and cure of breast cancer since its establishment last year;*
- (b) *the time currently taken by the Hong Kong Cancer Registry to compile statistics on the incidence rates of cancer, and the authorities' measures to assist the Registry in speeding up the processing of relevant information;*
- (c) *the annual expenditure on preventing breast cancer since the introduction of the Woman Health Programme, and its percentages in the overall expenditure of the Programme in the respective years; and the expenditure on the prevention of breast cancer under the Programme budgeted for the coming year; and*
- (d) *the respective numbers of women who were diagnosed as having developed breast cancer and those who died of the disease in the past two years?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Chinese):
Madam President,

- (a) To better combat and prevent cancer, the Government has set up a high-level CCC in 2001. It is chaired by the Secretary for Health,

Welfare and Food, with membership comprising cancer experts, academics, physicians from the public and private sectors, and public health professionals. The membership list is attached at Annex.

The terms of reference of the CCC are to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan and make recommendations for the effective prevention and control of cancer in Hong Kong. The work of the CCC focuses on four priority areas:

- Cancer data and priorities;
- Cancer prevention and screening;
- Cancer services and treatment standards; and
- Cancer research and development.

Breast cancer is a priority area for the CCC. It launched a pilot project on breast cancer in October 2002 with the following objectives:

- to explore ways and means of further improving the data collection process;
- to study the feasibility of collecting a comprehensive list of epidemiological and clinical variables for breast cancer registration in Hong Kong; and
- to link the cancer data to death data, and develop an information system to facilitate the collection of the clinical variables and to improve the reporting rate for breast cancer registration.

The CCC will make reference to the findings of the project upon its completion in making recommendations on the primary prevention, screening, and treatment services for breast cancer.

- (b) The Hong Kong Cancer Registry compiles cancer data of the local population, collecting 140 000 to 150 000 episodes of such data

each year including the demographic, anatomical and pathological information of cancer patients. Owing to the large volume of work involved in sorting, validating, matching and categorizing the data collected, the time lag for producing the consolidated data of a particular year is usually two to three years, which is comparable with international standards adopted in terms of data quality and reporting time.

One of the main tasks of the CCC is to enhance the collation of cancer data. An Expert Working Group has been established to take forward the subject with a view to further improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Hong Kong Cancer Registry.

- (c) The Department of Health (DH) set up the Woman Health Service in 1994. The aim is to promote the health of women and address their health needs at various stages of life through (i) enhancing the awareness and encouraging the practice of healthy lifestyle in women; (ii) educating women on the prevention of important health problems; and (iii) providing women with specific screening services including that for breast cancer. The DH provides women health services not only through its three Woman Health Centres but also its 10 Maternal and Child Health Centres. Through physical examination and investigations, health talks, counselling and workshops, clients are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and, if necessary, those who have suspected abnormalities will be referred to specialists for further management. In addition, women health services are also provided by the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong.

Breast cancer prevention requires a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach involving health promotion, preventive and curative services provided by the DH, Hospital Authority, NGOs and private sector. This approach is similar to practices overseas. As breast cancer prevention is integral to the provision of different component of the health service, we cannot separately account for the relevant resources involved. Nonetheless, the total resources spent on the three Women Health Centres amount to \$18 million each year.

- (d) The respective number of new cases of female breast cancer and those who died of the disease in the most recent two years for which data are available are set out below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of new cases</i>	<i>No. of deaths</i>
1999	1 787	395
2000	1 952 (provisional figure)	397

Annex

Membership List of CCC

Chairman:

Dr E K YEOH Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Members (16 numbers):

Dr P Y LEUNG Deputy Director, Department of Health

Dr Wing-man KO Director (Professional Services and Public Affairs),
Hospital Authority

Dr John CHAN Council Member,
Anatomical Pathology Specialty Board,
Hong Kong College of Pathologists

Dr Kin-sang CHAN Chairman, Hong Kong Society of Palliative
Medicine

Dr William FOO Director, Hong Kong Cancer Registry/Consultant,
Department of Radiotherapy and Oncology,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Dr James HWANG Chief of Service of Surgery,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Chairman:

Prof Philip JOHNSON	Chairman, Department of Clinical Oncology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Dr Kam-hing LAM	Private practitioner
Prof T H LAM	Head, Department of Community Medicine, University of Hong Kong
Prof Edith LAU	Department of Community and Family Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Dr Anne LEE	Chief of Service (Clinical Oncology), Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital
Prof Raymond LIANG	Prof of Haematology and Oncology, University of Hong Kong
Prof Jonathan SHAM	Head, Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Hong Kong
Dr Vivian WONG	Chairman, Clinical Co-ordinating Committee (Obstetrics and Gynaecology), Hospital Authority
Dr S V LO	Head, Research Office, Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Dr Thomas TSANG	Consultant (Community Medicine), Department of Health

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motions. Two motions with no legislative effect. Since Members are already very familiar with the time limits, I shall make no repetition here.

First motion: Teaching in small classes.

TEACHING IN SMALL CLASSES

MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, teaching in small classes has always been a dream of the education sector in Hong Kong. The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Prof Arthur LI, remarked right upon his assumption of office, "A class size of 20 students in primary school is my dream." Today, I have moved a motion on teaching in small classes for both secondary and primary schools. But I do not know whether Prof Arthur LI, caught in the vat culture of the Education Department, will now gainsay what he advocated in the past, thus making the dream teaching in small classes a mere illusion.

Parents support teaching in small classes. They all hope that their children can receive personalized and appropriate attention in school. In Hong Kong presently, the class size in secondary school is 40 and that in primary school 37. Faced with large classes, teachers can hardly pay any personalized attention to their students. Much less can they lay any equal emphasis on their students' development in the five domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics, explore their potentials in these domains, identify their aptitudes and talents and then offer them personalized education.

The Subsidized Primary Schools Council, the Union of Heads of Aided Primary Schools of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Elementary Education Research Society recently launched a signature campaign, and within a very short span of time, managed to collect 100 000 signatures from parents who wanted the Government to reduce the average class size. A couple of days ago, the Hong Kong Elementary Education Research Society conducted a further consultation exercise among teachers and parents to gauge their views on how the local education system should respond to the shrinking of the school children population. Coincidentally, 86% of the parents and 86% of the teachers considered that the existing number of teachers should be maintained while the class size should be reduced. It is thus very clear that teaching in small classes is the prevalent aspiration of society in regard to education.

It is an incontestable fact that teaching in small classes can improve the quality of teaching, foster teacher-student interaction and student participation in the classroom, and enhance the care and counselling available to individual students. In the past, the Government was reluctant to implement teaching in small classes on the ground that Hong Kong was a tiny but densely populated place, and schools even had to be operated on a bi-sessional basis, so the class

size had to be as large as possible, lest it would be difficult to implement compulsory education. In the colonial times, local education, which laid emphasis on quantity instead of quality, was founded on a pyramidal system of examinations and elimination. Students who failed to achieve the academic results required were screened out and had to leave school at the dividing points of the third, fifth and sixth forms, thus becoming the victims of the education system.

However, the colonial era is now history. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) has put forward the ideal of lifelong education. This means that all students should acquire the basic learning abilities at the stage of basic education and then seek to upgrade themselves for the rest of their life through self-studies and course attendance. No student can possibly learn and grow up without experiencing any problems. If they cannot receive the support of their families and schools when they encounter setbacks, they may lose confidence in themselves and fail to stand up again. Family backgrounds vary from student to student, and schools are always the last protectors of students. But teachers who are faced with large classes are practically unable to pay any personalized attention to students, so once a student lags behind in his studies, he will become a victim of the education system. This is as much a misfortune for our times as for the education sector.

Madam President, society is constantly changing; the changes are such that we now even have a chance to realize the dream of teaching in small classes. According to government statistics, due to the declining birth rate, by the year 2005, the number of primary-school-age children will decrease by 30 000 from the level of 2003. In 2010, it will drop a further 80 000, or 23%. The drastic reduction in the number of students offers the Government a golden opportunity to eventually achieve teaching in small classes while roughly maintaining the existing level of funding for education. It may do so district by district, school net by school net, school by school and grade by grade. It may start with those districts and school nets with a declining student population, start with Primary One and Secondary One, and reduce the class size in successive years and separate stages.

Madam President, if the Government is willing to implement teaching in small classes and reduce the class size systematically and naturally in the light of the population sizes of individual areas — I mean, if it does not aim to achieve full-scale implementation instantly but tries instead to start from Primary One and Secondary One and then gradually moves upward grade by grade, and if it

can also start from districts and school nets with declining population, then it will be simply unnecessary to incur the extra \$3.6 billion claimed by the Government. The virtue of such a scheme is that with the exception of schools in some newly developed areas, the primary and secondary schools in most other areas will be able to implement teaching in small classes within 10 years without incurring any huge additional resources. Therefore, teaching in small classes is no longer a dream. It is not the Government's inability so much, it is simply its reluctance. Some in society even ask, "Why is it impossible to implement teaching in small classes, even if the Government thus has to deploy additional resources? If teaching in small classes can bring forth quality education, it should be put in place step by step." I hope the Government can also note this view.

Madam President, in other countries and regions, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and China, the golden opportunity of a declining birth rate is also capitalized to implement teaching in small classes. Naturally, the definition of teaching in small classes does vary from place to place. But in general, a base of 20 with adjustment downward to 15 or upward to 25 can still be regarded as teaching in small classes. The schools under the English Schools Foundation (ESF) and other international schools in Hong Kong, where the maximum class size is roughly 25, are the local pioneers of teaching in small classes. Therefore, whether on the basis of foreign or local experience, one can say that the class size of 25 is acceptable to teaching in small classes in Hong Kong, and this should be adopted as the target for the local education sector. It is only after setting down the class size of 25 as the ultimate target that we can conduct our education planning and determine our demand for schools and teachers on the basis of the student population. This is precisely the reason why I oppose the amendment of the Liberal Party. Once the amendment is passed, it will be impossible to draw up planning for education.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MRS SELINA CHOW, took the Chair)

Madam Deputy, I now wish to say a few words on the experience of Shanghai in regard to teaching in small classes. The average class size in mainland China used to be roughly 50. In 1996, seizing the opportunity offered by its diminishing population, Shanghai started to implement teaching in small classes. After six years of effort, 300, or more than one third, of the 800 primary schools in Shanghai have achieved the objective of maintaining the class

size at 25. In the process of implementing teaching in small classes, Shanghai also took stock of its teaching experience, and admirable results have been achieved. In Shanghai, there are now 2.5 teachers for one small class, and that is nearly 100% more than that of Hong Kong. These teachers often stay in the classrooms of their classes, so that they can readily look after their students. When recapitulating the virtues of teaching in small classes, Mr ZHANG Min-sheng, Vice-Director of the Shanghai Education Commission, commented to the effect that teaching in small classes "has induced a series of reforms in concepts of education, curriculum contents and pedagogy." In other words, the implementation of teaching in small classes in Shanghai has fostered the education reform of the municipality. But the education reform of Hong Kong is still founded on the basis of large classes, all about lip service, and lagging far behind that of Shanghai.

Teaching in small classes is the very foundation of quality education, but it must be adequately supported, especially in terms of the quality of teachers. The failure of teaching in small classes in California, the United States can serve as a good example for Hong Kong. Like Shanghai, California also reduced its class size in 1996, from 28 to 20. But it failed at the same time to ensure the availability of enough classrooms and qualified teachers. The result was thus hardly satisfactory. The Californian experience illustrates clearly that teaching in small classes must be adequately supported by enough classrooms and quality teachers. Only this can yield satisfactory results. At present, due to the economic recession, many quality people are willing to work as teachers; teachers are able to attend in-service training as a result of teaching in small classes; and, in areas with declining population, there are also enough schools and classrooms for the implementation of teaching in small classes. The opportune combination of these factors really provides a golden opportunity to implement teaching in small classes. The Hong Kong Government must grasp this rare opportunity and implement teaching in small classes area by area, grade by grade and year by year, so as to do good to society and students and provide a platform and runway for the taking off of our education reform.

Madam Deputy, if Hong Kong is to advance to knowledge-based economy, it is imperative that it must nurture students' originality and critical thinking faculties. The conventional large class is marked only by a one-way transmission of knowledge, without any adequate teacher-student interaction, much less any creativity and critical thinking. Teaching in small classes can allow students to participate more, communicate more, think more and ask more. It can also allow teachers to adapt their teaching approaches to the specific needs

of their students and give them personalized attention. This will result in closer teacher-student relationships and make teaching much more effective. I therefore wish especially to make the point that teaching in small classes must be backed up by teacher training and in-service training for teachers. Otherwise, it will be hard to bring into play the merits of teaching in small classes if teachers still adopt the old approaches for large classes when teaching small one. This will be similar to the conversion of half-day primary schooling to whole-day schooling. The conversion involves only the lengthening of school hours without any corresponding improvement to the quality of teaching. Society and parents will naturally be disappointed.

Madam Deputy, a remark was frequently heard during the implementation of teaching in small classes in Shanghai: "Lesson preparations must be made with the needs of students in mind". This remark shows clearly that the core of teaching in small classes must be students, or it must be student-oriented. There are 40 students in a large class, so the teacher will inevitably become the focus of teaching activities. In a small class, there are only 25 students, or even fewer. Students can therefore receive more attention from the teacher, thus becoming the focus of teaching. Madam President, I am no dreamer. I just wish to make a dream come true. The dream of teaching in small classes, or the dream of Prof Arthur LI, has long since come true in ESF schools and international schools. Why then is it impossible to make it a reality in schools for local students? Some people argue that since ESF schools and international schools charge fees and their local counterparts do not, the two simply cannot be compared. But we are talking about the pursuit of excellence in education, and such excellence must be extended to all children. Are we saying that even in the case of universal education and children's learning, we must still make a distinction between the rich and the poor, between two different classes? This is not to mention the fact that we are just advocating that we should seize the opportunity offered by the declining population and reduce the class size area by area, school net by school net, school by school, grade by grade and year by year. As long as there is a well thought out scheme, as long as we are not so ambitious as to hope for instant success, we will be able to realize the hope of parents and teachers and benefit students ultimately without having to deploy any substantial additional resources. Why is the Government still so unfeeling. Why is it still trying to advance various excuses, to put up a huge array of terrifying figures to resist and delay teaching in small classes? Why is the vat culture within the Education Department so powerful?

Madam Deputy, my motion today is supported by the great majority of students, parents, teachers, headmasters, educational organizations and community figures. It represents the aspiration of society and the trend of the international education sector. It involves the fundamental interests of students. It is the spring late coming, and the very basis of the education reform. I hope that this sensible, reasonable and timely dream can come true in our schools, in our classrooms and among our students as early as possible.

With these remarks, Madam Deputy, I beg to move.

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, as the number of children of school age has been decreasing in recent years and it is the golden opportunity now for reducing the class sizes in primary and secondary schools, this Council urges the Government to implement, in a gradual and orderly manner and complementing with relevant teacher training, "teaching in small classes" in each grade of primary and secondary schools on a one-grade-per-year basis so as to achieve the ultimate target of 25 students per class, with a view to enhancing teaching efficacy, improving teacher-student relationship and providing counselling and teaching according to students' individual needs, thereby improving the quality of basic education and fulfilling the expectations of society and parents."

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong be passed.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Tommy CHEUNG 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 Mr Tommy CHEUNG to speak and move his amendment.

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, I move that Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion be amended, as printed on the Agenda.

As a result of the declining birth rate of Hong Kong in recent years, the number of school-age children is far fewer than estimated. According to the information of the Education and Manpower Bureau, there are around 490 000 school-age Primary One students at present, but the number will decrease by around 30 000 three years later, and it is projected that the number will further decrease to 410 000 by 2009. It is projected in the newly published report by the Director of Audit that the school-age children population would decline by 17% eight years later, the number of students enrolled would continue to fall and there will inevitably be surplus resources in education.

It is proposed in the original motion that the golden opportunity should be grasped to promote teaching in small classes with a view to enhancing teaching efficacy. The Liberal Party basically does not object to this general direction. When we discuss whether teaching in small classes should be implemented, however, we should not only consider the advantages of teaching in small classes. We should also discuss the reduction of the teacher-student ratio while reducing the class size.

Let me explain this point. Assuming that a school that has not adopted the activity approach has 30 classes and 37 students in each class, it has a total of 1 110 students. Calculating on the basis of an average teacher-student ratio of 1:20.8 in Hong Kong, the school needs 54 teachers. Assuming that the intake is reduced to 750 students while the teacher-student ratio and numbers of classes remain unchanged, the school only needs 36 teachers. Deducting 36 from 54, then 18 teachers, that is, one third of the teachers have to be laid off.

If teaching in small classes should be implemented as a result of the dropping school-age children population, as pointed out by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, while teachers cannot be laid off, then the school must reduce the teacher-student ratio. Dividing 750 students by 54 teachers, we will get a teacher-student ratio of 1:14, which is actually very close to the teacher-student ratio of universities. If the teacher-student ratio of secondary schools is reduced, should universities make a corresponding adjustment? How many resources will be required then?

Which advanced and developed countries in the world have such a low teacher-student ratio? According to the principle of funding on the basis of the numbers of classes employed by the Education Department, the Administration must substantially increase funding to meet the costs of each class to facilitate the implementation of teaching in small classes and secure the rice bowls of teachers.

In fact, an increasing number of parents think that the quality of teachers is vastly varied. Report No. 39 of the Audit Commission has analysed the achievement of the objective of primary education, and stated that only 41% and 57% of the parents think that English and Mathematics teaching in primary schools have respectively attained the basic standards fully. On average, only 50% of the parents think that their children's development in the five domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics, and capability for independent thinking have attained the basic standards. During the year 2001-02, 12% of the primary school teachers did not attend any seminars on education, and 44% did not take up training courses to learn new teaching methodologies. Therefore, teaching in small classes cannot solve all the existing problems of primary and secondary schools. If the Government does not allocate additional resources to provide training and upgrade the quality of teachers, it will only get half the result with twice the efforts in the implementation of teaching in small classes.

The Chief Executive pledged in his policy address last year that government investment in education would only increase but not decrease regardless of the economic situation. But in the face of serious fiscal deficits, the Liberal Party thinks that the Administration cannot simultaneously achieve all ideals in respect of education, therefore, it should prudently determine the priorities of various areas of its education portfolio. We think that if the number of students has decreased but the resources allocated to primary and secondary schools have not seen any corresponding decrease, the surplus resources cannot be deployed to other areas of education, for instance, the possible change of three-year university system into four-year in future and the introduction of higher diploma, associate degree, professional training and continuing education courses that require an injection of enormous resources to implement.

Moreover, we should not forget that the Chief Executive has pledged that whole-day schooling would be implemented in 60% of the primary schools before 2007. The education cause in Hong Kong requires money in all aspects. If the Government does not consider how resources can be suitably deployed before implementing teaching in small classes, then there can be no definite date for the implementation of whole-day schooling.

Furthermore, we have to gain a clear idea of the definition of "small classes". In Europe, the United States and Australia where there are abundant resources, the general class size has been reduced to fewer than 20 students; a

small class can comprise fewer than 30 students in Britain, and fewer than 40 students in some Asian countries. Summing up, there is not a common standard on the number of students in small classes in the international community yet.

Therefore, the Liberal Party can hardly agree to the suggestion in the original motion to set the size of a small class at 25 students per class in the absence of scientific proof. Why can the quality of teaching improve when the class size in primary and secondary schools is reduced from almost 40 students at present to 25? Why can it not be 26, 22 or 18 students? At present, various countries have divided views on whether or not teaching in small classes can really achieve the expected result of enhancement. An academic has recently written to *The Economist*, a famous financial magazine, stating that there is no evidence to prove that teaching in small classes is directly related to upgraded quality of teaching.

Thus, we urge the Administration to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth study before implementing teaching in small classes. We also suggest expeditiously launching the trial scheme for teaching in small classes that will soon be launched, but the three-year period of the trial scheme as originally scheduled is too long and I hope that the period can be shortened. Before confirming that the implementation of teaching in small classes in Hong Kong is really effective, it is unsuitable for us to draw any conclusion about teaching in small classes in advance and we should not set the class size as 25 students.

If we discuss teaching in small classes in isolation, everybody would find that it is a very attractive ideal. However, we cannot implement teaching in small classes for the sake of winning an applause and look at education policies from a single perspective. Teaching in small classes must be complemented by a reduction in the teacher-student ratio and provision of additional resources.

In fact, not only do I have worries about the implementation of teaching in small classes, but even teachers also have worries. I have an experience recently. I am a school manager of a secondary school and during the consultation period on the change of the school into a Direct Subsidy Scheme school, we suggested admitting fewer students to make the school more attractive and reducing the class size to 32 students so that there would be a lower teacher-student ratio and teachers could receive more training. However, the teachers unexpectedly objected because they thought that it would not be consistent with the century-long tradition of the school and the philosophy of

whole-man education in the five domains as advocated by the Education Department. Given the existing school of 1 400 students, the students of the school could participate in a lot of extra-curricular activities such as philharmonic orchestra, choir, athletics and many ball competitions, but if the number of students decreased to 1 000, there might not be enough and suitable students to participate in many activities. Thus, the teachers supported maintaining the class size at 38 students after the school has become a Direct Subsidy Scheme school.

It is most ironical that some schools have very small class sizes and some classes have fewer than 25 students, but they still fail to attract students to enrol at them. Nevertheless, in some schools that are run very well, even though the class size is maintained at 40 students, parents will still vie with one another in enrolling their children. Thus, if the number of students in each class is reduced for the implementation of teaching in small classes, for instance, if it is announced that the so-called elite schools will admit fewer students, I believe many parents will not agree.

I reiterate that the Liberal Party does not oppose the implementation of teaching in small classes, but we are only asking the Government to consider first the appropriate level at which the class size should be set and work out the priority to be given to various education policies under the premise of proper deployment of resources. It should not implement teaching in small classes in order to secure the rice bowls of teachers at all costs, regardless of the means and cost-effectiveness. I also hope that colleagues of the Democratic Party will support my amendment.

With these remarks, I beg to move.

Mr Tommy CHEUNG moved the following amendment (Translation):

"To add "to expeditiously study whether or not it is feasible, under the premise of proper deployment of resources," after "this Council urges the Government"; and to delete "so as to achieve the ultimate target of 25 students per class" after "'teaching in small classes' in each grade of primary and secondary schools on a one-grade-per-year basis". "

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Mr Tommy CHEUNG to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion, be passed. Does any Member wish to speak?

MS EMILY LAU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, I rise to speak in support of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion.

Before Prof Arthur LI assumed office as the Secretary, he had said in a radio programme that he had a dream. But after he has entered the mansions of the nobility, it appears as if someone has poured cold water on him and he has been awakened. Today, we are debating whether what the Secretary dreamt is right. Is that what society should go after? I hope that the Secretary would try his best not to read from his script when he later speaks and tells us what he really thinks from the bottom of his heart.

His dream may be very expensive. I have received a letter from the Secretary asking us to support Mr Tommy CHEUNG's amendment. There is no problem because all of us can lobby. The Secretary (or his staff) has said that although the school-age children population has declined, it will conversely rise by 2009. As far as I can remember, information from the government department has not mentioned that the relevant figure will conversely increase and the Secretary may explain that later. We also asked a relevant question at a meeting with the Director of Audit this morning. Madam Deputy, I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and I will mention some information in the report of the Audit Commission. But I will not draw a conclusion or step beyond the line. As the deputy chairman, I am even clearer about that of course.

However, why will there be a decline in the school-age children population? One of the reasons given by the Census and Statistics Department is that people do not wish to have children because the present economic situation is just too bad. If TUNG Chee-hwa continues to be the Chief Executive, the economic situation will continue to be poor and people will not bear children for a certain period of time. I do not know why the relevant figure will conversely rise by 2009, but a more important point is that the Secretary has said that \$800,000 public money will have to be spent on each of the classes. For there to be 4 500 additional classes by 2010, as Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong has just said, an additional \$3.6 billion in public expenditure will be incurred. Even if we really have to spend such an amount of money, I believe it is worthwhile for Hong Kong to consider spending it.

Madam Deputy, coming back to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion, the report by the Director of Audit indicates that 106 out of 326 whole-day primary schools in Hong Kong have vacant classrooms and 30 of such schools even have seven or more vacant classrooms. I believe that Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong has

proposed the motion must be because of such circumstances. He has not asked the Government to inject billions of public money all of a sudden. But since there are vacant classrooms, why can they not be used? Are these classrooms being used to keep mice or as storerooms? Why can we not give students and teachers some more space?

I also understand the point made by Mr Tommy CHEUNG just now, that there are such small classes and the classes have become so small precisely because more parents cannot be attracted to enrol their children at those schools. If more parents can be attracted, more students will enrol. There may be many causes and, if a three-year study has to be conducted, the Secretary should actually consider whether students coming out of such classes that have been forced to become small are better in quality. Teachers will certainly be happier because they will have less pressure and can mark fewer examination papers. Even if the small classes cannot attract more parents, can we seize this opportunity to give the people concerned more room to think about the matter?

We are actually arguing about whether teaching in small classes is good or not, and I have already discussed the matter with many teachers and principals. Many of them think that teaching in small classes is good and they have said that Prof Arthur LI should use his brain more. I say Prof Arthur LI will certainly use his brain, but they think that the Secretary is not worldly and does not know the realistic situation. Nevertheless, some have said that teaching in small classes may not necessarily be good and I have also heard some university lecturers say so. Therefore, I understand that the subject is very controversial. However, as Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong has said, since many schools have vacant classrooms, why can they not try out the proposal? Madam Deputy, we have heard the view that the numbers of classes should be reduced. For instance, if there are four classrooms for small classes and the number of classes is reduced, there will be two vacant classrooms. What will happen next year? There will be less funding next year and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has also pointed out that such a reduction will lead to a reduction in the number of teachers because the school will no longer need so many teachers. I hope that will not be the case. I understand that it needs money, but still I hope that we can try our best.

Mr CHEUNG has just mentioned the report of the Director of Audit and the Secretary really has to consider that some figures may not necessarily be related to teaching in small classes but to the education system as a whole. The

Audit Commission has interviewed some parents, teachers and principals in primary schools, asking them whether they think that education at present has afforded students full development in the domain of intellect. The result is not up to standard: 47% of these parents think that it can do so but the initiative of students is not up to standard while 44% of these parents say yes, 36% of these teachers and 46% of these principals say that it can do so. Concerning innovation and thinking, the result is even poorer and 37%, 28% and 30% of parents, teachers and principals respectively think that it can do so. We can see from these figures that — it has nothing to do with Prof Arthur LI who has just assumed office — teachers, parents and principals think that it is not up to standard.

Madam Deputy, regarding the medium of instruction, Mr CHEUNG has just said that it is particularly dependent on the views of secondary school principals on the standard of Chinese. 31% of them think that it is satisfactory, but only 4% of the secondary school principals think that the standard of English is fully satisfactory. The Mathematics subject is not in any way better and only 33% of the secondary school principals think that the standard is satisfactory. There are the problems. Will teaching in small classes be helpful? I am not sure, but I have heard many teachers and principals say that small classes will certainly put less pressure on them. Why can we not try our best to try out the proposal now that there are so many vacant classrooms? Why will it cause the funding to be reduced next year? Therefore, I hope the Secretary will consider this.

I also agree with Mr CHEUNG that a three-year period for the trial is really too long, and as Mr Jasper TSANG said at a meeting the other day, there may not be a conclusion three years later and we may have wasted our effort.

Lastly, now that a Member has talked about Shanghai, I would also like to talk about Shanghai though I cannot visit the Mainland. Madam Deputy, when the Shanghai Municipal Government talked about the significance of teaching in small classes, it said that it could provide high standard and high quality universal compulsory education to meet the growing demand of parents for quality education and allow progress in education to tune in with international development. Many parents in Hong Kong have enrolled their children at international schools and I believe the Secretary fully understands the international trend for many of his colleagues have also enrolled their children at international schools.

With these remarks, I support the original motion.

DR YEUNG SUM (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the Democratic Party conducted a questionnaire survey by voice telephone on teaching in small classes from 22 to 25 November and got the response of 545 people.

When these 545 interviewees were asked whether they agreed that the average class size of 33 to 34 students in primary and secondary schools was too large, 26.4% of them indicated that they very much agreed and 32.5% indicated that they agreed. In other words, the total number of interviewees who very much agreed and agreed exceeded 60%; 23.5% indicated that they did not agree and 4.4% very much disagreed while 13.2% indicated that they had no comment or did not know.

The second question we asked was that reducing the number of students per class was advantageous to teachers and students, and 51.2% of them indicated that they very much agreed and 28.1% indicated that they agreed, that is, the percentage of interviewees who very much agreed and agreed basically exceeded 60%.

Concerning the question of whether they agreed with the suggestion to reduce the number of students per class in primary and secondary schools to 25 students, 38% of them indicated that they very much agreed and 24.6% indicated that they agreed, that is, nearly 62.6% of the interviewees very much agreed or agreed.

As regards interviewees who thought that reducing the number of students per class could more directly improve the teaching quality than reducing the periods of teachers: 32.3% of them indicated that they very much agreed and 31.7% indicated that they agreed, that is, 64% of the interviewees very much agreed or agreed.

On 13 November when the Government responded to the oral question raised by Mr SZETO Wah on teaching in small classes, it indicated that the Government planned to implement teaching in small classes for the junior classes of 30 to 40 public schools in the next school year, but such particulars as the detailed timetable for the implementation of teaching in small classes, the criteria for selection of schools to participate in the trial scheme and the districts to which the participating schools belong had not been decided. The Democratic Party hopes that the Government will expeditiously announce the above details and let schools interested in the implementation of teaching in small classes know how they can file applications with the Education Department.

Moreover, a more important point is that the Democratic Party thinks that when the Education and Manpower Bureau implements the policy on teaching in small classes, it should carry out a synchronous reform in such aspects as the curriculum, teacher qualifications and resources arrangements for teaching in small classes. In other words, it not only has to implement teaching in small classes but also introduce other support measures. Specifically, the Government should encourage schools that implement teaching in small classes to become learning-type schools, for instance, they can implement school-focused retraining through teaching research societies, groups for the professional growth of teachers, study societies, project learning and school-based curricula. On the one hand, the school administration and parent-teacher associations should join force to promote school-focused retraining, and on the other, the Government should assist in designing the curricula for teaching in small classes and co-ordinating the production of teaching materials and making amendments to the contents of textbooks through organizing seminars. It should also promote co-operation between school teachers in designing teaching activity modules, making adjustments to teaching materials in the light of the differences between individual students and providing diversified teaching materials to achieve the objective of personalized teaching.

Although the experience of the United States in strongly advocating the policy of teaching in small classes and the follow-up evaluation, study and statistical data so far fail to fully affirm whether the policy can improve the academic performance of students, the Democratic Party thinks that the Government should seize this excellent opportunity of a decline in the birth rate to spare no effort in promoting the policy of teaching in small classes of 25 students per class to ameliorate the existing over-crowding in primary and secondary schools with an average of 33 students and 34 students per class respectively, as well as creating an environment that can better tune in with the promotion of education reform in Hong Kong.

The Democratic Party is of the view that it is essential to implement teaching in small classes and it should be one of the objectives of our education reform, otherwise, the Government will only get half the result with twice the efforts when implementing various reforms, and there are quite a number of examples that can illustrate this point:

The first example is that the Government is now implementing inclusive education the original intent of which is to mitigate the labelling effects on

students. But since the present teacher-student ratio is almost 1:40, most teachers cannot take care of individual students such as hyperactive or autistic students to whom greater attention should be paid.

The second example is that since the academic bands for secondary school places allocation have changed from five to three, there are virtually greater performance differences between students, and teachers have to spend more time instructing students who need to build up a sounder base.

The third example is that the Education Department encourages teachers to plan project learning to boost students' interest in learning. However, since the teacher-student ratio is very often 1:30 or even 1:40, teachers lack sufficient care for each student and the effectiveness of project learning is therefore not obvious.

The fourth example is that the Education Department started implementing the target-oriented policy around a decade ago, but it has been difficult to implement the policy for the class size is too large, as a result, the policy exists in name only.

The four examples cited above can clearly show that reducing the class size in primary and secondary schools is the key to the education reform and there should be effective support measures for the implementation and promotion of the education reform. The Democratic Party really hopes that the Government can seize the opportunity offered by a decline in the birth rate and spare no effort in promoting teaching in small classes to genuinely improve the quality of education, thus enabling us to make an important step forward in the education reform. Thank you, Madam Deputy.

MR ABRAHAM SHEK: Madam Deputy, small class teaching is an unrealized challenge for local schools, though it has been a common practice in many Western countries. The approach, which focuses on diversified teaching and individualized learning, has long been a subject of intense research in studies overseas. With personal experience as a qualified teacher, I believe, and it is also generally believed, that reducing class size inversely enhances the effectiveness of learning, and improves teacher-student relationship.

Hong Kong is going to conduct its own study on small class teaching. Starting from the next school year, a two-year pilot scheme will be launched in over 30 public primary schools. When completed, the Education Department

will evaluate the scheme and determine whether this educational approach should be expanded to a territory-wide practice.

With this timetable, Hong Kong will not likely adopt the small class educational approach for another five years. This is sad for Hong Kong. This means that Hong Kong will lag further behind many other developed countries and even some of our neighbouring cities. For example, Shanghai adopted the small class teaching approach in 1996; and even Shenzhen has started implementing small class teaching. I would say that the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is adopting an unreasonably over-cautious attitude towards the issue, given that there are already many successful overseas experiences and test cases; plus most teachers and parents generally support this educational approach.

In reply to a question raised in this Council two weeks ago, the Government justified its caution by claiming that the issue is highly controversial in nature. In the Government's words, "changes to class size involve a huge amount of resources and, so far, there lacks conclusive evidence proving the cost-effectiveness of reduced class size. Adopting a prudent attitude is, therefore, necessary." In plain English, the Government is saying that it is unwilling to expedite full implementation of small class learning across the territory.

I would agree that Hong Kong is not, financially or technically, prepared to reduce the class size from "regular" to "small" immediately. But this does not mean that Hong Kong should not embrace this educational method as a long-term initiative. Personally, I fully support the implementation of small class teaching, but to achieve this goal in the long term, the Government must take its first steps now. A reform of this scope should be planned early and carried out in gradual phases.

As Hong Kong's birth rate continues to fall, student enrolments in primary and secondary schools are falling, too. Some schools are already experiencing difficulty in filling up their places. In the past, demand for primary placement was so high that some schools had to split into morning and afternoon sessions to accommodate the overflow of students. Today, some of these schools face a shortage.

This is a golden opportunity for changing class size. Schools experiencing a student shortfall can now transfer unused resources from vacant places towards the implementation of small class learning. With education

expenditure accounting for a considerably large percentage of our government purse, this move avoids adding more financial burden while allowing us to initiate an innovative new teaching method. In fact, the Government should try to tackle the budget problem by redeploying existing resources as far as possible.

Another immediate challenge posed by small class teaching is to have properly trained teachers. This problem, however, is not insurmountable. I believe that our teachers will certainly be able to adjust to small class teaching if they are given the appropriate training.

Small class teaching, of course, will not solve all our prevailing problems in the education sector. Resources should also be applied to initiatives like whole-day primary schooling and eliminating "floating classes" in some secondary schools. Reforms must also be introduced in the examination-oriented, grade-conscious curriculum and teaching mode. In a successful education programme, students learn with their head and heart, not with their dictated notes and rote. Students should also be physically and mentally well-developed. They should learn ethics and have social conscience, and develop a positive approach towards life. Clearly, these qualities cannot be taught through class-size reform alone.

The Government has spent a huge amount of its resources on education. Its funding commitment to education will be consistent in the future. Yet, our students' performance does not remotely meet the expectations of taxpayers and parents. Youngsters today urgently need to improve their attitude towards learning. Their sense of responsibility and moral standards also need to be enhanced. I firmly believe that the attainment of these virtues and values could be achieved through small class teaching, and small class teaching is the first of the bold steps to improve our educational system. Madam Deputy, the Government cannot and should not measure the value of education in terms of IRR (internal rate of return) on the money spent, or its cost-effectiveness formula. Its success must be measured by the moral and educational fibres of our citizens, and the righteousness of our society.

With these words, I support the motion.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, reducing class sizes in primary and secondary schools with a view to enhancing the quality of

teaching is a concept emanated from Report No. 5 of the Education Commission, and it is not something raised by us all of a sudden today. In fact, since the publication of the Report, the Government decided to reduce the class sizes gradually on a year-by-year basis and at that time people in the education sector and in the community and even parents all thought that the Government was determined to launch education reform in order to raise the quality of education.

The colonial government understood that improvement to basic education must start with reducing class sizes. It is most unfortunate, however, that after the Chief Executive assumed office in 1997, in the name of introducing whole-day schooling for all primary schools, quite a lot of areas saw a move in the opposite direction. These include a suspension of the reduction in class sizes and an increase of two pupils for each class. Now 60% of the schools in Hong Kong have implemented the whole-day school system and the Secretary once said that by the year 2007-08, all of the primary schools in Hong Kong would have changed to the whole-day school system. But this cannot be used as a pretext for not implementing the reduction of class sizes, for there is still an aspiration among members of the public to enhance the quality of education by means of reducing the class sizes. Ms Emily LAU said earlier that the Secretary used to have such a dream before assuming office. The fact is that it is of vital importance that class sizes should be reduced and there is actually a need for the reduction. I would think that we have the right conditions now to implement the reduction of class sizes and it must be implemented.

Regrettably, Prof Arthur LI has made a about turn on assuming office, for he has changed from supporting the idea to delaying its implementation. And to date we do not know what would become in the end. We are very much disappointed indeed. The Secretary has proposed a pilot scheme, but that will take as many as three to six years. He has never told us that the Government is determined to act according to the results of the pilot scheme, or that a sum of money would be set aside to achieve the goal of reducing class sizes. So I would think that the use of such a pilot scheme is in fact trying to let the authorities to sit on it and to let the scheme diminish into obscurity.

I think the use of a pilot scheme to examine if the quality of teaching can be enhanced by reducing class sizes shows that the Government is trying to refute its previous convictions. In practice, a study or a trial will only serve to delay the scheme. On the other hand, we can see a lot of live examples around and

these can be found in places both far away from Hong Kong like the United States and near us, like South Korea and even the Mainland. So live examples really abound and it is unnecessary to spend time and public money on research. It may be argued that such a study is necessary given the difference in the cultural development and background of these countries, but is the cultural background of the Mainland so different from us that the situations of both places deny comparison?

I think not only can we draw reference from our neighbours, but that in Hong Kong we can find a lot of examples too, for while we note that the level of education here is declining, many schools have adopted the system of remedial classes. The concept behind this is to reduce a class of 40 to 20 for teaching efficacy and results have already been seen. As this is employed in many schools, why should trials be conducted? These are just a sheer waste of money. The results of remedial teaching can well be seen in the school results generally, so why should research be carried out?

Also, Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that some teachers thought that small class teaching was not so desirable, for they would have difficulty in finding enough people to organize extra-curricular activities such as athletics, singing contests, and so on. But these activities are actually not the most important. The most important thing is how teachers would teach their pupils and to pass knowledge onto them.

As a teacher, I am also deeply aware of this. If I have a class of 40 pupils, there would absolutely be no chance for me to talk with every one of them and even if I spend all of my time after school to talk with them, it would be difficult for me to talk with them in detail. If the class size can be reduced to 20 or 25 pupils, at least I can meet them individually and I can spend more time talking with them than in the past. Even if I cannot pass a lot of academic knowledge onto them, at least I can talk with them individually and such opportunities of communication would be far more than in the past. That would certainly help raise teaching efficacy, though this may not be quantified readily.

Therefore, I would think that insofar as this point is concerned, we cannot allow people to use study as an excuse. I am not the only person who makes such an argument. Mr Tommy CHEUNG also said that his school had planned to use small class teaching as a point of attraction in its charge into a direct subsidy school. This appeal is not a myth, for not only are the direct subsidy

schools doing this, but all the international schools are making this a point of attraction. Thus this is no myth, for if it is, then no one will bother to pay any attention to it. People will only find the idea attractive if it is true and meaningful. Therefore, I think this system of small class size must be put into force and it should brook no more delay. Any further delay will lead to a decline in the quality of our education.

As we mentioned at a certain panel meeting, the Secretary may not be unwilling to go ahead with this idea, but he is trying to cope with some professionals. For they will say that it would be unconvincing if no research has been done and no solid data are obtained. I hope the Secretary can say to these people that if they really want to make some study and obtain some realistic information, they can just visit the schools in Hong Kong and there is no need to make any more studies. Our schools can give them a true picture of what it is like and so I hope the Secretary would not say again that he has to answer some people anymore.

The issue of resources may be brought up in today's discussions. I remember Mr TUNG told us clearly in the policy address of 2000 that resources for education must not be slashed. Given such an undertaking, why does the Secretary not feel assured to do something bold and decisive? Why has he become so hesitant and allowed himself to be pressurized by the fiscal deficits? Now that he is given such an assurance, why can he not go ahead and try to make his dreams come true? Moreover, the Secretary should also be aware of the fact that many parents and school children have chosen overseas education. That they cast a vote of no confidence in our education system shows clearly that our education system has reached a breaking point and the people cannot stand this any more. I hope the Secretary can think twice about this.

I so submit.

MS AUDREY EU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the original motion moved by Mr CHEUNG mentions that as the birth rate of Hong Kong is falling, now is the golden opportunity for reducing class sizes in primary and secondary schools. However, my view is that, irrespective of whether the birth rate is falling or not, small class teaching is an idea worth supporting. I have three daughters who are studying in schools and from the point of view of a parent, as well as that of

all my friends, it is beyond any doubt that a class size of 25 is better than a class size of 37 or 40 pupils. No research is needed to substantiate such a view.

Teaching in small classes is no innovative idea indeed, for in 1992, the Education Commission suggested to reduce class sizes on a gradual basis. Unfortunately, when Mr TUNG assumed office, he put forward the idea of whole-day schooling and required all primary schools to change to whole-day schools by 2007. And so the plan to reduce class sizes was shelved. Prof Arthur LI, your remarks about a dream which you made before you assumed office have been quoted by many Honourable Members, so I do not wish to repeat them here. When you were saying those words, many people including me, felt that small class teaching might be revived. Unfortunately, later we heard the Education Department say that experts queried the cost-effectiveness of small class teaching and so studies had to be made. Madam Deputy, on this question of cost-effectiveness, if we are to compare small-class teaching with whole-day schooling, which is more cost-effective? On the issue of studies, may I ask the Secretary, if Mr TUNG had undertaken any studies before he introduced the policy of whole-day schooling in primary schools?

Take my youngest daughter as an example. After her school has switched to the whole-day system, the actual increase in her time at school is less than two hours when the meal break is taken away. What she will do are art and craft, domestic science and homework supervision. I do not want to belittle these periods. She comes home a bit later than before and the time she can spare for other activities is less than before. One may say that the time she spends in school is longer and so she should benefit from this. But what about the costs? Her school used to have two sessions, that is, the am and pm sessions, but since the school wanted to an extra hour or so school time, the afternoon section of the school had to move to a new campus. Then the pupils originally in that building had to find another campus. Thus in terms of cost-effectiveness, is whole-day schooling really greater? I feel that this is really open to question.

Compared to whole-day primary schooling, the benefits of small class teaching to pupils is more obvious. As we all know, the worst things about Hong Kong students are that they are too passive and they seldom ask questions and respond to teachers' questions spontaneously. All these problems can be attributed to a large class size. If we hope that these future pillars of Hong Kong can compete favourably and actively in the globalized environment, I think

the Government and the Secretary should create the right conditions for them in the first place.

Some Honourable Members have pointed out that many countries in the West, such as the United States and Britain, have adopted small class teaching since a long time ago. Some classes in these countries are as small as having only eight pupils. Results of the reform show that pupils will get more attention and they are more concentrated in class. Teachers' workload is reduced and they can spend more time improving their teaching methods. Small class teaching can enable the grouping of pupils with similar abilities in order that teaching efficacy can be enhanced.

Some Honourable Members have also pointed out that small class teaching is practised in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Macao and even Shanghai. So this is a worldwide trend and if Hong Kong is to stay competitive, we must not lag behind others.

Mr Tommy CHEUNG said in his speech that small class teaching is not a panacea for all ills. Madam Deputy, no one is saying that small class teaching can solve all the problems. Of course, when teaching method has to be changed, teachers will have to receive training, but that does not mean that one must choose between the two options. The most disappointing thing is that officials from the Education Department have recently told us that the effectiveness of small class teaching and relevant teacher training in this will need to be analysed, that is to say, we must choose one out of the two.

Prof Arthur LI told us yesterday that if small class teaching was to be implemented in all the schools, that would mean an additional expenditure of \$3.6 billion. So it appears that resources are the Government's main concern. However, Madam Deputy, after looking at the motion over and over again, I fail to find Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's proposal mentioning any deadline, that is, requiring the Government to implement small class teaching in all schools by a certain month or year, nor is the motion asking that class size be restricted to 25 pupils. The Government can certainly consider starting to implement small class teaching from Primary One on a one-grade-per-year basis. If the Government thinks that it would be very difficult to achieve the target of 25 students per class in one go, it may try to reduce the class size initially to 30 students, and that is also a good start.

I also heard Mr Tommy CHEUNG point out in his speech that a feasibility study should be carried out on small class teaching, and he also mentioned that a study should be made on the appropriate class size. Madam Deputy, I really do not know why he had to make that point, for there would not be any absolute figure for an appropriate class size. It may vary according to different classes and subjects. For example, in Mathematics, a class of 10 or 15 students would obviously be better than a class of 40 or 50 students. As for English, a class size with more students may be better as they may have more chances of sharing and exchange. So it is not possible that any absolute figure can apply to each subject, place and grade. So when the idea of making a study is raised, I have the impression that it smacks of making excuses, for practically, there can never be any appropriate and absolute figure for the ideal class size. Madam Deputy, what I am more concerned is that as Hong Kong moves towards a knowledge-based economy, it is our pressing task to raise the quality of basic education. It would be a great problem for the whole of Hong Kong if this is not properly dealt with. Therefore, I really hope that the Government will never put up any excuse on this and implement small class teaching as expeditiously as possible. Thank you, Madam Deputy.

MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, is teaching in small classes a good thing? Yes, it is. Is the drop in population currently a golden opportunity? Yes, it is. Shall everyone live in a big house? Yes. Now that the property market is sluggish, so it is a golden opportunity, right? So every family should live in a 1 000 sq ft flat and that can solve the problem of vacant flats and improve the quality of life of the people generally. Of course, these two problems cannot be lumped together for discussion, nor in such a simple analogy. Mr CHEUNG proposed the idea that the ultimate target of 25 students per class should be achieved in all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. This is similar to the suggestion that every family in Hong Kong should dwell in a 1 000 sq ft flat. We must think carefully, for huge resources are involved. Can we afford it? Or is it worthwhile? There is also the question of whether or not an across-the-board approach should be adopted to improve quality, in that the class size should be reduced to 25 students. Or is this the only option available? Should each and every family live in a 1 000 sq ft flat? Why can the class size not be reduced to 20 students? Why can people not live in flats of 1 500 sq ft in area? As taxpayers have to pay for this, so we should think carefully about it. Given the stringent financial situation, how are we going to face this problem? Do we have any concrete figures to support this?

The Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) considers the amendment moved by Mr Tommy CHEUNG is more desirable and more consistent with the realistic situation.

In fact, small class teaching is still a controversial subject in some advanced countries like the United States. Take the example of the State of California, in the first three years after small class teaching has been introduced, only some slight improvement has been seen in student performance as compared to students taught in large classes. There are, however, a few things that should be noted. First, at least \$3 billion was used in California over these three years for such purpose. Second, the maximum class size in Californian schools is 20 students, not 25. Third, small class teaching in California is still at the experimental stage and a lot of problems remain unsolved, such as the question of cost-effectiveness. As small class teaching is a very complicated concept in education, the smallest move will affect the whole situation. To oversimplify the problem may lead to more drawbacks than benefits. I would therefore like to discuss the issue of implementing small-class teaching in Hong Kong from these three perspectives.

First, why is the ultimate target set at 25 students per class rather than 20 or 27? Is it because a class size of 25 students would be more feasible? Why should an across-the-board approach be taken to implement this proposal in all the primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong? Can it not be carried out in some schools as a pilot scheme and then extended to other schools gradually? The State of Tennessee, United States, is an example of success in small class teaching. The reason for its success is that from the initial design to implementation, there are scholars who follow up and research on the project using scientific methods. A small class in Tennessee has about 13 to 17 students and a large class has 22 to 26 students. Since scholars all over the world are studying the question of what is the ideal class size for optimal learning, on what scientific grounds can we say that reducing the class size to 25 students would enable students to achieve the best performance?

Second, it is an indisputable fact that small class teaching calls for commitment of huge resources. As our resources are strained presently, do we have the financial means to implement small class teaching in all the primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong with a class size of 25 students in the next two or three years or even in the next 10 years? According to figures released by the Government today, if teaching in small classes is implemented in primary schools, an additional appropriation of \$3.6 billion would be needed. This

means an extra 31% of resources for primary education. Are we willing to take up this amount or can we afford it? Small class teaching is no magic and it is not certain that reducing the class size to 25 students can raise the efficacy of teaching and that resources should not be considered. The recurrent expenditure on primary school education for this financial year is \$11.7 billion. If the class size is reduced to 25 students, the teacher-student ratio will no longer be 1 to 20.9. Then how many more teachers do we need? How many more teachers should be trained? How many schools should be built? After using more than \$20 billion in California, it has only proved to be a limited success. Then shall we use \$3.6 billion on small class teaching which will not necessarily achieve too much effect?

In fact, small class teaching is presently implemented in the United States in parallel with research conducted at the same time. Apart from the uncertainty as to what the optimal class size should be, there has not been any study so far which can prove that small class teaching in senior grades is effective. Very little research has been done on the issue of cost-effectiveness as well. As to other countries, research findings show that teaching in small classes is not necessarily better than teaching in large classes. In Australia, France and Belgium, for example, the performance of students learning Mathematics in large classes has been proved to be obviously better than those learning the same subject in small classes. Given the lack of substantial support by scientific data, would it not be too risky if we spend a lot of public money to implement small class teaching in all the primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong? Would it not be much more risky if we extend this to senior grades?

A huge amount of resources and other forms of assistance are needed to facilitate teaching in small classes. For example, teachers should receive professional training and development; courses should be offered in the post-secondary institutions to train up teachers capable of teaching in small classes. All in all, there should be in-depth studies, planning and investment. I have worked in the education sector for over 25 years and I know very well that teaching in small classes is only one of the ways to enhance teaching efficacy. Other options are available to achieve the same result, such as reducing the teaching load on a gradual basis.

The DAB thinks that it would be most desirable if the schools are given more flexibility. It would be fine if schools do not exceed the present teacher-

student ratio in secondary and primary schools, that is, 1 to 18 and 1 to 20.9 respectively, for such ratios are acceptable even in advanced countries. Why can schools not be given greater flexibility to choose an option which is suitable for them, such as adopting small class teaching while increasing the instruction hours of teachers, or reducing the instruction hours while increasing the class size a little bit?

I so submit.

MR SZETO WAH (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, first of all, let me discuss the amendment of Mr Tommy CHEUNG. There are two points in his amendment. First, it deletes "so as to achieve the ultimate target of 25 students per class" from the original motion; and, second, it adds the following to the original motion: "to expeditiously study whether or not it is feasible, under the premise of proper deployment of resources".

Regarding the first point, he has not talked about the number of students per class. Not only has he failed to mention any ultimate class size, he has even not set down any target at all. Should a class of 39, down from 40, or a class of 36, down from 37, be regarded as a small class? Should all this be regarded as an implementation of teaching in small classes? Mr Tommy CHEUNG remarked a moment ago that a class of 40 students was already a small class. That being the case, I think he should really rephrase his amendment as follows: "That since teaching in small classes has already been achieved, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion is largely unnecessary".

Second, expressions like "expeditiously", "study", "whether", "proper" and "premise" are all very vague, all meant to distract people's focus. What is meant by "expeditiously"? By "proper deployment of resources"? Is the quality of education any "premise" at all? That he does not delete "as the number of children of school age has been decreasing in recent years" and "it is the golden opportunity now for reducing the class sizes in primary and secondary schools" actually means that he agrees to these two points. Then, why should there be any more need to conduct any studies?

He does not dare to oppose teaching in small classes formally and right in its face, but he has sought to castrate the original motion by means of an amendment. Such a tactic of opposition is even more vicious, and he is a

masked "royalist". It is small wonder that Prof Arthur LI has been lobbying support for him. As for the remarks of Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung, I notice that he has not read the original motion carefully.

Next, I wish to talk about Prof Arthur LI's reply to my oral question on the 13th of this month.

First, he talked about a pilot scheme on teaching in small classes. But this pilot scheme is just a very crude one. The adoption of such a crude scheme as a test really makes us doubt his sincerity, and people simply wonder if his intention is just to make the scheme a failure.

Second, he doubted the effectiveness of teaching in small classes, saying that it was a highly controversial issue. I do not know whether this issue can in any way be as contentious as the enactment of legislation to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law. Just listen to the voices of front-line headmasters and teachers, to the views of parents, and one will see that there is no controversy at all. I believe that even all those experts hiding in the Ivory Tower will choose to send their children to schools with small classes. To question the effectiveness of teaching in small classes is tantamount to insulting all those schools in the whole world (including Hong Kong) which have adopted this approach, for such a query in fact suggests that these schools are all big fools wasting huge resources.

Third, to say that teaching in small classes and the reduced number of classes are two unrelated issues is tantamount to neglecting the fact that the shrinking population of school-age children actually provides a golden opportunity to implement teaching in small classes. Seizing this opportunity can avoid the Audit Commission's criticisms on wastage of resources, and improve the quality of education at the same time.

Fourth, when talking about the educational effectiveness of teaching in small classes, he gave us the impression that he had focused only on academic results as the only standard. This is very much "examination-oriented", running counter to the avowed "people-oriented" principle of the education authorities.

Fifth, Prof Arthur LI said, "The existing teacher-to-pupil ratio in public primary schools is 1:20.8, which is more or less the same as that in developed countries." Mr Tommy CHEUNG also raised this point repeatedly in his

remarks. But he does not know that there is no such thing as a teacher-to-pupil ratio in local schools. In each local primary school, there is only a teacher-to-class ratio, and no teacher-to-pupil ratio has ever been computed. The ratio of 1:20.8 is just a statistical figure of the Education Department, and this figure does not take account of the varying class sizes in different schools, nor does it cover the weekly teaching load of each teacher. It also does not consider the fact that all the classes in the same school may be different in size. Some people have suggested to improve the teacher-to-class ratio instead of adopting teaching in small classes. This approach can no doubt reduce the workload of teachers, but it cannot be phased in orderly area by area, school by school and class by class, and must be implemented in all schools all at the same time. Much more resources will thus be required, and we will also fail to capitalize on the opportunity offered by the shrinking population of school-age children. In fact, the huge resources consumed by this approach will actually upset the scheme on teaching in small classes.

Sixth, Prof Arthur LI talked about cost-effectiveness. This is precisely the core issue. Frankly, when he talks about "cost-effectiveness", he is actually "faltering", unwilling to deploy any resources. Unlike the Chief Executive, who says that he will not "falter", the Secretary is "faltering". The point is that if we grasp this golden opportunity to implement teaching in small classes, instead of increasing the costs, we will only solve the problem of resource wastage. This is the real essence of cost-effectiveness.

I hope that when the policy address is announced in January next year, Prof Arthur LI can at the same time submit a detailed scheme on teaching in small classes to the Council. Such a scheme should be larger in scale and speedier in implementation than the pilot scheme suggested by him.

With these remarks, Madam Deputy, I oppose the amendment and support the original motion.

MR NG LEUNG-SING (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the number of school-age children in Hong Kong has been showing a trend of decline in recent years. As indicated by the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, the birth rate in Hong Kong has dropped 50% over the past 20 years or so, and according to the projections on demographic distribution released by the Planning Department in August this year, the population size of children aged between six

and 11 years will go down from 493 200 in the year 2002 (that is, this year) to 410 500 in 2010, representing a drop of 17%. As projected by the Report No. 39 of the Audit Commission, if the Education Department's current planning on the provision of primary school places remains unchanged, then by the year 2010, there will be an overall surplus of school places amounting to 27 600, which equals the number of places provided by 35 standard primary schools.

To begin with, the constant decline in the number of school-age children in Hong Kong means that the Education Department's school construction programme must change with the times. In general, it must definitely reduce the supply of school places and promptly review the problem of school place mismatches in different areas. Additional schools should be constructed only in areas where there is a shortage of school places, such as Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, and so on.

What is more, the constant decline in the number of school-age children in Hong Kong also means that if the total amount of resources committed to secondary and primary education remains unchanged, the per capita share of resources in the future will increase continuously. On the basis that the population size of children aged between six and 11 years will go down by 17%, and that the average annual cost of providing free primary education to one student is about \$26,000, the per capita share of resources may rise to \$30,420 in 2010. This will be the natural course of changes if no additional resources are injected.

This is of course only one of the directions which may be considered. But given the relatively tight public finances now, there is also a need to consider other alternatives. For instance, if there are any surplus resources in this respect, should we divert them to other policy areas with more urgent needs? Besides, even if we continue to spend these resources on improving primary education, we will still need to consider how best to prioritize the various aspects of education in terms of resource allocation: improvements to teachers' quality, a quicker pace of implementing whole-day primary schooling, curriculum reforms, native English teachers/teaching assistants for primary schools, enhanced information technology application to teaching, improvements to the various student finance schemes and even the provision of education infrastructure to better cater for the needs of new immigrant or cross-boundary students, and so on. If more resources can be allocated to these areas, the work concerned will be able to proceed more quickly and effectively.

As for teaching in small classes in secondary and primary school, its priority in the allocation of resources should be assessed and examined holistically together with all other aspects of education. In addition, we must also study the experience and research findings on teaching in small classes in overseas places. In general, foreign experience does show that teaching in small classes can help improve students' academic results. The main reason is that since students can receive more adequate attention, teacher-student relationship is bound to become more harmonious and students can concentrate better in classes. As for the class size, there is not yet any definite and scientific conclusion. Some academics consider that the suitable class size is also related to social and cultural differences. In some Southeast Asian countries and places, class sizes in primary school are comparatively large, and it is not uncommon to see more than 40 students per class. But the efficacy of teaching there is not low, and their students are also quite outstanding in academic results, comparing no less favourably with their Western counterparts studying in smaller classes. In comparison, Hong Kong's standard class size of 32 to 34 students in primary schools is already on the low side. Besides, while a reduction of class size from 50 or 40 students to 30 students may well achieve more obvious results in improving teaching efficacy, any further reduction from 30 to 25 may not necessarily yield the same result. Given the shape of public finances in Hong Kong now, if huge resources are injected for the sole purpose of rigidly reducing the class size in primary schools to the standard of 25 students, it is questionable if this is a reasonable allocation of resources.

Madam Deputy, many people think that upgrading teacher quality is particularly important to improving secondary and primary education, for they maintain that teachers of outstanding moral and academic standards will still be able to achieve better teaching efficacy even when class sizes are a bit large. This is especially obvious in the education culture of oriental societies. Conversely, if the quality of teachers varies greatly, teaching in small classes may instead expose students to very negative examples. Therefore, the most urgent improvement to secondary and primary education in Hong Kong now should be teacher quality. And, in the first few years of secondary education, the responsibility of class masters/mistresses is especially vital. The Government must focus the provision of resources on the training of teachers. Moreover, secondary and primary school teachers also need to upgrade themselves, keep on learning and progress with the times. It is only when they

have maintained high moral and academic standards that they can really educate people and train up the future backbone of society.

Madam Deputy, I so submit.

MISS CYD HO (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, I rise to speak in support of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion.

Education is in fact an investment in the future by society, and for this reason, I do not think that the Government should only be concerned about the present fiscal deficits and deployment of resources in violation of the principle of sustainable development.

As early as in 1992, the Education Commission (EC) suggested in its Report No. 5 the introduction of small class teaching. At that time, the Report pointed out that according to research findings — Madam Deputy, there was research on that by the EC — a slight change in class size would not lead to any obvious result. It suggested that only when the number of student per class was reduced greatly that there would be marked improvement in student performance. Now that 10 years have passed since 1992 and despite a falling number of school age children, there is not much change to the class size. The class size for conventional teaching remains at 37 students per class.

Why has there been apparently no improvement over the past 10 years? On freshly assuming office, the Chief Executive said that substantial investments would be made education. Even as the deficit problem has remained very serious in recent years, pledges have been made that investments in education would not be slashed. Now we are saying all of a sudden that small classes are only a dream and that we should be realistic. I was very disappointed on hearing that. Some Honourable Members said earlier that they worried that there might be problems with public expenditure and asked how the target of 25 students per class was determined and why the number 25 was chosen.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

The speech made by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong in moving this motion has actually touched on this issue. The case in some overseas countries is that there

are 25 students in each class. I think Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong would not mind at all if the class size is further reduced to 15 students. If the class size is really 15 students, all the people who support this motion would be very happy. Nevertheless, we do not mind a class size of 25 students.

The proposal made by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong to reduce the class size to 25 students is actually quite practical. He is not saying that the class size should be reduced to 15 students or a little more than 15 students. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung used the analogy of a 1 000 sq ft flat and a 1 500 sq ft flat to comment on small class teaching. I do not know if Mr YEUNG was saying that small class teaching is a luxury. If it is not, would Mr YEUNG make a clarification later? I hope Honourable Members will understand that small class teaching is not a luxury, but a necessity. The performance of primary and secondary students in Hong Kong are generally not that satisfactory in their academic work and they are particularly lacking in self-confidence. If we can implement small class teaching and enable teachers to give more individual attention to students, that will be enormously helpful to raising the quality of students. Small class teaching should best begin in lower grades, for when the self-confidence of students can be cultivated at a young age, they will know how to learn by themselves and develop an interest in studying. Hence there will not be any problem for them when they study in universities where the class can be as big as 300 to 400 students. I would also like to answer a question raised by Mr Tommy CHEUNG, that is, if the class size for primary and secondary schools is 25 students per class, then the class size for university should be even smaller. I do not think that is correct, for if students are enabled to build up a solid foundation in basic education, they will know how to learn by themselves when they get older.

Then would teaching in small classes lead to a great surge in funding for education? Actually, the number of school age children has been decreasing over the last 10 years and as many Honourable colleagues have said, if only we can maintain our present level of education funding, we will be able to achieve the goal of teaching in small classes gradually. So the most important thing is for the Education and Manpower Bureau to continue its existing policies and refrain from cutting resources.

I am concerned that when the Financial Secretary compiled the budget this year, he made some changes to some fundamental rules of the game, that is, to make an across-the-board 1.8% cut of the general expenditure. I do not know if

this proposed cut in expenditure would make the Secretary for Education and Manpower reduce the staffing costs of teachers due to the falling number of primary school students, instead of seizing the opportunity to implement small class teaching. Some people will think that this is no panacea and that no single prescription can cure all the ills. But I would think that this prescription can really solve a lot of problems. I would not oppose the suggestion of enhancing teacher training, reducing the number of periods and increasing clerical staff and teaching assistants in addition to teaching in small classes, for there are no conflicts between these proposals. They are not mutually exclusive and may be carried out at the same time. If all of these proposals can be implemented at the same time, we can achieve our goals more quickly.

Instead of studying into the cost-effectiveness of teaching in small classes, we should ask whether or not it has any benefits. For we should never do anything which does not have any benefits. But if it does, then even if the costs are high, we should do it. People always stress of late that since our manufacturing industries have declined and we do not have any natural resources, so we can only develop financial, services and innovative industries. It is necessary to raise the quality of our population and promote innovation. But all these are founded quality education. So we hope the Government can see this need to place the best of our efforts in the character development of our younger generation and their ability to cope with economic restructuring, and the best way to achieve these ends is to implement teaching in small classes, the sooner the better.

MR LEUNG FU-WAH (in Cantonese): Madam President, I believe most teachers and parents would agree to implementing teaching in small classes. Although I am not an education worker, from the perspective of parents, the concept of teaching in small classes is correct. If this is implemented successfully and effectively, it will lead to a "multi-win" situation. However, to implement small class teaching and to bring it really into full play, it must be complemented by relevant teacher qualifications, mode of instruction, teaching environment, education philosophy, curriculum design, and so on. In addition, the implementation of small class teaching is a long process of education engineering that requires a commitment of a lot of resources. Detailed planning and study must be made beforehand, lest half the results will be achieved with double the efforts. In that eventuality, even if small class teaching is implemented, it will never be really effective.

As I have just said, the implementation of small class teaching is a long process of education engineering that requires the commitment of a lot of resources. It involves a host of different things and what must be done is not simply reducing the class size. But more importantly, it entails the provision of the right kind of conditions for its success, and these conditions are precisely the greatest challenge faced by educators. Teachers used to spend most of their time teaching in large classes and the mode of instruction used is "chalk and talk". That is to say, students will take notes while the teacher is talking. There is a total lack of interaction in class. Students would just listen and they seldom ask questions. As the years go by, this has become a deep-rooted teaching practice generally. Just imagine what problems would arise if the same kind of teaching is used in a class of 50 to 60 students and a class of 20 to 30 students? So when the Government spends enormous sums of money to launch small class teaching, is its purpose only reducing the workload of teachers rather than enhancing student performance and teaching efficacy?

The challenges faced by teachers are not just confined to changing their mode of instruction. Changes should not just be made to the external environment, but to the internal environment as well. In my opinion, teachers should be endowed with the following three conditions: enthusiasm for teaching, teaching skills and expertise. Of these, the most important endowment is enthusiasm and attitude which is the key to becoming a successful education workers. Things like experience and skills can be developed over time, but it is not so easy with attitude forming. Therefore, while small class teaching presents teachers potentials for success, it also gives them tremendous challenges.

The implementation of small-class teaching cannot achieve good results overnight, for this has to be complemented with efforts by teachers and government funding. It is because the implementation of small class teaching is significant project of education engineering that requires an injection of enormous resources. Given the present stringent financial situation, great prudence should be exercised with every cent spent by the Government. If small class teaching is implemented hastily without detailed planning, the result will be detrimental to the overall development of education in Hong Kong, not to say wasting resources.

As to the definition of small class, it is not known whether this means a class of 25, 20 or 10-odd students. There seems to be no absolute answer to this. Moreover, one just cannot be certain whether the smaller the class size,

the greater the teaching efficacy that can be achieved. There have been no sufficient data and research findings proving the relationship between small class teaching and teaching efficacy. Researches done overseas show that some schools have a large student population and the class size is very big, but still a lot of their graduates become outstanding talents making significant contribution to their communities. On the contrary, some schools do not have a large student population and though their class size is small, teaching efficacy is not obvious because there is a lack of interaction between teacher and students.

The village schools in the remote areas of Hong Kong are good examples. Their class size is usually very small and theoretically, teachers there do not have a heavy workload. In other words, village schools which implement small class teaching should have better teaching efficacy than the bigger schools. However, owing to factors like mode of instruction, teacher qualification, atmosphere for learning and curriculum design, and so on, some of these village schools do not achieve such satisfactory teaching efficacy as we may expect. Some are even much worse off than the bigger schools. The example of village schools serves to illustrate that small class teaching is not an independent variable, but that it is affected by other variables.

Small class teaching is a correct concept in education indeed, but we must bear in mind that the prerequisite for its successful implementation is a combination of many complementary factors, including a change in the one-way mode of teaching which has been named "spoon-feeding", an enhancement of teacher qualifications and teaching skills, fostering among teachers an enthusiasm for teaching, a review of the existing curriculum design, improvements to the learning environment on the school campus and in the classroom, developing independent thinking in the students, and so on. All these factors will directly determine if teaching in small classes can really bring its functions into full play.

Madam President, I so submit.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): Madam President, on the question of teaching in small classes, I think I have to mention my son. I often mention my son in motion debates because he gives me a lot of opportunities of learning and much food for thought in life.

Once after school, his teacher said to me that my son would often talk in class and that would cause some difficulties of adaptation to other students. His

teacher also told me that it appeared my son was not too well-behaved and he would often talk in class and not listen to his teachers. Once home, I asked him about this. He said to me, "Dad, I have a lot of questions to ask in class and a lot of things that I wish to know. But after I have raised my hand and asked the teacher three or four questions, the teacher will have to attend to other students and will not answer my questions any more. That is because there are 40 students in the class." At last, the only thing I could do was to make an appointment with my son's teacher for a discussion on what could be done to help my son to raise questions more appropriately and learn more. The teacher told me that as there were some 40 students in each class, it would be difficult for him to attend to the questions asked by each student. He would have to answer more than a hundred questions if each student asks three questions. Now there are only 35 minutes in each period and when there are 40 children in each class, how can teachers allocate the same amount of time to each student to let them ask questions appropriately and enhance their learning? Apparently, if the class size is reduced to 25 students, I think teachers will have a greater amount of time to attend to the individual needs of their students. So it is beyond doubt that teaching in small classes would certainly raise the quality of education.

I am a social worker. Many of my colleagues will visit schools and help teach students with learning difficulties. Obviously, we will not train or teach students in a large group. We think that under normal circumstances, a group of 10 to 20 students would be quite enough. For when such a group of students encounter learning difficulties, it would not be possible for one social worker or teacher to cope with their problems. So in a class of 40 students, how can a teacher possibly handle all the questions raised by the students?

Actually, in a class of 40 students, no matter what arrangement we may make, there will still be divergences in learning abilities. And if every student has to receive the same degree of attention from the teacher, the teacher will have to spend twice the amount of efforts to do so. For the students, not every one of them will be able to take in what the teacher is teaching. Nor can they arouse the attention of the teacher and hence enhance their learning opportunities. If more interaction is made possible in a small class, so that students can learn from each other and that a better relationship can be forged between students and the teacher, that would certainly facilitate more interaction and improve the learning environment. Hence, teaching in small classes is a mode of learning which is urgently needed by students and teachers alike and should be put into practice at once.

Discussions are being made now on diversified learning and if we still adopt the class-based mode of teaching, how can teachers attend to the individual needs of students and hence promote their development in various aspects? If teachers have to attend to the development of their students in various aspects, they may need to spend more time and they may even need to talk with at least one student every day. Now that the class size is 40 students, it is impossible for teachers to talk with one student every day. Hence, it would be difficult to implement diversified education. Or we can say that diversified education will never have the chance to develop properly.

The population of Hong Kong will become aged 30 years from now and according to some information, the dependency ratio would rise from 382 in 2001 to 562 three decades from now. The increase would be more than 100%. In other words, by that time each member of the working population would have to support four persons. Now if we do not help these young people so that they can have better development and receive good training, they will not be able to cope with the ageing society 30 years from now and it would be tragic if they still need to be taken care of by other people at that time. The motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong does not call for an immediate implementation of the idea of small class teaching, he is merely proposing that this be implemented a few years later. But if we continue to drag our feet on this issue, the sound development of some of the children will be affected and 30 years from now they may still need our care and attention.

Therefore, I hope that the Government and the Secretary for Education and Manpower would take immediate action to plan and study into small class teaching in consideration of the future development of Hong Kong. Since we recognize that teaching in small classes should be implemented and that it would help improve the mode of education in Hong Kong, why should we not go ahead with it? Besides, the proposal made by the Honourable Member or the direction he is pointing to is not calling for additional resources. But he is suggesting that such a goal can be achieved by making use of existing resources, that is, without the Government having to resort to reducing any resources in education. What do we not just go ahead with it? I hope the Government can give due consideration to this proposal.

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

MR JASPER TSANG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I can see that Honourable colleagues have actually taken actions to support teaching in small

classes. Regarding the size of this "class" of ours here, I think Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong will be very happy with it. Madam President, you can give plenty of attention to every one of us in this "class" and will definitely notice whoever's hand is raised. But being the one who is speaking now, I do wish that this "class" of ours can be bigger in size. *(Laughter)*

Madam President, I do not have the blessing to be a scholar in an ivory tower, but I have over 20 years of teaching experience. Being a teacher, I do understand the merits of smaller classes. I entirely agree with some of the points made by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong in the original motion, such as teaching in small classes will improve teacher-student relationship and enable teachers to provide counselling and teaching according to students' individual needs. Smaller classes certainly have these advantages.

Madam President, I also have over 10 years of experience in school administration. Being a member of the administrative staff, I appreciate the need to consider a diversity of factors in the deployment of resources. We can ask sensationally: Is it that only students of international schools have the right to enjoy teaching in small classes? Similarly, we can also ask: Is it that only students of international schools have the right to play windsurfing, squash and other sports? It is because when I visited international schools, I saw that their students were really engaging in these sports. I think very few students of local secondary schools will have the opportunity to engage in these sports. Is it that only students of international schools can have access to especially good facilities, including a zoo? An international school in Hong Kong really has a zoo.

There is a great difference in the unit cost per student between these schools and their local counterparts. If I am asked whether it is fair, I would say that it is not. In this Chamber, I have repeatedly expressed the view that the Government should increase the resources for basic education. Before the year 2000, I had said time and again that there had been earth-shaking changes in public housing in Hong Kong over the last 30 years and there had also been earth-shaking changes in public hospitals over the last 30 years. But when it comes to schools, before we have the "year 2000 schools", the school premises 30 years ago were the same as those now, except for the addition of a few computers that have taken up some space. Under such circumstances, resources are indeed a problem. We cannot say casually that resources should no longer be used as a pretext for inaction.

Madam President, the school in which I work used to be a private school and so we had more flexibility and greater latitude in respect of school administration. Before the Government implemented split-class teaching, that is, to split a class into groups for teaching purposes, we had already taken the lead in implementing this mode of teaching. It was because our school, being a Chinese school, attached great importance to the need for our students to attain good English proficiency. Some teachers had questioned how they could ensure a mastery of the English language on the part of their students if there were 40-odd students in a class. Therefore, some classes were split into two groups of 20 students each.

Let me tell Members a true story here. In one of those years when classes were split as such, a student came to me to raise objection, saying that he did not like the split and that he would like to join the other group. I asked him for the reason and it was simple, because after his class was split, one of the two groups was taught by teacher A and the other by teacher B. Teacher A was far more popular than teacher B in the school and therefore, students preferred to be taught by teacher A. Even though all the 40-odd students would have to be taught in one class, they still did not wish to be split into two groups, one of which to be taught by teacher B.

Against such broader circumstances, and I trust that Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also understands that as we are now discussing the reduction of classes in order to seize the golden opportunity, teaching in small classes should first be implemented in schools with insufficient student intake. But are they willing to do so? A fairer approach is for schools with an extremely large student intake which are unable to accommodate their students — they do not necessarily have to be so crowded — to siphon some of their students off to other schools. As the other schools may only have some 10 students in each class, these schools would not become crowded even if they take an additional 10 students. In that case, it would be unnecessary for 30-odd students to be crammed in one class. But the question remains: Do the students like it? Do parents like it? These are the problems of resource deployment in reality. If there could really be a full team of teachers in each school, with each teacher taking care of 20 students only, everyone would be happy about it and this would certainly be implemented immediately.

So, the original motion mentions golden opportunity. Many Honourable colleagues have said in their speeches that if it is not a golden opportunity at

present, when is it then? If Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong should emphasize that it is now a golden opportunity, it serves to prove that his proposal is made in the light of the realistic circumstances, because a decrease in the number of students provides a very good condition for class sizes to be reduced. Moreover, if the class sizes would be reduced merely in response to a drop in the number of students, and the resources for schools would not be cut accordingly, I would entirely support this. I have also said before that this is something that should be done. Certainly, we have to consider the factor mentioned earlier. Some students wish to study in a particular school and prefer to stay even though they have to study in bigger classes; and while some schools want to implement teaching in small classes, the parents nevertheless do not have confidence in them.

However, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion appears to have gone way beyond this proposal, as it does not suggest that the class sizes be cut in the light of the reality that the number of students has decreased. The motion does not suggest this. Rather, he has proposed the concept of teaching in small classes, and teaching in small classes does not simply equal to a reduction of the number of students in each class. Mr SZETO Wah has given us an accurate annotation: Is it considered a small class if the class size is reduced from 40 to 39 students? Or is it considered a small class if the number of students is reduced from 38 to 37? All these are wrong. Teaching in small classes does not mean a gradual decrease in the number of students in a class. There should be a line, and this line drawn by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong is 25 students per class.

But then I must ask: Insofar as calculations are concerned, assuming that the resources for teaching are not increased and the number of students will be decreasing, a class size of 25 students will be achieved after a number of years, and then should we stop at that? If the number of students continued to decrease, resources would begin to be reduced accordingly. Since the class size could already be reduced to 25 students, we might as well make that the ultimate objective and stop at that. Is this the case? On the contrary, what if, after several years, it is found that the number of students has increased instead or the class size could not possibly be reduced to 25 students? Have we ever considered the resources involved? Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung mentioned earlier that the resources requested by us could serve to provide more teachers and reduce the number of teaching periods, and they could also serve other purposes. Do we really have to make this objective of a class size of 25 students a key element in the development of schools? In fact, this would deny us the

flexibility and we do not consider it worthwhile to do so. Thank you, Madam President.

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): Madam President, I believe this Council has actually come to a significant degree of consensus today, that is, the future number of students per class in primary schools should be less than the present number.

In fact, I believe nobody will oppose that proposition, but controversies have arisen in the course of discussion. For example, to what extent should the number of students per class be reduced? How should it be dealt with? How should it be implemented in order to benefit all the school children? At first, I have prepared a long essay as my speech, however, it seems that most Honourable colleagues have mentioned all of the arguments and some have studied the issue even more thoroughly than I have. For example, some have cited the cases of foreign countries and the development in Shanghai; some have come to the conclusion that the result has been encouraging while others considered the result disappointing, and it is needless to mention the controversies arising in the course of debate.

Nevertheless, I would like to express my opinions on several points already discussed, including the question raised by Ms Audrey EU: Should we do some give and take and should all of our resources be allocated to whole-day schooling? Is whole-day schooling better? She said it was not necessary better because she could not see any advantage from the whole-day schooling her daughter was attending. I believe a lot of dissimilar views and studies would emerge in the course of the education reform. Some people may insist that whole-day schooling is a must, small-class teaching, on the other hand, is of secondary importance; while others consider both of them should give way to language proficiency which is of the utmost importance, and therefore resources should be allocated to the fostering of language proficiency.

Certainly, in view of our status as legislators, and the free expression of opinions, everybody may dream his own dream, but the Government could not afford this luxury. Since we are not subject to resource constraints in conception, we may think about the plan at liberty, as we have unlimited resources in our minds. Therefore, we may feel free to voice our opinions as to what is considered the best time to implement whatever policy. But in reality,

there are lots of constraints confronting the Government. To a certain extent, it has to cut the coat according to the cloth available and it has to do so irrespective of the abundance, not to mention that we have not much cloth in hand now in comparison with the past. So the Government has to do some give and take in consideration of the constraint of resources. Certainly, before making the choice, the Government has to listen to public opinions made by people from different walks of life from various perspectives. I believe this is something which every Honourable Member would wish the Government to do. However, things can never be that desirable as 10 different people will have 10 different views. Not all of these views can be accepted, because the resources of the Government are really limited.

With regard to the issue of 25 students per class, without any apparent reason, Mr SZETO Wah suddenly challenged Mr Tommy CHEUNG for the small class theory of 40 students per class brought up by Mr CHEUNG, but in fact Mr CHEUNG had never said that before. Mr Tommy CHEUNG had made it very clear in his amendment that 25 students per class should not become a restriction. At that point, another Member criticized him: Why should there be no restriction? The reason is actually very simple, which could be found in the speech of Ms Audrey EU. It is because nobody knows which number is better, for instance, limiting the class size to 18, 20 or 25 students, for we only know that the number should be gradually reduced.

All of us hold the same opinion in general, that is, it would be better if the class size is reduced, as teachers may have more time to communicate and to hold dialogue with each student, or to teach them something other than classroom knowledge. Looking back at the recommendation made by the Education Commission (EC) then, no rigid timetable was set. Madam President, perhaps you should know better. Please do not say that the only thing I do is keeping the timetable in mind. I also remember that no rigid figure was set at that time, as the only recommendation was the adoption of an orderly and gradual approach. There was no clear conclusion in many areas as to a fixed number or a rigid timetable was considered desirable. Moreover, neither do I believe the case in every place is the same. For this reason, I consider it necessary to conduct a study which I believe is important.

The Liberal Party considers that we should not jump to the conclusion that the proposal must be implemented and each class should have 25 students before the study is completed. We should not conduct a study with a prerequisite like that, because a study is a study, and a lot of information would be found in the

course of study to help us decide the manner of implementation and understand how the resources should be deployed in order to achieve the best result.

Of course, the training of teachers is also indispensable. If the class size is abruptly reduced by a great margin, teachers should adopt different teaching methods as the requirements of society on teachers should also be different. Our teachers may not necessarily adapt to the change quickly, because they have to go through a training process. Thus, I consider the amendment of Mr Tommy CHEUNG more practical because he has explained his agreement in principle. However, we should look into ways of implementing the proposal and how resources can be deployed in detail.

Today, I feel sorry and disappointed after listening to the remarks of Mr SZETO Wah. I consider it unnecessary to label other people having "loyalists motive" when other people are just holding opposing opinions. I think it is not necessary for him to humiliate or discredit others. I feel that his approach will only become a negative example of a democratic debate. With regard to the remark made by several Honourable Members that the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Prof Arthur LI, has eaten his own words, I have no intention to bootlick the Secretary, but I think that the rationale is quite simple. Before the Secretary shouldered the present burden as the Bureau Director, he could speak of his dreams and ignore the reality just as we do. But now he is facing all sort of dreams that legislators, parents and the public are making and demanding of him, he could not ignore the allocation of resources and turn a blind eye to the need to strike a right balance when he acts.

Thank you, Madam President.

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): Madam President, the motion today proposes the implementation of teaching in small classes and it is worth supporting in principle, but I think that the proposed insertion of "under the premise of proper deployment of resources" and deletion of "the target of 25 students per class" in the amendment is more practical. Now that the economy has yet to recover and the structural deficit of the Government is pending solution, the suitable and flexible deployment of resources is more appropriate and a prerequisite for the implementation of various policies. If the Government rigidly specifies the class sizes and implements the policy by all means for the sake of achieving the

target class size, I am afraid a good deed will turn bad. Therefore, I have reservations about the original motion.

Why do we have to support the arguments for teaching in small classes? Many Members have expressed their views, and I believe Mr Jasper TSANG, in particular, who is a school principal with rich experience, must appreciate the reasons fully. But as the former school supervisor of the Gold & Silver Exchange Society School and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association, I have also discussed the matter with the school management and the relevant organizations and I have heard that front-line education workers hope to reduce the teacher-student ratio. In other words, they wish to increase the numbers of teachers, but they do not agree with rigidly specifying the ratio at one teacher to a fixed number of students in a broad-brush manner and they also hope that they can make flexible deployment on their own accord in the light of actual needs and the spirit of school-based management. In other words, they hope that adjustments can be made to the mode of teaching and numbers of students on the basis of the needs of different subjects in different schools. For instance, when some subjects allow teaching in big classes, two classes can actually attend lessons together and when it is more suitable for some subjects to be taught in small groups, teaching in small classes of different numbers of students such as workshops, ethics lessons, remedial classes and tutorials can be appropriately implemented.

Teaching in small classes is also a long-term strategy that will be effective only with support by an overall strategy. Are there comprehensive coupling measures such as the hardware facilities of schools and the teachers' grasp of teaching techniques? So, we cannot act with undue haste. If we purely wish to secure teachers' career to the neglect of coupling measures in other aspects and force through a reduction in class sizes while teachers teaching in small classes maintain the same mode of thinking as when they teach in big classes, the policy may land between two stools. Thus, it is very dangerous to judge the success or failure of a policy merely on the basis of figures. At present, the Government must first clearly determine the objective of teaching in small classes, that is, the teaching quality or the number of students.

Madam President, I wish to share with Members the experience gained by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association from teaching in small classes in the past few years from the perspective of our experience in practical operation.

In the light of such factors as a decline in the birth rate and an ageing population in some districts, the removal of young families to the urban areas, newly built schools in new towns, more convenient transport and more choices of cross-district schooling for students, the number of students in some rather remote villages has reduced year after year, so teaching in small classes has actually existed for some time. The four village schools run by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association in Yuen Long District have relatively few students, for there may only be around 80 to some 100 students in a school and only one class in each grade. In fact, there may only be around 25 students in a class at the most and some classes even have only a few students. We can clearly see that some schools have already adopted the mode of teaching in small classes and gained some experience in actual operation.

Although these village schools do not have a comprehensive mode of teaching in small classes at this stage, as I have just said, with a smaller number of students, these schools are mainly teaching in small classes and they have found that teaching in small classes evidently helps teachers concentrate more on teaching and pay more attention to students' progress in learning. They can also pay special attention to students with learning deviations. Besides paying attention to students' progress in class, teachers can also give tutorials to students after school, building up closer teacher-student relationships and they can even take care of the family problems of individual students. Therefore, such experience tells us that teaching in small classes has some important effects on the healthy growth of the younger generation.

In my view, the objective of teaching in small classes is not only to reduce the teacher-student ratio but also try to find in the course of reform a cost-effective policy for teaching in small classes that is suitable for development in Hong Kong and meets the needs of students and social development. Thus, the authorities concerned must explicitly determine the philosophy and objectives of teaching in small classes and provide models or examples for reference. They should also provide teachers with suitable training and conduct effective monitoring to ensure that the advantages of teaching in small classes are brought into play, resources are appropriately used and that complete whole-man education is provided to the younger generation to enable them to attain healthy physical and psychological development in the course of growing up.

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

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I originally did not intend to speak because Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung sitting next to me understands and knows the matter better than I. However, I have just listened to the remarks made by some Members, in particular, Ms Audrey EU and Ms Emily LAU earnestly hope that teaching in small classes can be implemented and I think I can offer some faster methods. First, students do not need to attend international schools because their school fees are very high; second, they also do not have to go to Britain to enjoy teaching in small classes for they can also enjoy teaching in small classes in some schools subsidized by the Government. Where are these schools? More than 100 village schools in Yuen Long are implementing teaching in small classes and even composite teaching, that is, two classes of students — a Primary One class and a Primary Two class — sitting together in a classroom and the teacher teaches Primary Two students after teaching the Primary One class. The persons in charge of these village schools have recently approached me for assistance and told me that their schools would be closed by the Government sooner or later if the situation goes on and they cannot drag out any more. Therefore, they are fighting for teaching in big classes and want to organize several village schools to establish a new school building in association for the admission of more students. If so, they will not be unable to organize athletic meets and the graduates will not only have a few alumni.

I have negotiated the matter with the Government, but only to be given the answer that even though these village schools are willing to pool together, the earliest time for the completion of the project will be the year 2008. There are many years to go before 2008 and nobody knows what will happen then, and these village schools teaching in small classes may have closed down already.

Having said this, it does not mean that I do not support teaching in small classes. I have only expressed my feelings and I wish to tell Members the realistic situation in our district. I hope Prof Arthur LI will seriously consider the matter.

MR LAU PING-CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, a lecturer of the Hong Kong Institute of Education has stated at the outset in a newspaper article that small classes are certainly better than big classes and it is common sense. By this logic, 25 students per class is better than 33 students per class, and 20 students per class is better than 25 students per class. But, is this the real

problem? The lecturer has also quoted copiously from many sources on the school systems in China and overseas and drawn the conclusion that there is room for reduction in the class sizes in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, but the ideal class size warrants further study.

We often hear front-line teachers complain that the class sizes are too large and they have to spend a lot of time marking students' exercises. Since there are too many students in a class, teachers can only give little attention and care to each student and they may not become aware of students' problems in time, thus failing to teach them in a suitable way and rectify their mistakes. Teachers who teach in secondary schools of lower academic bands with many students even lament that they feel that they cannot teach well for there are too many students in a class.

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion shows that he wants to achieve the objective of reducing the teacher-student ratio in each class and improve the quality of teaching in the light of the slackened population growth and the dropping number of school-age children, while maintaining the existing number of classes. First of all, I wish to state my position that though the school-age children population has declined, the Government may not necessarily have to rigidly withdraw the relevant expenditure on education. In other words, if the overall expenditure can remain unchanged, with a reduced number of students, the teaching resources thus released can be used for other purposes. So this is a question of the deployment of education resources. Nevertheless, I have reservations about "achieving the ultimate target of 25 students per class".

The teaching quality hinges on various factors and one but not the only factor is certainly the number of students. Let us look at our neighbouring regions in East Asia such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Macao and Shanghai. Although all of them are developing in the direction of small classes, the actual numbers of students per class are still greater than those in Hong Kong. However, the quality of their students in big classes are not necessarily worse than ours. There is a newspaper report today that the United Nations Children's Fund has published the first report on the education systems and academic quality of industrialized prosperous countries in the world, indicating that South Korea and Japan have the highest general quality. The report points out that there are direct relations between the quality of students and the occupation, education level and financial situation of parents, but there is no such relation with the amounts of education funding made by the countries. That the

quality of students in South Korea and Japan is higher because they are accustomed to facing competition in academic pursuits. The above observations are made in the first report published by the United Nations Children's Fund.

Similarly, some famous schools with outstanding academic results have class sizes similar to those of other schools, showing that the level of academic results is not determined by the number of students alone. Some schools even put together students with better academic performance in a class and we may just call these elite classes. The number of students in elite classes is larger than those in non-elite classes. According to practical experience, the academic performance of students in elite classes has not dropped because of a larger number of students and the performance of students in non-elite classes has not significantly improved as a result of a smaller number of students.

What I have just talked about is related to quantity and I would like to discuss quality now. Besides academic results, the performance of a student also includes his achievements in other cultural subjects including physical education, music and art as well as civic education and understanding about society and the country. All this is lacking among the students of Hong Kong. Teachers have to take the lead, organize interest classes or visits in small groups in class or after school to increase students' knowledge outside the classroom.

Madam President, according to the proposal in the original motion, after the implementation of teaching in small classes, each teacher can mark fewer exercises but even if the number of students in a class remains unchanged, each teacher can teach moderately fewer subjects and take up more cultural subjects or remedial teaching outside class. The workload of teachers will become less heavy, but students will benefit even more.

Although I am not a teacher, I understand that the education sector has different aspirations in respect of the development of education, such as the implementation of whole-day schooling in primary and secondary schools. With limited resources and a reduced number of school-age children, there will be more vacant classrooms. Vacant classrooms are precious in densely populated districts and I think it is open to question as to whether these classrooms should be used for implementing whole-day schooling, teaching in small classes or reducing the teacher-student ratio. So all this should be left to discussion among the education workers in the districts concerned rather than being subject to regulation by rigidly set targets.

There is not only teacher-student relationship but also relationship between students in classrooms. When teachers teach, they usually separate students into groups for such activities as focus discussions, quiz, group choral speaking and singing. The larger the number of students, the larger the number of groups, and the atmosphere of teaching activities can be improved and the subject matters more diversified. In the course of such activities, students can learn how to co-operate with one another and cultivate the team spirit, and they can also develop friendship with their peers on the basis of their personality and hobbies. Students in classes with a larger number of students can find more choices and room for development.

Madam President, I so submit.

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

(No Member responded)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, you may now speak.

MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I wish to respond to the views expressed by some colleagues on the motion.

Of course, I have to respond to the views expressed by Mr Tommy CHEUNG first. In fact, there are many mistakes in his remarks mainly because he is not familiar with education. For instance, he has said that the existing teacher-student ratio is 1:20 and if the number of students per class was reduced to 25 as proposed by me, would not the ratio become 1:14, similar to that of universities? In fact, Mr Tommy CHEUNG may not know that the proportion of students as we have said is not a comparison between the numbers of teachers and students. As the deployment of resources by the Government is linked up with classes, that is, even if the size of a class has been reduced, the students are still in one class and the numbers of teachers will remain the same. That is precisely what I have emphasized. It is the golden opportunity now to reduce the class sizes because after the class sizes have been reduced, the original numbers of teachers can be maintained so long as the original numbers of classes

have been maintained. The teaching quality can then be enhanced through reducing the class sizes while no increase in funding will be required.

Whether Mr Tommy CHEUNG is familiar with the issue is not the point here because education is actually a very complicated issue and a clear understanding is sometimes not easy. It is also very common for a wrong conclusion to be drawn because of unfamiliarity, let alone the fact that there are also factors such as misleading by the Government.

However, being a school principal, Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung should be well-versed in this issue. But unfortunately, he has not listened carefully to my arguments and perhaps he has not read carefully the lobbying letter I sent him. I have to say that teaching in small classes as proposed by me is definitely not a broad-brush proposal as Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung has mentioned. Mr YEUNG said earlier that my motion was a broad-brush proposal. Have I ever said so? Ms Audrey EU and other Members should have heard that I am seeking a gradual implementation. It refers to implementation on the basis of districts, if a certain district does not have a declined population, it is simply impossible to implement teaching in small classes. But if another district has a declined population, teaching in small classes can be implemented. We can even narrow down the scope of implementation and implement the proposal on the basis of school nets. We should implement it in all school nets one by one, but the ultimate objective is not implementation in the whole school but on a one-grade-per-year basis starting with Primary One and Secondary One. It not only has to be implemented grade by grade but also year after year and there is no definite timetable. So, how can it be a broad-brush proposal? In this respect, perhaps Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung has not heard my views clearly.

The third problem is that Mr Tommy CHEUNG has indicated earlier on that there is no evidence to prove that teaching in small classes is related to enhancement in teaching quality. I do not wish to criticize Mr CHEUNG after he has made the remark, but I understand the opinions of the Liberal Party on teaching in small classes. Mrs Selina CHOW of the Liberal Party actually knows education very well and she used to be a member of the Education Commission and mentioned the matter many times. As the *Ta Kung Pao* reported in 2000, she said that teaching in small classes was a way to improve students' proficiency in the Chinese and English languages and consideration should be given to making adjustments to the teacher-student ratio for the Chinese and English subjects. She also said in 1999 that the teacher-student

ratio definitely had effects on the teaching quality. In many budget debates, the Liberal Party has also touched upon improving the teacher-student ratio in each class in primary and secondary schools to enhance the teaching quality. These are the viewpoints of the Liberal Party and I have only cited these reports in response to Mr Tommy CHEUNG's remarks to illustrate that Mrs Selina CHOW of the Liberal Party has refuted their viewpoints long ago.

I also wish to respond to the viewpoints of Mr Jasper TSANG who knows the relevant situation very well. He has asked me whether I am saying that with a reduced number of students, reducing the class sizes can preserve the existing resources without incurring additional funding. My answer is very clearly affirmative, that is, if the number of students in a certain district has dropped, the district will have the necessary condition for a reduction of the class sizes. Schools only need to preserve the existing resources and do not need an increase in funding to reduce the class sizes and implement teaching in small classes. Why do we have to stop at 25 students per class? Can the class sizes continue to be reduced? Further reduction is evidently not the original intent of the motion today, as to what will happen in the future, I am afraid we have to wait for a new motion to be proposed. Nevertheless, if planning has to be made, a base must be adopted for purposes of auditing by the Audit Commission, construction of schools and the appointment of teachers. What are schools with under-enrolment going to do? Schools with under-enrolment will close down in the end and we need not worry about this point.

Thank you, Madam President.

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER (in Cantonese): Madam President, on this topic of teaching in small classes, I explained the views of the Government on this in my reply to the oral question raised by Mr SZETO Wah on 13 November. I am grateful to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong for proposing the motion today for it has given me the opportunity to explore this hot topic of teaching in small classes once again with Honourable Members.

In recent years, places all over the world are committed to enhancing the quality of education, and Hong Kong is no exception. However, once this topic of enhancing the quality of education is raised, there are bound to be some experts or other people who will mention the idea of teaching in small classes. To the general public, this is indeed a simple and direct method. However, is

teaching in small classes so effective as one would expect it to be? Is it the best way to achieve quality education? We must be serious and rational in exploring these fundamental questions. A person's dream cannot be turned into a government policy irrespective of conditions that may exist. Under the present accountability system, every Bureau Director has to be on the highest alert and cannot indulge in dreaming.

I would like to reiterate that the many researches on education done and experiences gathered in overseas countries are still inconclusive about the teaching efficacy of small class teaching. Some researches show that a substantial reduction of the class size would help raise academic performance. The most well-known study is the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio Project (STAR Project) conducted in Tennessee, the United States. The Project tracks the academic performance of students from kindergarten to Grade 3 taught in "small classes" and "regular classes". The performance of students from "small classes" in standardized tests is found to be better than those from "regular classes". However, as the research methodology is not stringent enough in certain aspects, the credibility of its findings is still subject to dispute. Other studies and experience show that teaching in small classes has a positive impact on reading comprehension and mathematics. Other advantages identified include greater flexibility for teachers in choosing the materials which best suit the needs of their students, more interaction between teachers and students and more attention given by teachers to disparities in the ability of students.

Another contentious point about teaching in small classes is its cost-effectiveness, because it is an expensive initiative. Since 1996, the state of California in the United States has implemented teaching in small classes in all the schools. The maximum class size from kindergarten to Grade 3 was greatly reduced from 32 to 20 students. The total expenditure incurred by this policy is as much as US\$5 billion, or about HK\$39 billion. Research findings have however shown that there has been no marked improvement in academic performance. This has led to questions about the value for money of teaching in small classes. There are comments that this policy of teaching in small classes has used up a great proportion of education funding and hence other improvement measures in education have to be deferred or postponed. Some scholars have made a study on the overall benefits obtained from resources put in various kinds of improvement policies in education carried out in Europe and America. The findings show that the most effective measure in enhancing teaching quality is improving the resources for teacher education. On the other

hand, the resources put into reducing the teacher-student ratio is the least effective.

I have no doubts that given the same conditions, teaching in small classes would be more effective than teaching in large classes. If resources are unlimited, then I would definitely support teaching in small classes. It remains, however, impossible for resources to be unlimited. The formulation of any public policy, in particular that in education, would in the last analysis involve a matter of choice, that is a question of priority and choosing the opportunity costs. Given the present fiscal deficits, it is all the more important to make prudent choices. We have to ask whether there is any causal relationship between teaching in small classes and learning effectiveness. If this causal relationship does not exist, then are there any other more effective means available? Some research done in Britain points out that for teaching in small classes to be effective, the teacher has to use the right kind of instruction methodology. If the class size is reduced, but the instruction methodology remains the same, then the advantages of teaching in small classes will never be brought into effective play. Some other researches also point out that in some circumstances, the academic performance of students in "regular" classes is better than those from small classes. Research findings show that other factors like the use of appropriate instruction methodology may have a greater impact on learning than class size. In sum, education researches to date are still unable to come to any definite conclusion on the efficacy of teaching in small classes. I understand that research findings from overseas studies may not be applicable to Hong Kong direct. So we need to conduct some studies on teaching in small classes in the local context before any policy on it can be formulated.

Some people point out that teaching in small classes may help solve the problem of aptitude differences. I would like to point out that differences in aptitudes are a complicated problem and there are many causes to it. So any solution must be specific to the causes. Researches done elsewhere show that small class teaching may help ameliorate the problems associated with divergent aptitudes. However, it is not necessarily the most effective method. The remedial classes in Hong Kong now have a class size of only 12 to 15 students and teachers have undergone special training in remedial teaching. But unfortunately, the results are not so marked. That shows precisely the complexity of the problem and hence the need for research.

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong is of the view that it is unfair for the Government not to permit small class teaching in public sector schools but in

direct subsidy schools, private schools and international schools. Madam President, this argument is in fact untenable. Under the principle of diversified education, these kinds of schools are permitted to enjoy a great degree of liberty. However, these schools are required to bear any additional expenses that may incur for the liberty enjoyed. Funds may be raised through adjustments in school fees and donations from sponsoring bodies. On the other hand, every cent the Government spends on public sector schools comes from public coffers and as an accountable government, we must exercise great prudence before deciding on any policy which has great resource implications. We can never make any undertaking before we are even sure of the effects. We should be more concerned about opportunity costs given the huge fiscal deficits that we now have. This will ensure that resources can be put in places where they are most needed and where they can achieve the best results.

With regard to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's motion, I would like to point out that according to population projections, though it is true that the number of children at school age will decline over the next few years, the number will rise again starting from 2010. If the proposal made by Mr CHEUNG is accepted, that teaching in small classes would be implemented on a one-grade-per-year basis in primary schools (leaving aside secondary schools for the moment), the financial commitment of the Government according to some rough estimates made would be an annual increase of \$3.6 billion or an increase of 31% in recurrent expenditure. This is worked out on the assumption that starting from the academic year of 2003-04, the class size for Primary One will be reduced to 25 students and this reduction is extended to other grades in primary school on a one-grade-per-year basis. In the academic year of 2008-09, when the class size from Primary One to Six is reduced to 25 students per class, that would mean about 4 600 extra classes would have been provided.

It is precisely due to the great resource implications plus the divergent views on the effectiveness of teaching in small classes that I think a study should be conducted in the local school context to explore the issue of whether and how small class teaching should be implemented in Hong Kong. We plan to carry out a systematic study on small class teaching beginning from the academic year of 2003-04. The issues to be explored would include whether it is "value for money", the requirements which schools and teachers should meet, what kinds of students would most benefit from it, the matching facilities that should be provided, and so on. We would also prioritize the idea against other

improvement measures in teaching, such as increasing the degree masters/mistresses in primary schools, increasing native-speaking English teachers, professional development of teachers, enhancement to curriculum development and the provision of teaching assistants to schools, and so on. In sum, the Government remains open and prudent to the idea of teaching in small classes and we will explore the issue and collect data in a rational and pragmatic manner for use as reference in long-term planning.

Some Honourable Members have pointed out that teaching in small classes would avoid a reduction in the number of classes in schools and hence minimize the number of redundant teachers. I would like to reiterate that the idea of teaching in small classes is to raise the quality of education while the reduction in the number of classes is related to under-enrolment. The two issues should be handled separately. I think Members are aware of many examples such as in districts where the number of school age children is declining, some reputed primary schools there are very popular among the parents, and hence there is over-enrolment. Some schools are forced to reduce the number of classes due to under-enrolment. In the previous academic year, some 770 classes or about 6.3% of the total had a class size of 25 students or below due to under-enrolment. However, the academic performance of these students has not been made any better as a result of teaching in small classes. I understand that this is due to the influence of many factors such as the background of the students, the professional level of the teachers, the leadership provided by the principal, curriculum design, and so on. Therefore, we feel that there is a need to make an in-depth study into the topic of teaching in small classes so that useful data can be gathered for future planning.

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and some other Honourable Members have cited the example of Shanghai where, starting from 1996, the class size in some schools was reduced to about 20 to 24 students per class in response to the drop in the population of school age children in some districts. There were 12 pilot schools initially, all of them being schools with under-enrolment. Resources comparable to those used in regular classes are put in to carry out this trial in small class teaching. The Shanghai experience could be used as reference, but it should not be rigidly applied to Hong Kong. The reason is that before small class teaching was implemented in Shanghai, a class could have as many as 40 to 50 students. The Shanghai experience also serves to tell us that small class teaching has to be complemented by many things, such as the teaching

philosophy and methodology of the teachers as well as the overall mode of operation of the schools concerned. If small class teaching is to be implemented in Hong Kong, then I would think that there must also be some complementary facilities to it. As to what exactly should these be, I think we have to find out from actual experience gathered and systematic studies conducted.

Despite the fact that our situation is different from that of Shanghai, I still believe that we can draw a lot of reference from the Shanghai experience, such as that on teacher training, and so on. We would certainly take into account the Shanghai experience when we commence our study into small class teaching.

Lastly, I would like to stress that the underlying concepts of small class teaching are diversified teaching and individual attention. Some schools in Hong Kong are able to make use of their existing resources and divide a class into groups and adopt small group teaching for certain subjects. This is a kind of focused implementation of small class teaching to achieve the aim of giving individual attention to students. In addition, some teachers also make changes to their teaching materials and instruction methodology to enable students to receive individual attention even in a large class. Such experience can provide an important frame of reference for us to examine if there are also other workable and more cost-effective options to achieve quality education besides a wholesale reduction of class size.

Madam President, I think that a study should be made on the effectiveness of teaching in small classes in the first place and that it is not desirable to decide on policy objectives in a hasty manner in the absence of any substantial evidence. Therefore, I oppose the original motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and support the amendment moved by Mr Tommy CHEUNG.

Madam President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Mr Tommy CHEUNG to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong'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.

(Members raised their hands)

Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong 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 result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Kenneth TING, Dr David LI, Dr LUI Ming-wah, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr HUI Cheung-ching, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Dr Philip WONG, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr Howard YOUNG, Mr LAU Wong-fat, Ms Miriam LAU, Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr Henry WU, Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr LEUNG Fu-wah, Mr IP Kwok-him and Mr LAU Ping-cheung voted for the amendment.

Miss Margaret NG, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Dr LAW Chi-kwong, Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr Michael MAK voted against the amendment.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Dr David CHU, Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung and Mr MA Fung-kwok voted for the amendment.

Ms Cyd HO, Mr Albert HO, Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Dr YEUNG Sum, Mr LAU Chin-shek, Ms Emily LAU, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr SZETO Wah, Mr Albert CHAN and Mr WONG Sing-chi voted against the amendment.

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

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 23 were present, 17 were in favour of the amendment and six against it; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 22 were present, eight were in favour of the amendment and 13 against it. 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 negatived.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, you may now speak in reply, you still have one minute 45 seconds.

MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I feel sad for Prof Arthur LI because he has just said that his dream about teaching in small classes cannot become a policy and he cannot dream any dream as he wishes in his capacity as a Bureau Director. It makes me think of two lines of *ci* poem: "While in my dream, I forget I am a guest" (夢裏不知身是客) and "Spring's gone like blossom fallen on flowing water" (流水落花春去也).

The Secretary has his own aspirations and all students and parents in the territory support teaching in small classes which is his aspiration, but it is a pity that the Secretary has fallen into the big vat of the Education Department. In fact, the Secretary is only a guest but he has considered himself an important figure, and forgotten that he is a guest in a dream (夢裏不知身是客).

Secondly, the big vat has made the Secretary undo what he has done and teaching in small classes is like Spring gone like blossom fallen on flowing water (流水落花春去也). I think that the Secretary is in an awkward situation and I therefore feel sad for him. But unlike the Secretary, I will not compromise.

In my view, too great a compromise has already been made in the motion today in proposing the trial implementation of teaching in small classes with the original funding. Therefore, I would rather lose, and even if I lose, I will insist. Nevertheless, I shall return, because I know that even though the motion moved by me is not supported in this Chamber today, parents, teachers, the community and education bodies outside will support my motion, and I have already won because I have their support. Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, as set out on the Agenda, be passed. 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 CHEUNG Man-kwong rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong 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 result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Miss Margaret NG, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Dr LAW Chi-kwong, Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr Michael MAK voted for the motion.

Mr Kenneth TING, Dr David LI, Dr LUI Ming-wah, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr HUI Cheung-ching, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Dr Philip WONG, Mr Howard YOUNG, Mr LAU Wong-fat, Ms Miriam LAU, Mr Henry WU and Mr Tommy CHEUNG voted against the motion.

Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr IP Kwok-him and Mr LAU Ping-cheung abstained.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Ms Cyd HO, Mr Albert HO, Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Dr YEUNG Sum, Mr LAU Chin-shek, Ms Emily LAU, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr SZETO Wah, Mr Albert CHAN, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Ms Audrey EU voted for the motion.

Dr David CHU, Mr NG Leung-sing and Mr Ambrose LAU voted against the motion.

Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung abstained.

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

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 21 were present, six were in favour of the motion, 12 against it and three abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 24 were present, 14 were in favour of the motion, three against it and six abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, she therefore declared that the motion was negatived.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second motion: The public's mental health.

THE PUBLIC'S MENTAL HEALTH

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

First of all, I have to make a declaration of interests. I have practised in the psychiatric service for more than 20 years. I am now a part-time psychiatric nurse in the Kwai Chung Hospital.

Since the outbreak of the financial turmoil in Asia in 1997, an extended economic downturn has been looming over Hong Kong. Both the employers and employees are feeling miserable about the future. The employers worry about poor business, which may lead to the closing down of their own companies. For the workers, they worry about massive layoffs, pay cuts, and the possible loss of their jobs any time.

Although the unemployment rate has improved slightly, the unemployed ranks still amount to 260 000 people. There are also thousands of people who are owners of negative equity assets, and the number of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients is steadily increasing. Under the pressure of pay cuts and the enhanced productivity programmes, civil servants who used to enjoy a relatively stable life are also caught in a state of instability. They are now made the victims to be sacrificed in order to solve the problem of fiscal deficit. They will definitely face further "actions" from the Government. The Stress Management Counselling Hotline set up specifically for the staff by the Civil Service Bureau received calls for assistance from a total of 409 persons between July and end October this year. Of these people seeking help, about half of them are staff disturbed by problems at work.

When we talk about the unemployment problem and unscrupulous employers, I reckon that the Pacific Century CyberWorks (PCCW) must be among one of the "notables". Between May 2001 and 20 November this year, PCCW launched three major layoff exercises, in which 1 375 employees were dismissed. The company recently implemented contract-out programmes, in which over 2 000 wage earners were forced to accept pay cuts at 10%. Last year, a telecommunication supervisor committed suicide due to excessive work pressure.

Presently, under the extremely poor economic climate, the people of Hong Kong are on the brink of burnt out due to the mental stress suffered. According to the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department, the total

number of suicides was 988 in 2001. Of these 988 persons, 379 were unemployed, accounting for nearly 40% of the total figure. Psychiatric illness-related suicides amounted to 275, representing 30% of the total suicide deaths. A press report on 22nd of this month unfolded a horrible tragedy. An interior decoration worker with a poor family background, feeling a strong sense of hopelessness and being disturbed by his own unemployment, committed suicide by cutting off his left hand with a chopper because of protracted unemployment. We cannot help feeling gloomy when such tragedies unfold one after the other. However, should we feel helpless? I think we should not. Instead, we should face the problems boldly.

In fact, the number of people suffering from emotional disturbances has shown a steady upward trend. During the past five years, the number of people seeking treatment at psychiatric clinics of the Hospital Authority (HA) has increased incessantly. Last year, the total number of cases of people seeking treatment exceeded 500 000. The number of people seeking first treatment has seen rapid growth — increasing by 60% in a matter of five years to over 24 000 persons last year. Besides, there is also the psychosis problems which have been the focus of attention in society in recent years. Ever since the service of treating such problems was promoted in July 2000, 1 700 young people have already used the service during the first nine months. The figure was even 20% higher than the Government's original estimate of providing service to 1 400 persons. This serves as a warning to the local community.

Therefore, I really hope that the Government should address the problem by the following approaches to show our concern for the public's mental health, so as to improve the relevant services and arrest the situation from deteriorating.

Firstly, I would like to dwell on the educational aspect. It is very important to promote mental health education among the people. The Government should strengthen its co-operation with various relevant organizations in this aspect so as to enhance people's knowledge of mental health. Only in this way will we be able to minimize the discrimination and the negative effect brought about by labelling in society, thus enabling the patients to face the problem boldly and, to seek early treatment, thereby enhancing their chance of rehabilitation.

As a proverb goes, "Prevention is better than cure." However, in the SMI Manuals for School Administration issued by the Education Department, stress is put only on the development of the core curricula, whereas the subject of mental health is not touched on. Therefore, I strongly hope that the

Government could make reference to the practices adopted in overseas countries to promote mental health education in school as soon as possible. For example, in Britain, topics in relation to physical and mental health have already been incorporated into their curricula to enable the teenagers to learn how to cope with mental health problems at an early stage.

In fact, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau has jointly organized an annual activity this month to promote mental health together with some other organizations. However, this activity is held for only one month in a year. The Mental Health Ambassadors of the year are Ms Nancy SIT and Mr Allen LEE, and the theme this year is "Mental health in the family". However, I want to point out that the Government should not just stress on the family. It is not sufficient to put the emphasis just on the family. In fact, the authorities concerned should assist in the promotion programme. For example, it may visit the various organizations or corporations to distribute the promotion booklets to the employees, to conduct video shows on promotion of mental health education and ways of handling mental health problems and to heighten the awareness of the public of mental stress. All these will help the people to detect such symptoms as insomnia, anxiety and depression as early as possible so as to enable them to seek early professional assistance. Besides, Hong Kong is an international cosmopolitan where the pace of life is very quick, there is a general culture of pursuing materialistic enjoyment, and the concept of "mind your own business" is also prevalent. Therefore, the Secretary should educate the people to pursue a value-added and healthy way of life which will consequently improve the quality of their life. In this way they will not give up themselves or resort to self-destruction easily.

In recent years, I have had the honour of being invited by various organizations to give talks on relieving pressure. Earlier this week, I have explained to officers of the Immigration Department how they can handle the problem of mental stress. The discussion was met with vigorous responses. Only in the course of discussion did I realize that they had been longing to find a good solution to help them to relieve their stress. Earlier on, I have mentioned that the number of people seeking treatment for psychiatric troubles has been increasing in Hong Kong. However, the attitude of the Government and the HA is not at all proactive in tackling the problem. Instead of launching a sound training programme, the Government just organizes some piecemeal talks and workshops. It does not have a comprehensive system of basic mental health education.

In fact, the people seeking treatment would first come into contact with general health care personnel of the medical units, surgical units or intensive care units. More often than not, these health care personnel would just treat the illnesses of the patients by providing symptomatic relief, whereas the importance of "total patient care" is overlooked. Therefore, the Government should formulate some long-term policies to provide basic professional training in mental health to all health care personnel, so as to enable them to grasp correct professional mental health knowledge for diagnosing the conditions of patients accurately and providing appropriate professional services to them, thus enabling them to face the ups and downs of their life. Moreover, consideration may be given to allowing nurses or social workers who have received formal psychiatric training to refer patients to specialized psychiatric clinics for treatment. This is because, under the present treatment and referral system, only doctors can refer patients to a clinic for treatment. What I mean is, as these nurses or social workers have received relevant training, they should be able to provide timely help to patients by referring them to the relevant clinics for treatment as soon as possible. This is also a good way of helping them.

Besides, it is necessary to improve the waiting system for patients, especially in respect of the triage system. Although the HA's information indicates that the average waiting time for psychiatric patients is six weeks (what I mean is the waiting time for first appointments), and this is already shorter than the waiting time of other specialties, the waiting time for new psychiatric cases at the North District Hospital, as far as I know, is about seven to eight weeks, whereas the waiting time for new cases at the General Psychiatric Unit of Li Ka-shing Specialized Clinic, Prince of Wales Hospital is even as long as one year. Although a triage system is now in place for psychiatric patients, the condition of patients could change quickly as their emotions could fluctuate greatly. Therefore, if an outreach psychiatric team could provide pre-treatment service to new clients during the first few weeks of their waiting time, tragedies will not be triggered off by a deterioration of the conditions of the patients. I hope we can adopt "zero" waiting time as our service target. And all along, the Secretary, Dr YEOH, also holds the same view.

I feel that if the Government does not address squarely the deteriorating mental health problem of the people of Hong Kong, it would be like burying a time bomb next to us. The consequences are certainly grave. I hope that the Government can intervene as soon as possible in order to prevent people with emotional problems from self-destruction or hurting others, which would affect the productivity and destroy the serenity of the community. Our community as a whole will have to pay a high price for all these.

A financial turmoil dragged everyone into great trouble — it seems that nobody can be spared. The situation was further aggravated by the collapse of the property prices, which led to the unprecedented negative equity situation in Hong Kong. Therefore, I hope The Negative Equity Owners Alliance and Hong Kong Negative Equity New Life Organization can give play to their spirit of mutual help, so that all of us can survive this predicament.

Last week, I watched Prof Arthur LI, Secretary for Education and Manpower, being interviewed on the television. When asked about the health condition of his wife who had fallen sick recently, he said that she was fine. He said that he felt that all the people of Hong Kong were facing extremely great stress, so he believed he could cope with the pressure and be brave enough to accept the challenge. I hereby hope that the enlightening words of Prof LI, apart from helping himself and his wife to relieve their pressure, can encourage the people of Hong Kong to assert themselves in spite of the adversities and relieve their own pressure in a suitable manner. We also hope that Mrs LI, the wife of the Secretary, can recover soon.

Madam President, may I wish all the people of Hong Kong excellent physical and mental health, and be able to meet challenges in good health.

With these remarks, I beg to move.

Mr Michael MAK moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, as Hong Kong's economy remains in the doldrums, with incessant layoffs and pay cuts whilst there has been no real improvement in the negative equity situation, the mental stress on the public has increased tremendously, this Council urges the Government to face up to the mental health of the public and adopt the following measures:

- (a) to comprehensively promote mental health education among all members of the public;
- (b) to strengthen professional training on mental health for front-line health care personnel; and
- (c) to establish a proper triage mechanism for new cases of people seeking treatment at the psychiatric specialist out-patient

departments of the Hospital Authority, so that appropriate professional services can be expeditiously provided to them."

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

MRS SOPHIE LEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, the motion moved by Mr Michael MAK today is on a general topic, we could not possibly not support it. Still, we have to express some views here.

The pace of life in Hong Kong is very quick. Hong Kong people have to face many different kinds of stress and changes in the environment every day. In addition, such problems as the poor economy, unemployment, negative equity also bring extra stress to bear on the people. All these factors can make them feel disturbed emotionally. If the problems are not addressed properly, mental health problems such as depression could result.

However, I would like to discuss how to face adversities. Perhaps, Hong Kong people had been living in abundance for a long time in the past, so they are at a loss as to what to do when they are confronted with the economic turmoil in recent years. If we could spare a moment to look at our neighbouring territories, we might find that their economic adversities are in fact much more severe than ours. As expounded by a lot of adversity quotient theories, a person, no matter how high his intelligent quotient is, will not be able to survive predicaments if he does not have the abilities to face adversities. If a person can be calm enough to face the adversities, he would be able to turn the predicaments into opportunities.

Therefore, I think the Government should strengthen public education in this aspect, including inculcating in the public comprehensive knowledge on mental health; developing their mentality and ability to cope with adversities; and making everyone learn how to adapt to changes promptly, face and overcome the present predicament, and adopt a "macro view" of life, realizing that there are higher and more long-term meanings and values in life other than the "micro view" of one's own ego, and a more proactive and positive attitude in life. With all this, so even in the event of some minor frustrations, they will not think

of committing suicide or giving up themselves or even putting the blame on someone else, or even start to develop psychiatric illnesses as a result of depression.

Madam President, in fact, the stress we faced in the '60s, '70s or even the '50s was more severe than that we have now. However, during those times, we were able to persevere and went on living our lives bravely. We even managed to tell the world that Hong Kong is a place where we can work miracles. How can we explain all these?

Besides, the Liberal Party is of the view that the love and care between family members and people in the community are also very important. On coming across unhappy incidents in life, if we can talk them over with someone close to us, much of the emotion can be released, and in this way, many tragedies in the families or society could be prevented in time. Therefore, we should strive to promote the culture of mutual help in the community and mutual love in the families. On top of these, we should, not just paying lip service, allocate suitable resources to mental health care. Otherwise, all the effort will be in vain. I would also like to point out here that this is not the work of the Government alone. All of us, be they who have some social commitment, or those who claim to have the commitment, should take up this responsibility.

In fact, the HA has really done a lot in recent years in improving its psychiatric services, especially in strengthening its community psychiatric services. I believe Mr Michael MAK has gone out of his way to do a lot in this aspect. For example, the implementation of the psychosis service programme as well as the annual event of "Mental Health Monthly" are able to arouse the concern of the people for mental health. Such efforts very much merit our support. However, for members of the public who are in no official capacity, have they ever given any support? This is food for thought. We think that there is still plenty of room for improvement, which may render our treatment services better and better.

For example, the out-patient psychiatric service would decide the priority of appointments according to the urgency of the psychiatric illnesses of the people seeking treatment. However, the present triage mechanism does not have categorical triage criteria. Therefore, we suggest that the authorities should enhance the present triage mechanism by explicitly listing the classification criteria and the waiting times for different categories of patients as well as providing enhanced care for patients in acute conditions.

Besides, the Government should also strengthen its referral system and examine if it is possible to provide some incentives to encourage patients with minor mental problems to seek treatment in private clinics. This approach, apart from enabling patients to get early treatment, will help to a certain extent to turn around the severe imbalance between the private and public medical services and reduce the Government's burden of medical expenditure.

On the other hand, most of the new psychiatric attendances are referred to the psychiatric specialist clinics by general out-patient clinics or private doctors; these general health care personnel mostly have not received any professional training in mental health. In addition, professionalism was emphasized in all training courses conducted during the past decade, or undue emphasis has been placed on certification. As a result, the significance of doing all jobs with the "heart" has been overlooked. Therefore, we can say that they may not know how to deal with patients with mental problems. In this connection, I feel that, in tackling problems in this regard, we have to adopt a multi-level approach — not just the personnel at the psychiatric services, the general health care personnel also may not have really understood these psychiatric patients with their hearts, so they do not know what kinds of attitude they should adopt in dealing with referred patients with minor mental problems. In fact, Madam President, no additional training is required. All it takes is the heart and the care for the patients, coupled with some small extra training, then it will be better than the present situation. Therefore, the Liberal Party thinks that the authorities should provide these health care personnel with more professional training so as to remind them of the need to do their jobs with the heart, in the hope that they can provide more appropriate care to patients who are waiting for their appointments.

Nowadays, many people still have misconceptions about mental illnesses. Many people in society still despise or prejudice against psychiatric patients. This has deterred many patients from seeking timely treatment for fear of being labelled as psychiatric patients, resulting in worsening conditions of their illnesses. These are areas that require our common effort to make improvement.

Lastly, Madam President, I would like to say that, all we need to do is to show some care — care for society, care for those around us. Do not just pay lip service. I believe we can do better than other places in this regard.

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

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): Madam President, in Hong Kong, many people suffered from great stress when there were problems with the economy in the past. Today, unemployed wage earners are facing the stress of not knowing when they could get a job; people with jobs are under the stress of not knowing when they might become jobless; business operators are also facing the stress caused by the difficulties brought about by the long-standing deflation. Even those people with good jobs, including middle-rank civil servants, are also facing great stress. The stress faced by negative equity owners is particularly great. Under such circumstances, I would like to say that while Hong Kong had enjoyed great economic prosperity for more than a decade and many people were able to live a relatively stable life, the sudden changes have made people from all walks of life feel disturbed. In fact, I think the Government should take some more steps to address these problems. Of course, I agree with the content of the motion proposed by Mr Michael MAK today. Therefore, I support his original motion. However, I would like to discuss the first part of the motion.

When someone start to develop psychiatric problems, some obvious symptoms can be detected. Before his mental illness surfaces, he must have been subject to a lot of disturbances. In the course of developing the mental illness, if he can get some assistance to relieve his stress, such assistance is also very important. Therefore, at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services, when I discussed the topic of giving support to crisis families or how to handle domestic tragedies, I often asked why we did not tackle these problems at an earlier stage. I feel that this is very important. If an organization can help those disturbed persons, their situations would be arrested from deteriorating, or even stop them from starting to develop mental health problems.

This explains why the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) has often mentioned these problems in recent years. We suggested that the Government could formulate some programmes to specifically help those people disturbed by employment. After some time, the Government implemented the Promoting Self-reliance Strategy. However, this plan has not included our original concept which aims at providing sound financial support to these people and assist them in looking for jobs. Besides, there should also be organizations providing them with psychological counselling in order to help them to survive the predicaments. We found that some unemployed people would look smart and bright at the beginning. However, after some months, when we met them again, they would have begun to develop some changes. If their unemployment

continued for a long time, they would become withdrawn and afraid of meeting people. Initially, they might be afraid of meeting their friends; later they would even be afraid of seeing members of their own families. In the end, we would find that they started to have mental health problems. In this whole process, if we can do something extra, some of the problems mentioned by Mr Michael MAK will not happen.

Every year, we will see the incidence of new cases. For example, from a written question raised by me last week on psychosis (a newly coined term) suffered by the young people, we can see that the number of such cases is increasing rapidly. Now this group of people has faced changes during past few years, if no one can provide them with counselling at an early stage, problems will emerge, I believe. Therefore, be it in meetings of the Panel on Welfare Services or the Panel on Manpower, I have told government officials repeatedly that if some early-stage work can be done, the later-stage work could be reduced. As we say that the medical costs are very high, why do we not do better in the early-stage work of the community medical network? Despite many years of discussion, the relevant work has still not been done very well. If we all pay attention to the maintenance of good health by taking a balanced diet, the incidence of such illnesses as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes could be reduced accordingly. These are topics of discussion often enough. Therefore, I hope our discussion today is also related to such aspects. As for the suggestions in the original motion, I support them.

In the past, I have received complaints lodged by this type of patients. I feel that their complaints were justified. Certainly, I also understand that the Government now suffers from an acute shortage of resources. Therefore, I suggest the Government may consider doing something in advance. For example, non-government organizations all along have put forward many different proposals to help patients whose conditions are not yet very serious, especially those who are still unemployed, to whom I have always shown my concern. This group of people are unemployed on the one hand, and they also have to take up the burden of taking care of their families on the other. Many of these people are patients of first incidence. Since we have fixed the targets, we should then decide on the overall policies. The Secretary, Dr YEOH, is the ideal candidate to make this decision. Since his policy portfolio covers welfare and health, I think he may look at the problems from a comprehensive angle, especially the area of food also falls under his brief.

Much of the work within the area of food has been contracted out. All along, I have been thinking about some idealistic propositions. If the Government could turn contracting-out projects into a framework for assisting the unemployed people, and enabling them to get jobs from such projects, then with the care and concern of the organizations, unemployed people would not be subject to further exploitation by middlemen in the process of looking for jobs. These are feasible work that can be done.

When I discussed the first part of the motion earlier on, I talked about how we could make unemployed people feel happier. On this part, I am saying that, if we have the above conditions, if the Government does not do it, fine, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can do it. NGOs may help these people who have been unemployed for a long time to get jobs by bidding for contracting-out projects of the Government.

I feel that under the present circumstances in Hong Kong, whenever we ask the Government to provide extra services, it would say that it does not have the resources. Now my request is for the Government to consider whether it can do some early-stage work. I hope the Government will not accede to our request of allocating additional resources only after all the problems have come up and some family tragedies have happened. By then, those resources would no longer be what we want to have. Although the motion today raises the discussion on psychiatric patients, it leads us to examine the causes for a rising number of such patients during the recent years. In fact, the situation is affected by our overall economy, the employment situation and the general situation in Hong Kong. I hope, through today's debate, the Government can give proper attention to some of the requests made by us in the meetings of various panels.

Madam President, I support the motion.

MR ALBERT CHAN (in Cantonese): Madam President, during the past few years, when I met members of the public in interviews every week, a lot of them would cry in my office. Some said that they wanted to commit suicide, while some other said that they did not know how they could survive the following day. Many of such mental health-related problems were caused by the Government's related policies, maladministration or policy blunders. Therefore, the Secretary, Dr YEOH, should not be the only official who should be sitting here to listen to

and respond to the speeches of Members today. Other Secretaries, or even the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Financial Secretary and the Secretary for Justice should all be present and respond to the issues raised by us here because, in many instances, they are actually the persons who should take the blame.

Two days ago, in an evening interview, I met a person in the neighbourhood of my office who suffered from a mental illness. He was having medication. He cried in my office just because of a simple issue — a transfer problem. He had been waiting for a transfer to another flat for a very long time. His family of six lives in a flat of 200 to 300 sq ft in Fuk Loi Estate. In principle, there should have been a transfer exercise in September this year, and the Housing Department (HD) should have sent him a letter to notify him of this. But he said he did not receive it. The officials in the HD said his family had to be transferred to Tuen Mun if he insisted on a transfer. He should have been transferred to a new flat in Kwai Fong district. However, as he did not receive the letter from the HD, he lost a chance to be transferred there. He suffered great mental stress because of this, and could not sleep every night. As a result, his mental illness was further aggravated. The officials concerned did not exercise their discretion in handling his case. Therefore, handling mental health problems is not the sole responsibility of doctors. Instead, all government departments, particularly those involving the livelihood of the people, should share the responsibility.

During all these years, especially after the financial turmoil in 1997, policy blunders of the Government have caused the mental health of the people to deteriorate. Many people who originally did not have any mental health problem had become psychiatric patients as a result of such issues as negative equity properties, "penny stocks", the clearance of rooftop structures, pay cuts and layoffs of the Civil Service and similar actions by other major corporations — Mr James TIEN has a part to play in the making of problems of this category. Besides, there are a lot of problems related to the livelihood of the people, and they are all interrelated. Issues related to the people's livelihood would affect their mental health. If the living of the people is unstable and tough, they will develop problems in their mental health, will they not? Therefore, all these problems are interrelated. Do not underestimate these problems and their impact. A minor problem could rock the whole society. This is often the source of problems.

In the Chamber of the Legislative Council, I have mentioned the issue of the land resumption of Wah Kai Industrial Centre on many occasions. As a

result of the Wah Kai Incident, all the three members of a family have to keep on seeking treatment by psychiatric doctors and taking medicine during the past two years because the Government resumption had caused them financial and family problems. To date, this family of three are still having medication. This is a problem created by the Government. Beside, the Wah Kai Incident had also induced an old man to attempt suicide by jumping down from a building. When he was about to jump down, his legs were grasped by someone, resulting in the fracture of his legs. He has to walk with a pair of crutches now. The land resumption has wrecked him financially, and he still has to face great disturbances. These are all created by the Government.

Recently, the Government has required the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) to develop the Tsim Sha Tsui Extension. This has caused great disturbances to the shop operators along the route of the Tsim Sha Tsui Extension. This type of problems, if not handled properly in the planning and compensation aspects, will make more and more Hong Kong people become victims of mental health problems. The same also goes for rooftop squatter clearance. Recently, I met hundreds of rooftop squatters who had no money to demolish the illegal structures. But the Government keeps sending them letters, saying that if they do not demolish the structures, they will be prosecuted, and the maximum penalty can be several years of imprisonment and a fine of several hundreds thousand dollars. Residents were very frightened on receiving the letters. To an ordinary resident, telling him that he would be fined \$500,000 or sentenced to some years of imprisonment would surely disturb him greatly, and would make him unable to sleep at night. These are the mental health problems caused by government policies or the indifference of the Government to the situations of the people.

Moreover, during the past few years, I have seen many bankrupt cases. This year, the number of bankruptcies would surge up to 20 000. I believe, one out of every 100 working persons in Hong Kong will go bankrupt next year. These many bankrupts have to face considerable financial difficulties and predicaments. Not all of them can cope with the predicaments as easily as Mr Kenny Bee. I recall that in 1998, I met a young couple in their 30s. Greatly disturbed by the problem of negative equity, they had considered taking their lives together with their two kids by turning on the gas. So it is not easy for one to cope with such predicaments.

There are also the issues of debts, banks, credit card companies and financial companies which do not pursue repayments by legal procedures but

commission some debt collection companies to pursue repayments from debtors instead. These debt collection companies make thousands of people suffer from great disturbances in the course of demanding repayment. The people do not know when these companies will set fire on their flats or splash black paint all over their places. Nor do they know when these companies would threaten or hurt their families. Therefore, it is also very important for the Government to exercise control over these debt collection companies. The credit card companies or banks are not alone in employing these companies, for large corporations will also employ them. Some people signed agreements on purchase of uncompleted flats some four years ago, but were later unable to complete the transactions due to their own financial problems. To date, they are still being pursued by the large corporations for the outstanding liabilities. The large corporations have not brought the purchasers to court or make them bankrupt. Instead, they have commissioned debt collection companies to pursue their claims on their behalf. This is also a very serious problem.

I would like to urge everyone to pay attention to this. If people of different trades or the top officials of the Government really hope the people of Hong Kong can enjoy good mental health, I believe the policies that are related to the livelihood of the people are very significant. Besides, I would also like to urge the banks, financial companies and large corporations not to oppress the poor people. Otherwise, if they are driven crazy, they might fight back and kill the oppressors with a chopper. Some of them did say that. If they were subject to further oppression, they would "die together" with their oppressors. Many people did say that. Therefore, do not underestimate the anger of these people. Thank you, Madam President.

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): Madam President, as Hong Kong's economy remains in the doldrums, the people face pressure from possible layoffs and pay cuts, and the negative equity situation remains very serious, the mental stress on the people has increased incessantly. When some of the people cannot cope with the stress and develop problems with their mental health, sad tragedies will very often happen. In some of these tragic cases in recent years, some people committed suicide or killed their families by burning charcoal just because of their indebtedness, unemployment and financial difficulties. The tragedies happened generally because the persons involved were facing difficulties or crises, and they started to have mental health problems which were not addressed or treated in time. Therefore, the Government should adopt appropriate measures to address the problem of the mental health of the public.

Firstly, the Government should comprehensively promote education on mental health among all members of the public, and advocate and uphold the good intellectual and cultural tradition of the people of Hong Kong in the past. The good traditional values, all along cherished by the people of Hong Kong, have enabled them to overcome crises and difficulties times and again. However, undermined by the effects of the bubble economy, these traditional values have inevitably been weakened. Under such circumstances, in the face of deteriorating conditions, frustrations and failures, some of the people will inevitably develop certain mental health problems. Therefore, it is important to advocate and uphold the good traditional values that used to be cherished by the people of Hong Kong, such as the significance attached to the family, benevolence and harmony, diligence and perseverance and the pursuit of continuous self-improvement. All of these are very important to promoting mental health education among all members of the public.

Secondly, the local media and the mass culture should attach significance to their social responsibility. They should not create an atmosphere of violence, blood lust and a pessimistic mentality. They should be aware that the negative impact would infiltrate into the families, thus causing damage to the mental health of the people. In reporting certain tragic incidents, the media should not emphasize the bloodshed and violence involved. Instead, the reports should focus on providing guidance's and rational analyses. The community as a whole should attach great significance to building up a healthy media culture, for this will have a positive impact on the mental health of the people.

Furthermore, the Government should strengthen professional training on mental health for front-line health care personnel to enable them to detect the mental problems of the patients in time so as to provide them with effective guidance and treatment as soon as possible. This will enable the health care personnel to give early treatment to patients with certain mental illnesses that cannot be detected easily. Meanwhile, the Government should also establish a proper triage mechanism for new cases of people seeking treatment at the psychiatric specialist out-patient departments of the HA, so that appropriate professional services can be expeditiously provided to them.

Madam President, I so submit.

MS LI FUNG-YING (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have to declare my interest before coming to my speech proper. Since I am a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), I will mention certain positive recommendations of the EOC later.

The term mental health sounds quite abstract, yet it is actually closely related to us. All along, the Chinese are allegedly a nation indifferent to mental health, however, I can hardly agree with this viewpoint. In fact, great importance has been attached to mental health in the Chinese traditional culture. The Chinese philosophy of life emphasizes heavily the integration of men and the nature and the harmony among people. I cannot think of any other thinking which attach more importance to mental health than the Chinese do.

Today's debate is not seeking redress for the question of whether the Chinese take mental health seriously. However, the meeting of the Eastern and Western cultures has indeed given rise to a sequela in terms of mental health. In 1995, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a report on the suicide rates in 13 countries and regions worldwide. The top three countries or regions with the highest elderly suicide rate were Singapore, China and Hong Kong respectively. Ironically, the Chinese community, which has all along emphasized the order of importance of seniority in human relationship, filial piety and fraternal duty, has become colonies of the highest elderly suicide rate. The suicide rate in Hong Kong has been rising since 1998. And more worrying still, the suicide rate among the 20 to 59 age group of working population has also gone up, from 547 people in 1998 to 625 people last year.

Perhaps ending one's life is the extreme manifestation of mental health problems. Other diseases may also be induced in tandem with mental health problems. According to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD), the three leading killer diseases in Hong Kong over the years have all been malignant neoplasms, heart diseases including hypertensive heart disease and cerebrovascular disease. Customarily, the morbidity rate of heart diseases including hypertensive heart disease and cerebrovascular disease is closely related to personal living habits and mental health.

According to information of the psychiatric service of public hospitals, in the past three years, the attendance of specialist out-patient psychiatric service has been growing on a yearly basis, exceeding the threshold of 500 000 last year.

However, there are only 200-odd psychiatrists in the territory to take care of this heavy caseload. According to the survey conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies this September, over 810 000 people in Hong Kong were suffering from emotional problems. In other words, we do not know how many cases are still hidden in society and how many people are being haunted by mental health problems without receiving medical care. Similarly, the 2001 annual report of the WHO also pointed out that one out of every four people was suffering from emotional problems. So according to the survey of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies or the estimate of the WHO, the figures are by no means small and these problems are potentially hazardous to families and society.

It is difficult to put the blame of mental health problem on a single cause. After making an attempt to reduce all the contributory factors of mental health to 43 categories, American psychologists had drawn up an adjusted list to evaluate mental health in the present-day social context, in which unemployment was ranked the eighth while career adjustment and a change of financial position were ranked 15th and 16th respectively. Nevertheless, this classification was made in the western community where there are protection for minimum wage, unemployment and medical care. Back in the Hong Kong environment, much of the necessary protection is lacking. Just as the motion has suggested, Hong Kong's economy remains in the doldrums, the incessant layoffs, pay cuts and the negative equity situation would increase the mental stress on the public tremendously. As a result, the changes in employment and economy would cause greater impact on the mental health of the people of Hong Kong than on their counterparts in the western world. In other words, the mental health of the people of Hong Kong would be more susceptible to economic fluctuations.

Yesterday, the EOC released the results of a study jointly conducted by the EOC and two universities. The results showed that people with mental illness were not treated with respect as far as work, social relationships and even their personal rights of receiving medical care were concerned. The study made several positive recommendations, including the development of community mental health care services and the establishment of a Mental Health Council. I personally think that all of these suggestions merit full consideration by the Government, and incidentally, these views coincide with today's motion, that is, the mental health of the public should be taken seriously and it is a task which brooks no delay.

Madam President, I so submit.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, life is precious. No one would choose to take his own life had he not gone to the brink of absolute despair. Regrettably, 980 Hong Kong people took this course of action last year. We must ask: What had pushed them to self-destruction? According to statistics, 38% or 379 people committed suicide because of unemployment. In other words, unemployment murdered 379 Hong Kong people last year, and is definitely the chief criminal. However, is the Government capable of nailing this criminal and has it done its best to track it down?

Moreover, the whole of our body, even the least bits of it, comes from our parents. The Chinese attach great importance to filial piety and will generally refrain from inflicting bodily injuries on themselves, for it would hurt the feelings of their elders. But if we read the newspaper on the 18th of this month, the news headline was about a middle-aged unemployed worker having chopped off his left hand, for he could not bear the ordeal of unemployment. This is obviously a bloody indictment, a remonstrance against the Government's inability to resolve the problem of unemployment by committing suicide. But what has the Government done in the end?

In its answer to these two questions, the Government will definitely say that it has already done the best it can. But how hard has it worked? The mental stress on the people caused by unemployment is increasing, transforming into more and more psychiatric cases. The number of new cases in the psychiatric out-patient departments of public hospitals has continued to rise, from 15 060 cases in 1997-98 to 24 224 cases in 2001-02, representing an increase of 60%. This figure is indeed alarming. But what has the Government done?

To resolve the problem, we must start at its root, and it is imperative to ease the financial pressure as well as the pressure of unemployment on the people. Much to our regret, the Government has no effective measure to tackle the problem. While the unemployment rate has come down for two consecutive months, many government officials hold that the future is far from optimistic, and that the unemployment rate may rise to a comparatively serious level. Since the Government is aware that the situation is not going to be easy and will remain critical, why does it not explore ways to address the problem? The answer is simple. The Government considers it more important to arrest the fiscal deficit than to stop the people from bleeding. So, while the Government

would still undertake to create some temporary jobs to provide short-term relief to the pressure of unemployment on the people in the past, it has not created new jobs to help the middle-aged unemployed workers after its undertaking of creating 30 000 temporary jobs in the 2001 policy address. We must ask: Has the Government done its utmost to help the people?

In fact, the Government is at its wits' end on alleviating the mental stress caused by unemployment on the people. It has even attributed the problem to external economic conditions, saying that the present economic predicament could be resolved only after the external economy has improved. But regarding those people who already have mental problems, how will the Government help them? How will it improve the conditions of their mental health? I think all the Government has to do is to inject more resources, and the problem could then be resolved or ameliorated. But regrettably, the Government has not done its level best in this regard.

According to a survey conducted by The Chinese University of Hong Kong last year, 30% of the interviewees said that they had had emotional problems in the past six months, 18% of them had had continued symptoms of anxiety and 12% continued symptoms of depression. These problems, if not given early treatment, would very likely develop into serious psychiatric problems. It is a pity that the Government has never addressed these problems squarely. On the contrary, it has even cut the social service resources for addressing the public's emotional and mental problems. The government provision for the year 1999-2000 was \$646 million, but it was reduced to \$639 million in 2000-2001. It is estimated that the future situation will be even worse because, as we all know, there is the fiscal deficit problem, and a further trimming of resources will probably follow. Given this trend, I am very worried that mental patients may not be provided with proper care, in which case their problems would further deteriorate.

Enabling ex-mental patients to rejoin society can help resolve the problem of relapses and is indeed an important step to prevent them from committing suicide. Regrettably, the resources provided by the Government in this regard are but lacking. According to government statistics, there are at present some 50 000 people with mental illness in Hong Kong, but only 70 staff are deployed for the Extended-care Patients Intensive Treatment, Early Diversion and Rehabilitation Stepping-stone Project, which means that each staff has a caseload

of over 700. How can the services provided be sufficient? Is this like indirectly leaving the people in the lurch?

Madam President, the sky of Hong Kong has gradually turned from grey in the wake of the financial turmoil into blood red now. The reason is not that the government books are in the red. Rather, it is the result of the blood shed by people committing suicide, hurting themselves and killing themselves in a bid to remonstrate with the Government. If the Government continues to fail to do anything to tackle the problem of unemployment at root and expeditiously provide services to people with minor mental illness, I think the problem will become even more worrying. Therefore, here, I urge the Government to seriously face the problem and do its utmost to ease the pressure of the people. We do not wish to see many more tragic incidents happen. When tackling the problem, the Government must not further slash resources in this area. We hope that the Government would not sit idly by with folded arms. Rather, it should address the problem squarely.

Madam President, I so submit.

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, the pervasiveness of mental problems is generally underestimated. According to the statistics published by the Census and Statistics Department in 2000, there are 50 000 people with mental illness in Hong Kong. But this figure is obtained only through interviews, and is definitely an underestimation of the actual figure.

According to estimations under the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme, 17% of the people of Hong Kong, which means one sixth of the population or about one million-odd people, suffer from some forms of mental illness, of whom close to 90 000 people require rehabilitation services. In 2001, 4 200 people were diagnosed as having mental illness, which is not a small number, and 13 000 people were discharged from mental institutions.

Today's motion mainly discusses mental health. We all know the relation between health and disease. Good health naturally means less diseases. For example, pathogens that cause respiratory diseases often exist in our living environment. If our health conditions are not good enough, say, in an environment that is too sultry or cold, our body resistance may be weakened and we would then be vulnerable to upper respiratory diseases. The case with

mental health is the same. If our mental health conditions are poor, we would be vulnerable to mental illness when we face sudden changes, shocks or threats in life.

There are many different theories about the factors contributing to mental health, but I think there are a number of important components, including psychological status, and social and spiritual life. I do not wish to go into details about the quality of spiritual life. But as we all know, apart from religion, cultural and sports activities will also have a bearing on the quality of our mental status.

On the psychological front, it is very important to promote education on mental health. This involves knowledge about mental health, enhancement of the ability to handle pressure, the ability to solve problems, development of positive thinking, and so on. Very often, pressure can be considered a threat, a challenge, and even an opportunity. If we can develop positive thinking in different aspects, we will tend not to view pressure as a threat or even a challenge, but an opportunity to give play to our talents and strive for improvement. Hong Kong people are not accustomed to seeing things in the positive way and will, therefore, be caught in many emotional and behavioural barriers when faced with pressure.

For example, I have once interviewed two children and asked them to tell me their own weaknesses. One told me that his mother always said that he did not have his own opinion. I told him that it was a very good quality indeed for he was willing to listen to others' opinions, and this was also essential to a democratic society. The case of the other child was just the opposite. He told me that his father always said that he was too stubborn and unwilling to listen to other people's views. I said that it was very important for a person to persevere with what is right, stand firmly by his convictions, and make unrelenting efforts to pursue his goals. So, the crux lies in how things that are negative can be turned into positive. This is very important when we face pressure and challenge. In this regard, Hong Kong has not carried out any promotional work.

When pressure increases, we must pay attention not only to the psychological and mental status, for we also require social support and a network of mutual assistance which obviously means the family, peers and the community. At present, these are mainly the jobs of social welfare organizations. But as

these are not services of obvious urgency, they are often not given due attention. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund set up recently to help reconsolidating social capital is an exception indeed.

On mental health services, there are now many organizations playing a part in the delivery of these services. They include mainly institutions, halfway houses, long stay care homes, supported hostels, and so on. But very often, these services are seriously inadequate. Besides, support services are also provided in the community, such as residential respite services, day care centres, parents resource centres, and so on, and they are provided by a large team of professionals including medical social workers, clinical psychologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, and so on. But these services are utterly inadequate as opposed to the huge number of ex-mental patients. Take long stay care homes as an example. The waiting time for a patient's admission is as long as 55 months, that is, over four years.

At present, most of the resources are channelled to specialist treatment and provision of care to the mentally ill. Very little resources have been injected for community rehabilitation work, and resources for promoting mental health are even less. Very often, people with minor mental problems are not detected at an early stage. It is only until their conditions worsen and have developed into serious illnesses that they are provided with care and attention. Of the 4 200 people diagnosed as having mental illness in 2001, 45% were admitted to hospitals via the accident and emergency department.

Given insufficient resources and extremely heavy caseloads, many cases are not provided with the necessary services. The 143 medical social workers in the psychiatry stream have to take care of some 13 000 discharged mental patients and some 4 800 hospital beds. As a result, the medical social workers can only perform the more practical duties, such as submitting on behalf of patients applications for public housing and Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, and so on, unable to attend to the co-ordination of medical and community services. Consequently, many ex-mental patients are not duly provided with follow-up services after discharge until relapse. If we calculate on the basis of some 4 000 hospital beds and 13 000 discharged patients, each patient goes in and out of hospitals for nearly three times on average. This is the so-called "revolving door" phenomenon, which must be addressed squarely.

In simpler terms, it is imperative that additional resources be provided, training be stepped up and appropriate specialist services be expeditiously provided for people in need.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, while the pace of life in Hong Kong is fast and tense, the people have to endure great stress in their daily life, and there is a close connection between mental health and the stress of life. If the stress is greater than the individual tolerance, we can easily develop a varying degree of emotional anxiety or mental health problems. Stress can induce such minor psychiatric problems as insomnia, anxiety, minor depression, bad temper, and so on, and it may lead to more serious psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia or acute depression. According to the statistics released by the Hospital Authority (HA), the total number of first attendances at the psychiatric specialized out-patient clinics last year was 23 800, which reflected a 15% increase over 2000. The total number of attendances last year recorded a historic high of over 500 000. In 1998, the total number of attendances was only about 340 000. This shows that the number of attendances has increased over 40% in three years. Under the present acute shortage of psychiatrists, first appointments of new cases have to wait for over three months on average, and sometimes the waiting time could be as long as half a year.

The drastic increase in the number of attendances reflects on the one hand that the public has now become more aware of mental health, understanding the need to seek help from health care personnel. On the other hand, it also reflects that there are a lot of inadequacies in the present mental health education, and the public do not know how to cope with the stress of living and maintain their mental health. I think the Government should adopt a two-pronged approach to improve the mental health of the people. On the one hand, it should effectively deploy resources to meet the ever-increasing demand. However, as a proverb goes, "Prevention is better than cure." A more important aspect of work is to launch comprehensive mental health education initiatives so as to reduce the morbidity rate of mental health problems. In this connection, I urge the Government to do the following properly:

Firstly, be they the doctors or the nurses, the professional training on mental health received by them is inadequate. Apart from training up more

specialized psychiatrists, training could also be provided to general practitioners and family doctors so the latter can help to provide support to psychiatric patients. In particular, enhanced training for family doctors can help psychiatric patients in the early access to treatment and referrals. On the other hand, the patients may just have some ordinary emotional disturbances, which could easily be cured by family doctors who have received suitable training, thus obviating the need for patients to wait for a long time to be treated by psychiatrists. In many Western countries, most of the anxiety and minor depression cases are treated by family doctors. Such an arrangement would make the allocation of resources more effective.

Secondly, the HA should continue to strengthen its Community Psychiatric Service and enhance its support to ex-mental patients and their families. Although the HA already increased the number of community psychiatric teams from five to eight in July 2001, this is still inadequate to provide service to people who have such a need. Besides, the HA should step up its co-operation with district voluntary organizations in providing ex-mental patients with more comprehensive services.

Thirdly, the Government should step up its promotion of mental health education to disseminate ways of coping with stress and maintaining good mental health. Mental problems can be avoided if the people can maintain a good and healthy lifestyle, knowing how to relax themselves, hold an optimistic outlook, and talk with their families and friends when they encounter problems. Besides, if we can inculcate in the teenagers an awareness of mental health from childhood, then they will know how to keep themselves in good mental health and relax when they grow up.

Fourthly, the Government should provide information to the public on how to identify people with mental health problems, so as to make the public understand the symptoms of mental illnesses. In this way, members of the public are able to tell if anything abnormal has happened to people around them, so that they can be more alert, and they can encourage such people to seek treatment, thus avoiding unnecessary incidents from happening.

Madam President, mental health has a great impact on the long-term development of a community. However, in the past, we have not given due emphasis to the issue. The World Health Organization estimates that, by 2010,

depression will possibly become the second most influential illness that affects our health. I hope the Government and members of the public can pay greater attention to the issue of mental health.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): Madam President, with the economy of Hong Kong remaining in the doldrums in recent years, the stress that work and employment exerts on the general public, in particular on adults, has increased significantly and it has similarly impacted on the mental health of children and the youth. From my experience of serving as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, amid the economic downturn in recent years, the number of cases of children seeking help is obviously higher than that in past years.

Today, many Honourable colleagues have spoken on the effects of social pressure on the mental health of the individual, in particular adults, so I am going to focus on the mental health of children. If even adults cannot adjust to the effects of stress on them, how can children, whose mind is so vulnerable, manage?

I believe we all understand very well that today's children are the masters of society in the future. In particular, with an ageing population, the sustained prosperity and stability of society will rest in their hands. Therefore, their health is vital to society, and by that I do not mean just a good physique but also good mental health.

The economic recession has increased the workload and extended the working hours of parents in low-income families so that they cannot attend to the needs of their families and children, and they sometimes even neglected the care and upbringing of their children. This is one of the causes affecting the mental health of children. According to the information of the counselling centre of The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, of the 190 cases handled by the counselling centre in 2001, 80% of the clients were primary school students between six and 11 years of age. The natures of the cases had to do mainly with family, personal and learning problems.

In addition, the Children's Hotline of the The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong received a total of 6 200 calls between 2001 and 2002.

Compared to the previous year, the number of requests for help saw an increase and the problems also covered family and academic problems, in addition to interpersonal and emotional problems. It can thus be seen that children have no one to confide to when they encounter stress or emotional problems and have to turn to the hotline service for counselling. This is a cause for concern.

Madam President, since parents have to stay away from home for long periods of time, children will find life boring, and when their emotional problems are not resolved, mental problems will be induced easily. According to a survey conducted at the end of last year, nearly 30% of students surveyed thought that there was no meaning in life and over 40% felt lonely and admitted to having emotional problems. These figures are very astonishing indeed and show the gravity of the situation.

Moreover, parents also experience a significant increase in mental pressure for various reasons, such as long working hours or unemployment and they often vent it on their children unconsciously, leading to a gradual deterioration in the mental health of their children. According to the results of a survey conducted in 2000, 57.3% of the children felt disturbed as a result of family pressure and what children found most disturbing was scolding and nagging by their parents, and the poor financial situation of their families was also one of the sources of stress.

The unemployment of the breadwinner often leads to worsening financial situation of the family and the long-standing high unemployment rate is without doubt one of the culprits of serious social problems. Therefore, this Council passed at a previous meeting a motion on "Solving the Problem of Unemployment". I also mentioned then that various reforms or new policies to be implemented by the authorities concerned must be premised on reducing unemployment or at least not aggravating it. It is highly inappropriate for the authorities to implement policies or reforms that will aggravate the unemployment problem at such a difficult time, such as abolishing the minimum brokerage commission system, which is of great concern to the sector that I represent. According to estimation by operators in the market, the abolition of the minimum brokerage commission system will lead to the closure of at least 200 securities firms and knock at least 7 000 employees of the securities sector into the plight of unemployment. In that event, another wave of unemployment

will definitely be triggered off, making the unemployment rate hit a new high and a large group of people and families in society will have to bear the pressure.

Madam President, with the social instability, economic recession and shaky confidence nowadays, particularly attention must be paid to children's mental health. To raise the awareness in this area, I believe the Government should promote comprehensive mental health education of various levels for the general public according to their age groups, having regard to appropriate allocation of resources, so that the awareness of the general public, in particular that of families and children, of mental health can be raised. Meanwhile, the professional training on mental health for front-line medical personnel as well as that for front-line social workers and professional family counsellors should be enhanced, so that they can help families and children beset by mental and emotional stress more effectively when handling these cases. On the other hand, the Government should encourage and support social service organizations to strengthen their family counselling services, and provide additional resources for the relevant counselling services appropriately.

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

MR ALBERT HO (in Cantonese): Madam President, in this bustling metropolis of Hong Kong, life is stressful and competition fierce. The people are subject to mental stress in many aspects. As a result, many have developed problems with their mental health. Although mental problems are common, most people have not handled their problems properly. People with mental illness in Hong Kong generally seek medical treatment only two years after the onset of their illness. The reason is that the public generally lack basic understanding of mental illness, and they worry about being negatively labelled and so, they tend to delay seeking consultation. Consequently, this will more often than not worsen their condition and hence make treatment more difficult.

Recently, the Government has started to launch some early intervention initiatives, such as the "Easy" services and hotline services. These, in our view, do merit support. But we consider it inadequate to target the services mainly at young people with psychosis. We consider that the services should be extended to other age groups, including adults who face heavy work pressure. Many psychiatric treatment services provided by primary care clinics are helpful to

early detection of the illness and to reducing the labelling effect which is of concern to patients. In a word, prevention is better than cure, and early treatment is far better than delayed treatment. Successful treatment is very important to both the patients and society. We consider that the Government should attach more importance to primary mental health services and inject more resources into this area, so that the general public will address the issue of mental health more seriously.

I also wish to say a few words on discrimination against mental patients. Madam President, the fact that many patients are afraid of being labelled has made them take an evasive or stalling attitude towards treatment, and has created many barriers for many patients who wish to rejoin the community. While Hong Kong is an advanced and liberal society, we nevertheless found that many patients think that they are not accommodated and accepted by the community. According to past surveys conducted by the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 23% of the respondents considered that people with mental illness should participate less in activities held in public, and only 61% did not oppose the establishment of rehabilitation centres for ex-mental patients in the neighbourhood of their residence. Such an attitude that discriminates against and rejects ex-mental patients may pass onto the next generation. A survey conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) recently shows that although many students are aware that people with disabilities should not be discriminated against in society, this abstract perception has not increased their contact with the disabled in real life. They still harbour many prejudices and assumptions, thinking that the mentally ill are all weirdos or prone to violence. These impressions may come from some distorted descriptions or coverage by television, newspaper and magazines. In fact, over 60% of the people have never come into contact with people with mental illness. We can thus see that, in reality, there is a very big gap between mental patients and other people. Members of the public do not have the opportunity to get along with the mentally ill or ex-mental patients. Nor do they have a correct understanding of them. Under such circumstances, many deep-rooted prejudices therefore take shape.

As such social values prevail, exclusionary acts are therefore common in society. The opposition raised by the residents of Laguna City against the construction of a psychiatric rehabilitation centre in the neighbourhood is a blatant example. Among government departments, the Fire Services Department and the Customs and Excise Department are also discriminatory in their recruitment policies, which have consequently led to litigations. I believe

there is a more serious problem in endless latent discrimination, which is difficult to detect. According to surveys of the EOC, only 13% of the public perceive willingness on the part of employers to employ ex-mental patients owing to safety considerations. This shows that we indeed face a problem of very serious discrimination. The authorities must improve the situation through education.

Such discrimination and prejudices have barred many patients from finding a way out, making it impossible for them to stand on their own feet. Given their fear of being labelled, they therefore conceal their problems and are unwilling to seek medical treatment, and they will even plunge into self-isolation. All these have deterred them from seeking treatment and help, making it all the more difficult for them to recover and integrate into society.

In order to build a more accommodating society, we must spare no effort to promote community education, and increase the public's contact with and understanding of the mentally ill. These are ways that can counteract discrimination, and success will hinge on our ongoing endeavours.

I also wish to propose some short-term measures. I think some of the measures can bring about rapid improvement and are conducive to the rehabilitation of mental patients and their integration into society. The psychotropic drugs currently dispensed by public hospitals have immense side effects. Patients on such medication will develop restlessness and become dull; their mouths will even be dry and crooked; and tremors may also develop in their limbs. All of these side effects will make it impossible for them to work and take part in normal social activities. It is even more difficult for them to evade the discriminatory looks of other people. To avoid being negatively labelled, many patients therefore refused to attend follow-up consultations. We know that many new medicines, though more expensive, have less side effects. But given resource constraints, the Hospital Authority can provide these new medicines to only 2 500 mental patients yearly. In fact, while the new medicines are costly, they are very helpful to the discharged patients. We consider that the Government should not refuse to provide adequate resources to purchase these cost-effective medicines which are beneficial to patients and society in order to cut expenditure. I hope the Government can reconsider the provision of additional resources to improve the situation, as I have said earlier.

Thank you, Madam President.

MR CHAN KWOK-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, recently, there is a song very popular on the Internet which makes people think of committing suicide. This song is called "Gloomy Sunday", also known as "the devil's invitation letter". It is reported that this song, having driven over 100 people to commit suicide 50 years ago, became an international musical mystery and was banned for as long as 13 years. It is only recently that it becomes popular again on the Internet. Members may perhaps dismiss this rumour with a laugh. But Members cannot neglect the fact that mental health has generally declined in Hong Kong. The number of people who committed suicide has continued to increase, as if they had received this "deadly invitation in music".

Last week, the Pacific Century CyberWorks (PCCW) laid off 500 employees, and some 3 000 of its staff got a pay cut ranging from 10% to 20% after being transferred to the new company, Cascade. Layoffs and pay cuts are like "Gloomy Sunday" for Hong Kong, as people become terror-stricken on hearing them. As long as the economy remains in the doldrums, the bomb of suicide will still be there. A fortnight ago there was a case in which an unemployed worker chopped off his hand for the adversities he faced were so unbearable that he did not even wish to live. The difficulties in employment in Hong Kong are like calls from hell, sabotaging the will to survive of each unemployed worker.

My point is supported by statistics, not alarmist talk. As pointed out by the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong, over 40% of the suicides in Hong Kong in 2000 and 2001 were unemployed. It considered that while there is no proof of a causal relationship between unemployment and suicide, the interactive relation between them warrants in-depth consideration and study by the Government. In the past two years, some 1 000 people have committed suicide, showing that the social pressure is extremely heavy, falling onto the shoulders of each and every citizen.

Given that the public is wrecked spiritually, it is imperative for the Government to resolve the crisis at source and that is, the Government must improve the employment situation. Regrettably, the Government seems to suffer from schizophrenic in its thinking. On the one hand, it puts great emphasis on employment, making it a key policy objective of the Government and yet on the other, it allows the importation of a large number of domestic workers, condemning "wage earners" to such plights that they could find no tears

to shed. On the one hand, the Government takes steps to stabilize and intervene in the property market, yet on the other, it refuses to criticize the PCCW for effecting a massive layoff. It has even gone further by saying that government intervention in commercial operation is unwarranted and using this as a pretext.

Members may recall a family tragedy that occurred in Tsz Wan Shan around this time last year. The father of a family, having killed his wife, chopped his two young children to death, mercilessly ruining their tender lives. This is a time bomb in the city. Not only individuals, but all sectors of the community are in a state as if they are facing a formidable enemy and everyone is like a fully-loaded machine gun, waiting to let loose of the trigger of mental disorder.

With no improvement in the mental health of the community, hostility thus grows. It is under such a climate that one after another "man-eating flowers" are bred, swallowing up the souls of individuals and sucking up their bone marrow and nutrition, leaving behind one after another walking zombies. By then, Hong Kong might turn into a dead city that would not afford hopes any more.

The number of people seeking medical treatment at psychiatric out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority (HA) has been increasing annually, from some 14 000 four years ago to some 17 000 last year. Over the last four years, the number of people seeking treatment for reason of unemployment has increased to over 2 000 yearly at 2 652 the highest. Those who sought medical treatment were unable to cope with the pressure of unemployment and required assistance from psychiatric clinics. But so far the Government has not provided a quota of medical treatment specifically for the unemployed. I propose that the Government should extend the consultation hours of psychiatric out-patient clinics and enhance the counselling services for the unemployed. According to the information of the HA, the average waiting time for an appointment for consultation at psychiatric out-patient clinics is as long as six weeks. To those people who suffer from mental illness, a waiting period of six weeks is a very long process of pain and agony indeed.

In recent years, there have been extensive discussions over the symptoms of psychosis, a minor mental problem which is common among city dwellers. The symptoms include insomnia, excessive anxieties, and so on. If we can establish a proper triage system to enable the psychiatric out-patient service to

handle more minor cases of mental illness, then it will effectively reduce the waiting time of people in need of medical treatment.

Finally, I hope that the Government can pay attention to the fact that the impact of unemployment on Hong Kong people is so great that it has far exceeded the tolerance of the ordinary people. The Federation of Trade Unions advocates the re-employment support scheme in our call on the Government to provide short-term financial assistance to the unemployed, for this will help the unemployed enormously, both spiritually and practically.

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

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): Madam President, I originally did not intend to speak. However, after listening to the speeches made by many Members from the labour sector, I would like to also make a few comments.

It is stated in the original motion that the mental stress on the public has increased tremendously as Hong Kong economy remains in the doldrums, plus incessant layoffs and pay cuts. But having listened to the speeches made by Members, I feel that they have regarded it as the only reason. But I do not think that is the case. Let us take a look at the unemployment rate of 3% or 4% between 1992 and 1993 a decade ago. At that time, people conversely said that working too hard put mental stress on the people and some people would do something that they should not. Actually, many countries in the world now have an unemployment rate of over 10%, would not they be in serious disorder? Since people in these countries suffer great mental stress, would not many of them commit suicide? Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said earlier that there were some 300 suicide cases this year and all of them were related to unemployment. I think employers in the business sector may not agree with such a simplified statement. In fact, businessmen may incur losses after they have become bankrupt and their situation is even more pitiful than that of the unemployed. Of course, the unemployed without income is pitiful, but the bosses are even more pitiful. So, should the bosses not also suffer mental stress?

Measure (a) as proposed in the motion is to comprehensively promote mental health education among all members of the public. I think this is very important. But what do we have to educate the public on? The Government

can educate the public that they should have a more visionary perspective on life. Although there has been an economic downturn in recent years, the economy will after all recover in the future, so they should seize the opportunity to pursue further studies, to acquire more knowledge and to better equip themselves to enable them to find a better job when the economic situation improves. Is such education not excellent? Should we conversely tell the unemployed that they might as well apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for it is impossible for them to find a good job now? In my view, education on health may not only be conducted by the Secretary, Dr YEOH, in the medical sector. We can also strike home positive messages by means of encouraging friends and bosses. On the whole, it is worrying for all the responsibilities for the problem to be shirked onto the economic downturn.

I do not think that the economic situation will improve next year or there will be significant economic improvement two to three years later. So by this logic, the problem of mental health of the public will become more serious next year. I hope that the Government can strike a balance between the relevant messages. Layoffs and pay cuts may be the major cause of the mental stress on most wage earners, but I do not think that is the only cause. Thank you, Madam President.

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

(No Member responded)

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, according to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s definition, health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." For all individuals, mental, physical and social health are vital strands of life that are closely interwoven and deeply interdependent.

Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Like physical health, mental well-being is affected by a range of factors that are personal, social and environmental in origin. Although many aspects of physical health have improved over the years, the number of people suffering from mental illness continues to grow. According to the WHO, mental and behavioural disorders represented 11% of the total disease burden in 1990 worldwide, based on disability-adjusted life years. Rapid social changes, economic instability, conflict and violence, urbanization, unemployment, work stress and family disruption all contribute to the decline in overall mental health.

The Government is keenly aware of the need to look after the mental health of the public at all times. We aim at improving the integration of primary health care and provision of effective intervention for mental illness. Treatment of severe mental illness is managed at secondary and tertiary levels. Apart from medical and rehabilitative service provision, we emphasize on promoting mental health through public education to reduce the social stigma and discrimination, improving access to care and cure for people with mental illness and their families, as well as increasing community awareness of the determinants of mental health and mental illness.

For the purpose of this motion debate, I shall focus on four areas : mental health education, professional training on mental health for front-line health care professionals, the triage mechanism for first attendance at psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics of the Hospital Authority (HA), and special programmes launched in recent years to address mental health problems of high-risk groups in the community.

First, comprehensive promotion of mental health education among all members of the public. We fully appreciate the need to educate members of the public on the importance of mental health, early symptoms of mental illness, and the various services the health care system provides in relation to mental health and treatment of mental illness. This is done by the public health care sector in collaboration with other non-government organizations and education institutions.

Mental health promotion forms part and parcel of the Department of Health (DH)'s wide-ranging health promotion and disease prevention activities. Our goal is to promote physical and psycho-social health by maximizing people's

functional capacity through early life interventions, slow down functional decline in adulthood, and improve quality of life for those falling below the disability threshold. This is achieved by providing a range of services and programmes as individuals go through each stage of the life course.

The DH is running a parenting programme through its 50 Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs). The programme aims at enhancing parents' competence in promoting physical and mental health of their children and reducing stress related problems of child care through improving parent-child relationship, improving parenting skills and efficacy, and reducing child behavior problems.

To facilitate early detection and treatment of postnatal mood disorders, MCHC staff is trained to be alert to clients exhibiting emotional disturbance and to provide general supportive and client-centered counselling.

The DH's Central Health Education Unit (CHEU) enrolls health ambassadors who are given adequate exposure to topics such as "mental health" and "marital relationship". It also produces a comprehensive range of health educational resources and audio-visual aids including the mental health topic to cater for people of different gender and age groups. Round-the-clock telephone information hotline, newsletter, homepage, newspaper health columns, radio, TV programmes and media interviews are used to disseminate mental health information.

In August 2002, the DH launched the Men's Health Programme to improve the physical, mental and social health and well-being of adult men in Hong Kong. An interactive website provides special section devoted to "healthy mind" that helps men deal with stress, suicidal intent and other mental problems. It also provides a list of men's mental health resources available in Hong Kong.

The Student Health Service safeguards the physical and psychosocial health of school children through comprehensive, promotive and preventive health programmes and enable them to gain maximum benefit from the education system as well as develop their potential to their fullest. Students receive an annual assessment, including psychological health screening, through which they gain access to a range of support services.

To proactively reach out to adolescents, an Adolescent Health Program was rolled out in the school year 2002-03 to promote students' psychosocial health, improve emotional skills and knowledge, and enhance their resilience through training.

The Elderly Health Services conducts regular health promotion programmes to promote positive psycho-social health and seniors' adaptation to psychological impacts of ageing. Educational programmes on promoting healthy marital relationship, relationship with adult children and children-in-laws, and effective communication skills are developed.

The Health, Welfare and Food Bureau organizes a mental health campaign every year to promote community awareness of mental health and enhance literacy in mental health issues and promotion. The theme for this year is "Mental Health in the Family". During the Mental Health Month, government departments, statutory bodies and non-government organizations, worked together to mobilize community participation in more than 90 activities ranging from seminars to art competitions and recreational activities.

As to the HA, it has in recent years organized extensive mental health promotion programmes targeted at the general public and high-risk groups. In addition to participating in the Mental Health Month, the HA also regularly conducts seminars and publicity campaigns on common types of mental illness, and the various specialist psychiatric services that the HA provides to patients with mental illness. Specific educational programmes targeted at different high-risk groups are also operated. To enhance the awareness of our youth on mental illness, the HA organizes competitions and quizzes on mental health targeted at youngsters and students. Mental health talks are also conducted regularly to raise public awareness of the problem of elderly depression and suicide and to educate elders on self-awareness of early signs of depression and ways to maintain well-being.

Regular liaison with patient groups and patients' family also constitutes an important part of public education. HA Health InfoWorld and Patient Resource Centres of public hospitals are effective communication channels with patients' support groups and their family members. Educational programmes on topics such as basic skills in caring for patients with mental illness are conducted on a regular basis.

For the purpose of strengthening professional staff training on mental health, staff capacity building is a prominent feature as the DH gears up to strengthen psychosocial support to members of the public through services that cater for an individual's life course. Depending on the clientele served, health care staff are provided with training in areas relevant to service needs.

To implement new programmes in the MCHCs, staff are empowered through seminars, workshops, resource materials and other means on the importance of effective methods of child rearing, emotional support for expectant/nursing mothers, and prevention of family violence.

The DH also trains primary care personnel for the early recognition of suicide-related conditions in order to prevent suicide occurrence. In the past year, the DH provided training on suicide prevention to over 750 health care staff.

The HA also attaches great importance to train its front-line staff on mental health. The HA has developed, in collaboration with the Hong Kong College of Psychiatry, a structured framework for providing specialist and continuing professional education on mental health for its front-line clinicians. Since 1997, the HA has introduced structured training in psychiatry into the training programmes of Family Medicine trainees. All family medicine trainees now receive three-month training on psychiatry to equip them with the basic skills in treating patients with mental illness. The HA also conducts numerous training seminars in psychosocial care for health care professionals working in other specialties. In addition, the HA's psychiatrists have been leading various local awareness enhancement programmes targeted at clinicians working in the community to increase the latter's awareness of the importance of early detection and treatment of mental illness.

Continuing training opportunities are also available to front-line nurses. The Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies of the HA organizes on a regular basis post-registration certificate courses and seminars on psychiatric rehabilitation nursing, community psychiatric nursing, psycho-geriatric nursing, substance abuse nursing and the prevention of elderly suicide.

Third, the introduction of a triage mechanism at psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics in the HA. The HA has put in place a standardized triage mechanism at all of its psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics to ensure that

patients are attended to in a timely manner appropriate to their clinical conditions. Under the mechanism, specially trained nurses will first interview the patient and his carer (if available), to obtain a comprehensive picture of the patient's conditions for triage assessment, having regard to set triage criteria such as risk of suicide or violence, the presence of active psychotic or depressive symptoms, and social factors such as the availability of supportive carers.

The present mechanism classifies patients into three broad triage categories. Patients classified under Category I will be attended to by specialists within two weeks from the date of triage assessment. Those placed under Category II will normally be given an appointment within eight weeks. Patients classified under Category III would have to wait for eight weeks or more for treatment. If during the course of awaiting treatment, the conditions of patients classified under Categories II and III have deteriorated, the patients or their carers can seek professional advice through a telephone hotline operated by the HA Psychiatric Department. They can also approach the specialist out-patient clinic concerned to seek further advice and an earlier appointment. In case of urgency, they can approach the Accident and Emergency Department for treatment.

Fourth, special programmes to address certain mental health problems. This year, additional resources have been provided to launch special programmes to address mental health problems of certain high-risk groups in the community. These include the Early Assessment Service for Young People with Psychosis ("EASY" in short) and the Elderly Suicide Prevention Programme.

Severe mentally illness, such as schizophrenia and severe mood disorder, often starts at teenage and in early adulthood. Early detection and treatment will result in better long-term treatment outcome and reduce long-term impairment. The EASY Programme is a pilot scheme launched in July 2001 to provide early assessment and treatment for young persons with psychosis. This early intervention programme aims to reduce the lag time of severe mental illness and treatment for young persons aged 15 to 25. The programme comprises two major components: public education to facilitate early identification of potential psychosis; and assessment and treatment. On public education, primary health doctors, teachers, social workers, parents and staff of non-government organizations are educated on the early symptoms of psychosis to enable them to identify potential cases of psychosis. Young people detected to have symptoms

of early psychotic illness will be referred to assessment and treatment by specialist psychiatrists.

The Elderly Suicide Prevention Programme launched in October 2002 targets at the elderly population, another high-risk group. It is widely accepted that the presence of mental illness, in particular depression, presents a great risk for suicide for elders. The programme seeks to enhance early detection and treatment of depression in elders, and provide intensive follow-up services through its fast-track clinics to identified elders.

In conclusion, concerted efforts are required to improve the community's overall mental health. Maintaining good health is a personal responsibility. Any effort to prevent illnesses must involve the individual, who should make appropriate plans on how to avoid illness and remain healthy. The Government's role is to provide the necessary information, encouragement and infrastructure to enable people to maintain and improve their health. We need to adopt a cross-sectoral approach because mental health promotion requires intervention from health as well as non-health sectors. Community participation is essential. I sincerely urge everyone to consider how they personally can offer help and care to their loved ones, family members, friends, colleagues in times of stress or illness. Together we can make a significant impact on the mental well-being of the community.

I would like to thank the Honourable Michael MAK for bringing "the public's mental health" to this Council for debate. I wish to assure Honourable Members that the Administration is committed to promoting mental health and providing comprehensive and holistic mental health services to the community.

Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Michael MAK, you may now reply.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam President, I should have more than three minutes for my reply.

First of all, I would like to thank the 12 Members who have spoken and they generally support my motion and identify with the arguments made by me,

especially the point that unemployment has caused many problems. But I must apologize to the Secretary again because the Secretary will reply in Cantonese whenever I move a motion and it puts him under stress for more than 20 minutes. I hope that the mental stress suffered by the Secretary in this respect will not become heavier as a result of the motion moved by me. It so happened that the Secretary has replied to the three motions moved by me this year and I hope he can maintain mental health in various aspects. Actually, I can accept a reply made by the Secretary in English because simultaneous interpretation services are provided by this Council and there will be not much problem. Moreover, replying in English may also come as one of the methods for the Secretary to relieve stress.

The Secretary has given an account of the work being done by the DH and the Hospital Authority and I agree with their efforts. However, the Secretary should have heard the remarks made by Members — I believe the Secretary should not have any problem of comprehension in Cantonese — who mainly think that the resources currently put in by the Government are inadequate. Nor are they comprehensive or thorough enough. Although the DH is doing a lot such as prevention and services for health improvement, the relevant resources are definitely inadequate. For instance, the Government should encourage participation by non-governmental organizations in community services so that concerted efforts can be made. Though the Secretary did not mention this point in his reply just now, I hope he can consider it in depth during policy formulation in future.

I also wish to briefly respond to the remarks made by some Members today. The remark made by Mrs Sophie LEUNG somewhat upset me. If I did not hear her wrong, Mrs Sophie LEUNG seems to think that health care personnel only need to have the heart when they work. I can tell Members that many health care personnel whom I know, including myself, really have the heart. We are devoted to our work and make people or patients our prime concern, which is very important. Nevertheless, it is not only important for health care providers to work with their heart, their training is also very important. I hope Mrs Sophie LEUNG will support my argument that one does not just need to have the heart if he wants to perform certain tasks well.

The debate also seems to have touched Mr James TIEN's nerves. I wish to say that we have definitely not discriminated against employers. Since employers surpass employees in many aspects such as education level and there are fewer employers, their problems are not as serious. Hence, we have not

particularly collected the relevant figures. Yet, we have definitely not discriminated against employers.

Summing up, the existing unemployment problem is very serious indeed and I hope Members can give those stakeholders appropriate support. 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 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.

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now adjourn the Council until 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 4 December 2002.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Eight o'clock.

Appendix I**WRITTEN ANSWER****Translation of written answer by the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology to Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung's supplementary question to Question 1**

I had explained at the Legislative Council meeting the procedures from submitting an article to the Obscene Articles Tribunal (OAT) for classification to the making of a final decision by the Tribunal at a full hearing. The time required from the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) issuing a summons to conviction varies from case to case, depending on such circumstances as the schedule of court hearing, whether the defendant had appealed, and so on, and therefore cannot be generalized. In the past three years, the time required to process a case from submission to the OAT to conviction varied from two to eight months. The average processing time was four months in 2000, 5.5 months in 2001 and 4.5 months in 2002 (from January to October).

Besides, for articles that had obviously infringed the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance, the TELA would issue summons direct without seeking the OAT's classification. In the past three years, the processing time for such cases varied from one to seven months. The average processing time was 2.5 months in 2000 and two months in both 2001 and 2002 (from January to October).

Appendixes II and III**WRITTEN ANSWER****Translation of written answer by the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology to Ms Cyd HO's supplementary question to Question 1**

The number of outstanding cases being handled by the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) as at 31 October 2002 is 54 (including cases arising from public complaints as well as routine surveillance of the TELA).

The resources allocated by the TELA in the past three years to carry out publicity and public education activities in relation to the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance were about \$1.58 million in 2000, \$4.14 million in 2001 and \$2.37 million in 2002 (from January to October) respectively.

Besides, the Education Department also allocated resources during the same period to promote sex education and media education in schools. The resources allocated were about \$2.62 million in 2000, \$4.68 million in 2001 and \$1.28 million in 2002 (from January to October) respectively.

Appendix IV

WRITTEN ANSWER**Translation of written answer by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works to Dr Raymond HO's supplementary question to Question 2**

Joints installed on flyovers/bridges are required to absorb displacements caused by changes of temperature and other physical movements. They are generally classified, in terms of flexibility, into rigid joints (made of a series of metal elements), elastomeric joints (made of rubber), and flexible joints (buried joints).

Ir Dr the Honourable Raymond HO's suggestion on application of a flexible pavement layer on top of a joint to produce better running surface is akin to the provision of a buried joint. Such joint normally could only accommodate small range of movement (about 10 mm). The movement range would be even much smaller, if the movement is mostly of transient in nature instead of quasi-static, or where vertical movement also exists. Any movement bigger than the designed range of a buried joint will be transmitted to the bituminous layer and cracking it. This will lead to rapid deterioration of the bituminous surface at that location. In Hong Kong, joints may need to accommodate longitudinal movement up to 20 mm or so. Buried joint is therefore not suitable for the local condition.

As regards elastomeric joint, the Highways Department (HyD) has installed in the past quite a number of elastomeric joints because of their popularity throughout the world. It was subsequently found that these joints did not perform satisfactorily. The reason was that the elastomer bounced up and down and smashed the substrate (concrete) underneath and tore itself apart.

As a result of the technical problems mentioned above, rigid joints are commonly used in Hong Kong. Such joints are indeed more durable. However, being a rigid component, the joint cannot deform in the same way as the adjoining asphalt pavement, and hence, some degree of riding agitation cannot be totally avoided. To improve the driving comfort, the HyD has widely adopted continuous bridge design in order to reduce the number of joints as far as possible. The HyD also imposes tight control on the workmanship to achieve better performance.

WRITTEN ANSWER — *Continued*

The HyD will closely monitor the condition of our flyovers and explore innovative technology for movement joints to give a better riding surface to the public. Any broken joints found will be repaired/replaced promptly.