

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 4 February 2010

The Council continued to meet at Nine o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT:

THE PRESIDENT

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

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT HO CHUN-YAN

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

THE HONOURABLE LEE CHEUK-YAN

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

DR THE HONOURABLE MARGARET NG

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TO KUN-SUN

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG MAN-KWONG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KAM-LAM, S.B.S., J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG YIU-CHUNG

DR THE HONOURABLE PHILIP WONG YU-HONG, G.B.S.

THE HONOURABLE WONG YUNG-KAN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU KONG-WAH, J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE MIRIAM LAU KIN-YEE, G.B.S., J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW CHENG KAR-FOO

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

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

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

THE HONOURABLE LI FUNG-YING, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE FREDERICK FUNG KIN-KEE, S.B.S., J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT FANG KANG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE WONG KWOK-HING, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE LEE WING-TAT

DR THE HONOURABLE JOSEPH LEE KOK-LONG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG HOK-MING, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE WONG TING-KWONG, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE RONNY TONG KA-WAH, S.C.

THE HONOURABLE CHIM PUI-CHUNG

PROF THE HONOURABLE PATRICK LAU SAU-SHING, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KAM NAI-WAI, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE CYD HO SAU-LAN

THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING

DR THE HONOURABLE LAM TAI-FAI, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN

THE HONOURABLE PAUL CHAN MO-PO, M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG KWOK-CHE

THE HONOURABLE WONG SING-CHI

THE HONOURABLE WONG KWOK-KIN, B.B.S.

THE HONOURABLE IP WAI-MING, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE IP KWOK-HIM, G.B.S., J.P.

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

DR THE HONOURABLE PAN PEY-CHYOU

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN

DR THE HONOURABLE SAMSON TAM WAI-HO, J.P.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LI KWOK-PO, G.B.M., G.B.S., J.P.

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

DR THE HONOURABLE LEUNG KA-LAU

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING:

DR THE HONOURABLE YORK CHOW YAT-NGOK, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR FOOD AND HEALTH

THE HONOURABLE TSANG TAK-SING, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS

THE HONOURABLE MATTHEW CHEUNG KIN-CHUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE

THE HONOURABLE MRS CARRIE LAM CHENG YUET-NGOR, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT

MR YAU SHING-MU, J.P.
UNDER SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND HOUSING

MS FLORENCE HUI HIU-FAI, J.P.
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MRS CONSTANCE LI TSOI YEUK-LIN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY
GENERAL

MRS PERCY MA, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Good morning. The Council will resume to continue to debate the motion for adjournment.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

MOTION FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE COUNCIL

Continuation of debate on motion which was moved on 3 February 2010

DR PAN PEY-CHYOU (in Cantonese): President, regarding the sudden collapse of the entire five-storey tenement building on Ma Tau Wai Road, I believe the majority of Hong Kong people were very shocked. Sometimes, on learning about the collapse of a whole building on television or in newspapers, we will say to ourselves that such incident will not happen in Hong Kong, for buildings in Hong Kong are very sturdy. It is astonishing that such an incident happened in Hong Kong.

Last night, some Honourable colleagues also mentioned that the incident was a tragedy, not only because of the loss of four lives and the injuries sustained by two residents, but because in this process we could get a glimpse of the tenants' lives in these tenement buildings. We can share the feeling of the grassroots who have been forced to live in places of extremely poor conditions because of their meagre income. I think we in Hong Kong, which is an affluent society, should show more concern to the disadvantaged. In the wake of the tragedy, many government departments have also provided assistance, temporary housing and daily necessities to the victims. I think the Administration has dealt with the emergency properly.

The incident has sounded an alarm that buildings in Hong Kong are not yet safe and crises may still happen at any time. The tenement building — we also know that tenement buildings of the same age will be inspected, the number of which may reach 4 000 — has revealed the tip of the iceberg only and, according to estimation, it is most likely that similar incidents may happen to other buildings.

We have got a partial picture from newspaper and television reports. It is said that workers might have mistakenly demolished the structural walls during

renovation of the shop on the ground floor. It has also been reported that the structural walls had basically been removed a long time ago and the so-called "main structural framework" supporting the building before the collapse was practically an illegal structure. It is even said that the workers responsible for renovation and demolition have disappeared after the incident and are suspected to be "illegal workers". Regarding these rumours, I believe it is difficult to tell whether or not they are true at the present stage before the departments concerned have conducted a careful investigation to uncover the facts of the incident. However, I can tell from this incident and various signs that there is a lack of monitoring on old buildings, unauthorized building works and illegal structures in Hong Kong.

In fact, the flats in the collapsed building have already been entirely converted into a number of en suites. As mentioned by Mr IP Kwok-him last night, very often, platforms are built on the floor of these rooms or the floor slabs are even drilled for laying of water pipes, drainage pipes, and so on. Such wanton alterations will seriously affect the loading capacity of the building. For instance, the additional concrete structure on each floor will increase the weight of each floor, causing overloading to the building as a whole. Also, cracks may develop in the new pipes by wear and tear over the years no matter whether they are laid properly or not. All these factors will adversely affect the structure of a building. In fact, flats to which such wanton alterations have been made are called "partitioned flats".

There are many other types of dangerous illegal structures existing in large numbers in Hong Kong. One of them is illegal rooftop structures because the rooftop is the fire escape for residents when a fire has broken out. If there is an illegal structure on the rooftop, it will block the means of escape, thus posing hazards to residents during a fire. Another type of illegal structure is found on podiums and in back alleys. Although they may be less dangerous than illegal rooftop structures, they are prone to disrepair and become places for accumulation of rubbish. We all understand that accumulation of rubbish will impede pedestrian passage on the one hand and cause health problems on the other. Another kind of dangerous urban structure includes large signboards and large pieces of glass walls often erected over bustling streets. If they are structurally unsafe, they will constitute a great danger to pedestrians. Such incidents did happen in the past in which the passers-by were crushed to death by fallen shop decorations, facades, large signboards, plaques, and so on. Another type is illegal cellars. If standard specifications are not complied with during

construction, the stability of upper flats may be adversely affected, possibly causing landslips and even subsidence of the streets.

The existence of numerous dangerous structures, coupled with the recent tragedy, has made us see that inadequate monitoring will lead to serious problems. Thus, it is the Buildings Department (BD) which should shoulder the responsibility for overseeing building safety in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is a densely populated city with buildings of different sizes, different ages and every description. The BD should be responsible for monitoring the safety and hidden hazards of these buildings. Performing such onerous duties, it plays a very important role, too. Let me draw an analogy. Its functions are, to a certain extent, the same as us doctors. First, the well-being of buildings, it has to examine and check whether buildings are sick; second, if an illness is found, it has to prescribe medication and supervise its administering, so as to ensure proper treatment of the illness.

The responsibilities of the BD are in fact quite onerous, including approval of the plans of new buildings, approval of applications for alteration works to existing buildings, approval of applications for licences of hotels and restaurants (as guests' safety may be affected), following up illegal structural alterations to buildings, conducting inspections and following up matters relating to unauthorized changes of use of buildings. Inspection of old buildings also falls within the ambit of the BD, which has to inspect slopes in the vicinity of private buildings and other building problems such as maintenance of drainage pipes and water seepage. Like the doctor who has to deal with acute cases, it has to provide emergency assistance as well.

Regarding the crisis management on this occasion, we also know that the Government will kick-start an emergency inspection on 4 000 buildings of more than 50 years old in the whole territory within one month so as to inspect their safety condition. In fact, there are precedents of the BD dealing with such crises. One of the most obvious examples is the outbreak of SARS in 2003. At that time, the SARS outbreak at Amoy Gardens left me with a deep impression because I was, and I am, working there. After epidemiological investigations and studies, it was found that drains might be a means of transmission, thus prompting the Government to conduct an urgent investigation into the general condition of drainage systems in the territory. The drains had dried up because no water had been flowing for a long time, coupled with the effect of exhaust fans in the flats, virus spread inside the building. Putting their own lives at risk, the

BD staff inspected the drains of all buildings to assess the seriousness of the problem.

This time around, they are required to inspect 4 000 buildings in one month. Let me draw an analogy. If we doctors are required to see 30 to 40 patients in one morning, frankly, how meticulous can we be? In fact, we all understand it very well. I consider this a most unreasonable request. But the department has no alternative, and for the sake of crisis management, it has to take up the job all the same.

This has brought a problem to light, that is, the manpower for monitoring. The problem of illegal structures and unauthorized works has been rampant because Hong Kong is a small and densely populated city and the manpower for inspection is also inadequate. So there are many cases in which problems have been detected during inspection and rectification works are required to be undertaken by owners. But a few years later, the problems remain unsolved due to the shortage of manpower for law enforcement. This has been a long-standing and serious problem. Precisely because of this, the Government launched a 10-year clearance operation of unauthorized works in two phases from 2001 and 2006 respectively to eradicate the problem of unauthorized works which were estimated to be more than 800 000 in the whole territory. Thanks to the long-term efforts made in the past eight or nine years, results can now be seen because a lot of dangerous unauthorized works in the territory have been removed. The Government considers that a new policy can be introduced at this stage as replacement. Under the new policy, legislation will be enacted on mandatory building inspection and with the registration of minor works contractors, there will be a legal channel for the contractors to take up minor works projects, unlike the case in the past when they had to go through very complicated procedures before approval was granted.

However, the latest building collapse incident has reflected that people will not comply with the requirement of monitoring the safety of buildings simply because a law has been enacted. Indeed, a large amount of monitoring and inspection work remains to be done after legislation. In fact, I think we cannot return to the situation a century ago no matter how government policies have changed. Under that situation, Hong Kong was a crisis-ridden city where mines and bombs were found everywhere. Tragedies will happen again if there is a shortage of manpower and a lack of manpower for enforcement and inspection.

The Secretary may also be aware that Mr IP Wai-ming and I have all along been following up the issue concerning the contract staff of the BD. I do not wish to go into the details about it, but I think I have to remind the Administration that, among other things, these contract staff account for almost half of the manpower of the BD. Now, when the workload is heavy and it is necessary to review the policy, the Administration should consider the staffing arrangement of the BD because the work nature of these contract employees is practically no different from that of their civil servant colleagues for they basically work together. The departure of these staff in March 2011 will imply a sudden brain drain involving half of its skilled and experienced staff. Even though the Administration has immediately recruited a team of new staff, will a succession gap still be inevitable? Will another recruitment exercise be necessary when a new plan has been devised? I believe the Government will inevitably need to review its policy on old buildings after this incident. I hope the Government can understand one thing, that is, a reduction of doctors will not lead to a reduction of diseases. I so submit.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): President, the tragedy of a building collapse on Ma Tau Wai Road killing four persons and injuring another two is most shocking and saddening indeed. I went to the site on that day and stayed there for three hours. Three other members of the Professional Forum, namely Prof Patrick LAU, Dr Priscilla LEUNG and Mr Abraham SHEK, were also there. The causes of the building collapse are still under investigation. It is believed that the authorities will investigate into the true causes of the collapse from various aspects. It was reported that the Buildings Department (BD) had inspected that old building in December, that is, the end of last year. However, it did not find the building posing any immediate danger and a repair order was issued in mid-January. However, on 29 of the same month, the whole building collapsed. We now expect the Government to conduct a detailed investigation as soon as possible and give a reasonable account to the public.

Although we are now unable to ascertain the causes of the collapse, we should also not make any speculation at this stage. However, one can be sure that had that building been given regular necessary repairs and maintenance, or had no inappropriate structural changes or illegal structures been made, any similar danger would not have arisen. Besides, had the Government introduced

the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) earlier, this tragedy could have been avoided.

That building was built in 1955. At that time, buildings were designed according to the standard of the United Kingdom, and most of them are a simple structure of beams and columns. The design of structural walls was yet to be introduced at that time. The design life should be 50 years. Granting proper repairs and maintenance, it should be able to last for more than 50 years.

Nonetheless, after this tragedy, the reaction of the Government was also rather quick. Mrs Carrie LAM, Secretary for Development, who is a very efficient Secretary, arrived at the scene immediately. Moreover, she also proposed an expeditious inspection of buildings over 50 years of age within one month, and that 40 inspection teams would be set up to inspect 4 000 such type of buildings. They will mainly look into the different degrees of risk of these buildings due to any structural problems, and even the possibility of collapse in the short term. I welcome and commend the decisive measures of the Administration. However, the inspection work concerned will usually entail professional assessment on the inspection of structural safety of buildings, including professional analyses of the shape, angle, length, width and area of each crack appearing on the building. Sometimes, it is also necessary to take some samples from the concrete, that is, cores, for inspection. One also needs to examine if tell-tales are necessary, that is, thin pieces of glass used to monitor movements of the cracks. When necessary, strengthening works will be conducted on the building structure. All these fall into the professional area of structural engineers. Therefore, I have to clearly point out that in this aspect, I think structural engineers can play a more important role in the inspection of buildings.

More than a decade ago, the Government already started a consultation on the Building Safety Inspection Scheme, and it submitted a discussion paper to the Legislative Council in 2003 for the first time. Due to various considerations, unfortunately, the Administration kept on dragging its feet. After going four Directors of Buildings, it was not until recently that a relevant Bill on the introduction of the MBIS and the Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme, namely the Buildings (Amendment) Bill 2010 which was set down for First and Second Readings yesterday, was submitted to this Council for deliberation.

Given the present tight schedule of inspections and the future need for mandatory building inspection, the Government should have a large number of structural engineers to assist in taking forward the related work. However, I understand that the BD is not going to renew the contracts of about 600 staff, and they have to leave their posts before March next year. Some colleagues also mentioned this point just now as well as yesterday. A lot of these affected staff are structural engineers. It is a pity that the BD is totally oblivious to the need for these related professionals in connection with the building inspection work. In this connection, I urge the Government to review this unrealistic so-called Exit Plan again in the light of the work situation, and consider the employment of these government professional engineers under the contract system, and even allow their incorporation into the pensionable establishment of the Civil Service.

Apart from co-ordination with the professional staff establishment, the Government also has to consider the difficulties faced by some owners of old buildings when introducing mandatory building inspection in future. Quite a number of old buildings have no building management bodies or owners' corporations (OCs) to speak of, rendering the sharing of building maintenance fees even more difficult. Certainly, there are many other problems that need to be addressed, and the situation is also not easy to deal with. I have been a Mutual Aid Committee member and an OC member for 20 years. I understand that many problems and difficulties are involved in building management. A lot of old buildings actually do not have any form of building management. Besides, due to fragmented ownership, certain difficulties will be met when gathering all owners to discuss building maintenance issues. Therefore, more efforts should be put in urging and guiding the owners concerned to set up OCs and employ property managers to assume the duty of regular building maintenance.

Besides, it is also imperative for the Government to pursue various channels to enhance the awareness of owners of building maintenance, step up supervision of renovation works and prevent major building structures from being moved or removed. Through various kinds of mass media, it should also enhance the understanding of the public of the potential dangers of erecting illegal structures or unauthorized structures on external walls and inappropriate alterations of internal partitions.

President, this tragedy has totally highlighted the seriousness of the building safety problem in Hong Kong. I hope that the people concerned,

especially government officials and building owners, can take proactive actions to avoid the recurrence of similar tragedies.

Thank you, President.

MR CHEUNG HOK-MING (in Cantonese): President, last Friday, that is 29 January, can be said as the day of grief to Hong Kong. There was neither a natural disaster nor terrorist attack, but a five-storey old building on Ma Tau Wai Road suddenly collapsed and shocked everybody in Hong Kong. Under the debris of the collapsed building, not only were there innocent victims of the disaster, but was also the epitome of the livelihood of the lower strata of society. There was a good young student living in a single-parent family who strived for upward mobility. There were also tenants toiling for a living. In order to pre-empt the recurrence of similar tragedies, the Administration has to put more efforts in assisting the socially disadvantaged groups with a view to improving their living conditions. It should also introduce the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) and the Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme (MWIS) as soon as possible and allocate more funding to the Operation Building Bright (OBB).

At present, quite a number of buildings in Hong Kong were built before the 1960s. Although after the tragedy of building collapse, the Administration immediately announced that a few thousand buildings aged more than 50 years would be inspected within one month and repair orders would be issued to the problematic buildings, to those poor elderly people who only possess the ownership but have no income and merely live on their savings, or to those low-income earners who make only a few thousand dollars monthly, the heavy maintenance cost will be their biggest hurdle.

The Administration is now implementing the OBB. For any building an application of which has been submitted and approved under the OBB, the owners concerned can obtain an allowance up to a maximum of \$16,000 for carrying out repairs and maintenance of the common areas of the building without going through a means test. Elderly people over 60 years old can obtain a maximum allowance of \$40,000 in total. However, the OBB will only last for two years and it thus cannot cover all the problematic old buildings in the territory. If the maintenance cost exceeds the subsidy provided by a wide margin, it will be hard for the owners with financial difficulties to bear.

Besides, it is believed that at present, most of the old buildings over 50 years of age do not have OCs, and they are in a very passive position in this maintenance issue. Therefore, I hope that the Government can consider putting more efforts in the OBB and improve various subsidy and allowance schemes so that those owners with financial difficulties can participate in building maintenance more proactively. For instance, the Government can allocate more resources to extend the OBB validity period, and consider, in the course of the operation, automatic admission of any building having been issued with a repair order and of 50 years of age into the OBB so that it does not have to go through the complicated application procedures. Besides, the Administration can also study the possibility of increasing the amount of subsidy or providing a maintenance cost waiver to those requiring special assistance, for example, low-income families or poor elderly who do not have any income.

President, after the incident of the building collapse, there is a strong call in the community for an expeditious introduction of the MBIS and the MWIS. These schemes can facilitate the owners concerned in gaining a better understanding of the conditions of their properties so that necessary maintenance works can be carried out to ensure that the buildings are in a safe position for the protection of personal safety of the public. Although there is already a consensus in the community to launch these schemes, there are still a lot of old buildings without OCs in Hong Kong currently.

If a private building has proper management and a well-organized OC, even without joining the MBIS and MWIS, its OC will also carry out proper repairs and maintenance on its own initiative. The existing biggest time bomb in the community is those old buildings without OCs or management. Besides, if a building does not have an OC, it cannot apply for subsidy for mandatory building inspection provided by the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS). In case a building is identified as one of the target buildings for mandatory building inspection, but some owners are unreachable or refuse to share the maintenance cost, how can the measures concerned be carried out? Buildings without OCs will be the biggest obstacle in the implementation of the OBB, the MBIS and the MWIS.

Although the Home Affairs Department is also currently providing assistance to old buildings in setting up OCs, as the information reveals, there are only 200 to 300-odd newly registered OCs per year. The Administration

suggests selecting 2 000 private buildings over 30 years of age for enhanced building and window inspection per year, but many of the target buildings may still have not yet set up OCs. Therefore, the Administration should employ additional manpower, actively assist old building owners in forming OCs and consider other feasible options. For instance, it can appoint management companies, study whether the HKHS or other non-governmental organizations can act as the agency of the building concerned to manage the building or appoint a management company for the building so as to help the residents solve their management and maintenance problems.

President, although the existing legislation clearly stipulates that applications must be made to the Buildings Department for any renovation works involving building structure, not a few owners will still, for the sake of saving the trouble, money or being ignorant of the law, find renovation workers to carry out the works arbitrarily. Besides, since the plans of some old buildings were lost long time ago, while the experience and standard of the renovation workers vary, cases like structural walls being mistakenly removed may happen. The SAR Government must step up the monitoring of renovation works. It should require owners to employ structural engineers to make an assessment before carrying out any renovation works involving structural alteration, and punish those non-compliant owners. The Administration also needs to enhance publicity so as to raise owners' knowledge of the legislation and their safety awareness.

President, I so submit.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): President, last Friday afternoon, we were suddenly caught by a piece of incredible news. A building was reported to have collapsed in Ma Tau Wai Road. A five-storey tenement building collapsed in 10 seconds and became a pile of rubble. This was indeed the Hong Kong version of the 911 incident. We can imagine how terrifying the scene was. This serious incident killed four people and injured two others, and we all feel deeply sorry for that. I and my colleagues of the Liberal Party would like to express once again our distress in this adjournment debate today, hoping that families of the deceased can get over the trauma and the injured can fully recover as soon as possible.

I am feeling distressed on the one hand for this rare incident caused serious casualties, making many families lose their dearest ones and their homes when

the Chinese New Year is just round the corner. It is indeed miserable and saddening.

On the other hand, in an advanced international metropolis like Hong Kong, I am pained to see a building collapse and turn into ashes in broad daylight, making it a headline of international news. It is indeed a shame for Hong Kong people.

President, no one wants an accident to happen, but as it has already happened, we should do a proper job of conducting a review, in particular to take immediate remedial measures, such as rehousing the displaced residents and taking precautionary measures expeditiously to prevent the recurrence of similar disasters.

Before talking about the remedial measures, I would like to sing praises of the rescue team, especially the firemen who were the first to arrive at the scene. They all raced against time to save people, regardless of their personal safety. Risking the possibility of further collapses, they tried to save people under the rubble by digging with their bare hands. Their selfless spirit deserves our respect.

President, let me talk about the follow-up measures for the displaced residents. We notice that in the first couple of days, some residents were not quite satisfied with the relocation arrangement of the Government. On the very day of the disaster, almost all of them ran for their lives with all their belongings, documents and winter clothings buried in the rubble. However, as the Government was unable to supply them with sufficient relief materials, it caused them some inconvenience.

Some residents complained that on the first night in the temporary shelter, only one blanket was provided. Without enough clothing, they already felt very cold. For a person who had lost his home, we can imagine how miserable it was to shiver in the cold.

I believe such negligence might be oversight, yet it can be improved and avoided. The officials in the district, especially those on the front line, should make better arrangements for the displaced residents.

Nevertheless, to be fair, in a few days, a lot of improvement was made in the follow-up work done by the Government for the displaced residents. They could choose not to stay in the community centre where there were few facilities. If they so wished, they could move to interim housing at any time where they would be provided with water, electricity, beds and even small electrical appliances such as boilers and rice cookers. They were even given a seven-day meal allowance. The only small imperfection was the interim housing was far away from their original residence and quite inconvenient. Besides, as exposed steel reinforcements could be seen on the ceilings of some units, it made them feel sad and worried about the safety of the building.

I sympathize with the plight of the displaced residents and I also agree that the Government should, where circumstances allow, spare no effort in helping them find temporary accommodation. Notwithstanding this, if the Government is indeed unable to locate transit units in the urban area to rehouse the displaced residents, I hope they can reluctantly accept the offer for the time being. Most importantly, if they are eligible for public rental housing, the Government should make such arrangements as soon as practicable. It will of course be more satisfactory if they can be rehoused in units in the same district or in the urban area before the Lunar New Year, which means in one or two weeks' time. The time may be a bit tight, but if they can move into their new homes before the Lunar New Year, they would have a happier new year. I hope the Government can exert every effort to make this happen.

President, after talking about the follow-up arrangements for displaced residents, I wish to discuss the follow-up issues arising from the incident, such as the maintenance and structural safety of old tenement buildings.

To prevent the recurrence of similar tragedies, the Building Department (BD) has mobilized 40 teams of surveyors and inspectors, hoping to complete the inspection of 4 000 buildings aged 50 years or more in the territory within a month.

Some people are concerned about the heavy task of inspecting three to four buildings a day on average. How can the quality of work of these 40 teams of surveyors and inspectors be ensured? I believe the misgivings about this are shared by many members of the public. I also hope that the Government can elaborate more on this point. Is the inspection this time around merely a routine procedure or does it want to find out structurally unsound buildings for the early

making of remedial measures? I hope the Government can give a response to this.

Yet, why did I express the concern just now? It is because there are really too many old dilapidated tenement buildings in Hong Kong. It would not be too exaggerated to say that they are like ticking time bombs scattered all over the place, and if they are not properly defused, no one can tell when and where they are going to explode and how many casualties will be caused. We only hope that the teams can exert their best effort in conducting more detailed inspections, especially when problematic buildings are identified, they must take extra care in the checking process, so as to protect people's lives and prevent the recurrence of tragedies like the one in Ma Tau Wai Road. I also hope that the Government can explain the details of the relevant procedures. Many people have been talking about if the inspection this time is only a routine procedure. If it is, will it be adequate? Have tests been really taken place? We wish to obtain more information on this.

More importantly, after the inspection, should there be any problem, how are the necessary repair works going to proceed? Of the remaining eight buildings of the same number adjacent to the collapsed one, for instance, two of them are reported to have unified title, that is, they belong to one single owner. However, since 2006, three removal orders for unauthorized building works (UBWs) have been served on each of the two buildings, but they have not yet been dealt with. Although the removal orders were issued in 2003, no body has yet to pay any heed. As such, can these problems be genuinely tackled after they have been identified and orders issued in wake of an inspection?

Let us look at the law. According to the existing legislation, non-compliance with the removal order for UBWs is a criminal offence, and owners will be liable to a maximum penalty of one-year imprisonment and a fine of \$200,000 plus an additional fine of \$20,000 daily for continuation of the offence. Furthermore, a memorandum of charge may be registered against the property concerned. However, for buildings awaiting redevelopment, the registration of a memorandum of charge is the least concern for these owners, so they will hardly pay any heed to such orders.

According to information provided by the BD, there was once a case of an owner being heavily fined \$90,000. There was also a case of an owner being sentenced to imprisonment of 14 days with a suspension for two years for erecting UBWs in a back alley, the first time for an owner to be given an

imprisonment sentence for non-compliance with UBWs removal order. After all, there has been only a very small number of such cases, the deterrent effect is thus inadequate.

Besides, comparing the some 500 000 UBWs in Hong Kong to the average of 32 000 UBWs removal orders and 3 000 summons issued by the BD per year, it is apparently far behind the target. As I just said, even if an order is issued, can we ensure that the UBWs concerned would be removed and repairs and maintenance properly carried out? From what we can see now, it has been very ineffective.

In the light of the present situation, the BD should therefore step up inspections while increasing the vigour of prosecution, in order to bring charges against irresponsible owners who knowingly take no action to their property with potential dangers. It may also call for legislative amendments to impose heavier penalties, such that owners awakened to speed up the disposal of those ticking time bombs in our city.

President, the old tenement building that collapsed this time is in fact a rather typical "five noes" building, that is, no owners' corporation (OC), no security, no management, no maintenance and no one cares. However, for owners of these "five noes" buildings, if they can turn a blind eye to removal orders, why would they bother to carry out any regular maintenance?

The Buildings (Amendment) Bill 2010 introduced by the Secretary for Development yesterday stipulates that buildings aged 30 years or more shall be subject to mandatory building inspection. It is no doubt a method, so we support the Government to speed up the implementation of the scheme. However, the crux of the matter is, after the inspection, how we can ensure that the building concerned would carry out the necessary repairs maintenance works and that such works would be executed in a proper manner.

In the long run, I think the Government should conduct researches in two directions at the same time, so as to fully address the building safety problem in Hong Kong. The first one is to look into the possibility of setting up an organization to co-ordinate the management of old tenement buildings, to help with full strength old buildings reaching a certain age, say 30 years or more, do a better job in building management. Its main function is to urge owners to set up OCs, and employ qualified management companies to manage their buildings.

If owners of the relevant building for various reasons refuse or fail to set up an OC, the Government may consider empowering the organization to hire a management company on its behalf and to recover the charges from those owners. The management and maintenance issues of old tenement buildings can be better addressed in this way. I think the building collapse incident at Ma Tau Wai Road has sounded the alarm against these hidden ticking time bombs in the city, reminding us to take actions instead of sweeping the problem under the carpet.

As a matter of fact, there is a similar law in Malaysia and Singapore. According to the Building and Common Property (Maintenance and Management) Act of Malaysia, all residences in high-rise buildings are required to set up a body jointly managed by owners. The Commissioner of Buildings is also empowered to recover charges in arrears from owners refusing to pay the maintenance cost, and even authorize the attachment of their liquid assets to be sold by public auction, so that the proceeds thus made can be used to offset the arrears. Though it may not be feasible to copy wholesale the practice of other places, I think it is worthwhile for the Government to make reference to this.

Another problem that needs to be addressed simultaneously is the redevelopment of old tenement buildings. The older a building, the higher its maintenance cost. While redevelopment is the best solution, however, as ownerships of these old buildings are scattered and their location may not offer substantial redevelopment value, the pace of redevelopment dictated by market force is slow.

For this reason, I believe the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) or the Housing Society is in a better position to take up a more important role in redeveloping old buildings, in particular the URA, which is set up for the object of renewal. However, in recent years, it seems that the URA has been working rather slowly. I hope the URA can do more, such that even if old buildings do not offer much redevelopment value, if the condition is very poor, it should also consider taking over the redevelopment. It should not always expect to make enormous profits and should put up with unprofitable business at times.

President, the incident this time is indeed most unfortunate. No one wants it to happen, yet we must learn from our mistakes. I believe we may still remember vaguely the canopy accident which took place in Albert House in Aberdeen some years ago. The owners eventually had to shoulder

compensations amounting to more than \$20 million. In the building collapse incident at Ma Tau Wai Road, it is still unknown who should bear the responsibility ultimately and whether a colossal sum of compensation will be involved. I hope the Government can step up publicity, so that owners can be made more alert of their own responsibility. Otherwise, there will be a recurrence of tragedies such as the canopy collapse incident at Albert House in Aberdeen and the building collapse incident at Ma Tau Wai Road. Most importantly, we should not forget the pain once the wound is healed. We must always bear in mind that lessons learnt from the past can guide us in the future.

President, I so submit.

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): I thank Ms Starry LEE very much for proposing this adjournment debate in such a short time so that we can examine the issue here. The Secretary said at the beginning that she would listen carefully. However, in fact, not only the Secretary needs to listen, other Members of this Council should also listen to this debate attentively as they will find in it a lot of professional opinions and district work experiences that will be very useful when we tackle the issue in the future. Here, I also hope that the Bureau (besides the Secretary for Development, other departments should also give their full co-operation) will arrange for the rehousing of the victims in the building collapse accident in order that they will live in peace and contentment in new homes as soon as possible.

What the Secretary said is right. The problem is very complicated, covering very extensive areas and many different levels. Urban renewal and old building maintenance is a big, old and difficult problem. This accident has told us that the problem is more urgent and complicated than the public has expected and understood. We have learnt from the news reports that there are still 2 799 buildings over 50 years of age scattering in the urban areas in Kowloon and on Hong Kong Island, and for that matter, Sham Shui Po, Yau Tsim Mong and Wan Chai are the worst areas. In these areas, large-scale underground works will be carried out, for example, the Express Rail Link, and the Shatin to Central Link will also pass along Ma Tau Wai Road. We urgently need to know how big the impact of these works is on the safety of building structure.

We can see from this accident that there are many illegal alterations in the structure of these old buildings, which were done with absolutely no professional

input and without approval of the authorities, and they may have affected the building structure. The problem of "partitioned flats" for subletting has greatly increased the loading of these buildings, thus making the building structure dangerous. The pressing need now is to speed up inspections. As we observed in the past, the repair orders issued by the Buildings Department (BD) after inspections would be ignored by the owners, and it also took a very long time before the judicial proceedings could commence. Even though there were cases of successful prosecution, the number was not many. We can see from this accident that even if owners were willing to enforce the repair orders, repair works must be carried out in the whole building. If only the owners of the lower floor flats are willing to do and those of the upper floor flats refuse to do so, or repair works will be carried out at different times, this may constitute another cause for building safety being affected. So, it is necessary to enable the BD to maintain closer co-operation with the enforcement departments while carrying out building safety inspections in the future.

Of course, I hope this accident will make the owners and tenants more willing to co-operate with the authorities. However, unfortunately, the issues of building maintenance and urban renewal involve many different classes and interests. There are even many types of owners, for example, owners who have acquired flats for no other purpose than future development, thus not carry about it at all. The sooner the buildings become dangerous the better because they can acquire other flats expeditiously. Another type of owners are those who lead a rather stable life and can afford the maintenance expenses, and they can be handled most easily. The third type is the elderly and poor owners, whose living conditions are actually even worse than many households eligible for public housing, and they simply have no surplus money for maintenance. As such, if mandatory building inspection and maintenance has to be carried out, the authorities should make different arrangements in the light of the background and interests of different owners. As to how to deal with owners who have acquired flats for future development so that public funds used to subsidize poor owners will not be wasted, this is an issue that we must deal with in the context of low-making in the future. Adopting the unitary approach of mandatory building inspection and subsidizing maintenance is not a desirable option in the interest of monitoring the use of public funds.

Given the high-speed inspection of buildings in the future, we must devise an effective method to deal with different interests immediately after we have identified dangerous buildings for which repairs and maintenance works have to

be carried out immediately before considering the implementation of mandatory maintenance. Since assuming office, the Secretary for Development has introduced a lot of new initiatives and we must recognize her efforts. Laws on building and window inspection will be made some time later, and we, of course, hope to pass these laws as soon as possible. However, just as we have said, we also need to look after the interests and affordability of owners from different classes with different backgrounds and abilities.

Moreover, President, in the medium term, we also need to determine the responsibilities for building maintenance. Of course, we can mandatorily require owners to bear responsibilities for building inspection and maintenance under certain laws, but this can only solve the problems of buildings which are not in danger yet in order to prevent them from deteriorating further. However, as for buildings that are already in danger, the Government needs to make arrangements for the owners and tenants to move out as soon as possible and solve their housing problem. I believe the Secretary who once worked in the Social Welfare Department will share the same view. It is easy to pull down buildings and acquisition is also easy. However, it will be very difficult to carry out redevelopment and rehousing in a people-oriented manner, and maintain the original economic and social life of the community.

I am very pleased that a number of Members have agreed to the "flat-for-flat" concept, which not just gives the owners or occupants a sum of money or compensation and requires them to move out. Since the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) commenced acquisition for development in 2002, whenever an acquisition for redevelopment was carried out in the districts, people would have grievances, and a group of people would chase after the Secretary in the hope that she could solve their rehousing problem and improve the acquisition process. This "bomb" is another type of conflict with far-reaching effects in society that we must tackle. So, I would like to ask the Secretary to look for some new ideas together with the URA, the Housing Society and even the Housing Authority with a view to improving the acquisition process and providing more options to the owners, for example, the "flat-for-flat" mode long proposed by us. As there are many surplus Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats, can these owners exchange the flats that they are now living in for these HOS flats? As for the more dilapidated units of even lower market values, can we discuss with the Housing Society on rehousing the owners in the form of housing for senior citizens, meaning that they only have the licence to live there but not the ownership? We also agree that the owners may set up co-operatives,

that is, a reverse initiative of redevelopment as proposed by the DAB to help owners with means in setting up co-operatives and seeking professional support, so that they can handle redevelopment matters themselves.

I hope the Secretary can consider these different proposals and modes for in addition to the urban renewal to be undertaken by the URA, some railway projects will also involve acquisition in the future. I am now handling the acquisition of Tai Shing House in connection with the West Island Line, and I will later discuss the issue with the Secretary. Will there be this kind of acquisition issues in relation to the Shatin to Central Link project in the future? There is an urgency to make alternative arrangements for acquisition and relocation. Moreover, I believe we will face greater difficulties, that is, the private housing estates which are some 20 storeys tall and over 40 years old with fragmented ownership that will pose thorny problems in the course of redevelopment in the future.

I know that the Secretary commissioned some academics to study the mode of urban renewal in different cities two years ago, and the findings reveal that it is very easy to deal with the redevelopment projects of old buildings with only four to five storeys because of the substantial financial incentives. However, it will be very difficult to deal with buildings with 20 storeys which can hardly be redeveloped for profits. Actually, there are now some large private housing estates with buildings of more than 40 years in age and very fragmented ownership. When some owners have unfortunately fallen into the grass-roots stratum of an M-shaped society and cannot afford maintenance, the problem of redevelopment of private housing estates will become more complicated. Therefore, in order to take precautions before things actually happen, I hope that we can pool together collective wisdom and think about ways to handle the problems of these private housing estates in advance.

Finally, President, urban renewal and maintenance is a poverty problem, not merely a problem about professional works. Many occupants are only tenants who lack the incentives and abilities to carry out building maintenance. However, they will often become victims once an accident occurs. So, I hope the Secretary for Development and the Secretary for Transport and Housing will urgently increase the housing supply and relax the eligibility for public housing as soon as possible so as to enable the tenants who can only afford to rent dilapidated private flats to move into public housing flats as soon as possible.

President, very often, Hong Kong can demonstrate strong unity in the face of disasters and crises, which was exactly the case when SARS broke out in 2003. I hope that this time when we also face these "time bombs", all political parties and groupings can work with one heart, with a mentality of being prepared to pool collective wisdom and tolerate, to look for new ideas together with the Government with a view to solving the problems of urban renewal and dangerous building structure in different modes, so that reasonable arrangements can be made for the tenants and the owners.

Thank you, President.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members have finished speaking on the motion. I now call upon the Secretary for Development to speak on the motion.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I have to give special thanks to the 20 Members who spoke yesterday and this morning. Members of the Legislative Council, be they professionals or Members well-versed in district affairs, have provided very constructive views. Their views will facilitate our work in tackling the problem of buildings in disrepair further, which is a problem of great import given its close relationship with the people's livelihood.

Let me summarize the several salient points espoused in the speeches of the 20 Members. First, Members in general agree that the problem of old buildings in disrepair in Hong Kong is a very complicated issue, which will only worsen as buildings age. Second, I take comfort in many Members acknowledging that the Government has made an effort in this respect, though the effort made may be inadequate and fails to solve the problem thoroughly. Third, Members pointed out that the problem cannot be effectively solved by the Development Bureau alone, and has to rely on the co-operation of various Bureaus and government departments, whereas the co-ordination effort should be stepped up.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell Members that I share their views fully. On 29 January, the night the incident happened, to be more exact, during the early hours of the following day, I sent an email to the Chief Executive about the incident, and the content mainly included the following points:

First, I told the Chief Executive that my colleagues and I felt particularly sad about the incident. Naturally, we were sad about the casualties caused. But we were also sad that the awareness of building safety remained very low despite the efforts we had made over the past years, and that such a serious incident would have happened in a cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong.

Second, I shared with the Chief Executive that the collapse this time around did not only highlight the problem of dilapidated buildings, but also a very serious social problem. For the most disadvantaged in Hong Kong, who badly need the care and attention of the SAR Government, are living in these old and dilapidated buildings in the worst condition.

Third, I also pointed out that the Government itself should be more consistent, more united and more determined in order to deal with the problem thoroughly.

I reported to him that the Development Bureau would work together with the colleagues concerned, particularly those from the Home Affairs Bureau, to perform this task well. If co-ordination work were required within the Government, the Development Bureau would be more than prepared to assume that role. And I, as a Secretary under the Accountability System, was obliged to bear this responsibility.

Actually, I did an exclusive interview with the media a month ago, in which I concluded my work in the past two and a half years, which represents nearly half of my tenure. When I was asked about the greatest challenge I would have to face during my remaining term, I replied that it was urban renewal. In the board sense, urban renewal definitely includes the important issue of buildings in disrepair, but is it necessary to appoint a co-ordinator for this purpose as proposed by Ms Starry LEE? I have to consider the proposal carefully, for this may result in superfluous structure, and I do not want to attract criticisms of the Development Bureau over-expanding.

Dr Margaret NG asked about the policies adopted by us in handling dilapidated buildings. The policies adopted are indeed very clear. We know that the problem of dilapidated buildings must be dealt with from four aspects. The first aspect is legislation; the second aspect is law enforcement; the third aspect is the implementation of matching measures, and the fourth aspect is public education. I will try to respond to the views I heard from Members yesterday and this morning in these four aspects.

In respect of legislation, I gave an account on this in my speech yesterday. Thanks to the hardwork of Members between November 2007 and the end of 2008, the legislation on the regulation of minor works has been completed, both the principal ordinance and the subsidiary legislation are ready, and the registration regime for minor works contractors has been introduced promptly. This registration regime for minor works contractors is extremely useful to our work on building management, particularly in terms of its relevance to renovation workers as mentioned by Mr KAM Nai-wai.

At present, for some extremely simple renovation works, like painting works, wallpapering and plastering, are exempted from the regulation of the ordinance. However, renovation works involving the building members, such as the installation of windows, the erection of supporting frames for air-conditioners or the removal of unauthorized structures, are classified as minor works subject to regulation in future, or as major works requiring prior approval of the Buildings Department (BD). Before the establishment of the regulatory regime for minor works, people considered the practice of adopting the same arrangement for both minor and major works troublesome, for applicants were required to submit plans in advance before employing authorized persons to carry out the works. People thus lacked the incentive to comply with the statutory requirement of employing qualified persons to carry out the works, or they may just use this as an excuse for non-compliance.

However, now the classification of minor works is set out unequivocally in the ordinance, as well as the Practice Notes issued by the BD to the trade for reference, and the works must be carried out by registered contractors. Minor works contractors include not only companies, but also individuals and individual contractors engaging in low-skilled works who may also apply, but they must complete a mandatory top-up course to qualify for registration. To encourage the trade to attend the top-up course and complete registration, we will subsidize members of the trade in attending such courses, in response to the request made

by Members representing trade unions in particular. The course will cover the requirements stipulated in the ordinance and the codes of practice on works safety. Contractors will also be reminded during the course that they cannot carry out minor works for which they have not registered. Hence, I believe some of the renovation workers and companies will register as registered minor works contractors.

Yesterday, I submitted to the Legislative Council the Buildings (Amendment) Bill (the Bill) for the implementation of a mandatory building inspection scheme and a mandatory window inspection scheme. I would like to thank Members for their support of the spirit of the Bill and their efforts to expedite its scrutiny. Certainly, in the course of scrutiny, Members will definitely raise questions on the particular details of the Bill, and may even propose certain necessary amendments. As mentioned by Mr KAM Nai-wai, if unauthorized structures are identified in the course of building inspection, how should they be dealt with? Though we have put forth a proposal, we are prepared to listen to the views of Members. If the amendments are necessary and practicable, they should definitely be adopted, for it is the outcome of the scrutiny of the Bill. If the scrutiny of the Amendment Bill can be carried out expeditiously, definitely, it will greatly facilitate our work in enhancing the safety of buildings in Hong Kong.

The third item of legislation is the Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) (Specification of Lower Percentage) Notice submitted by we last week, and several Members, including Mr Jeffrey LAM, Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Mr IP Kwok-him, have also mentioned this point. It is proposed in the subsidiary legislation lowering the compulsory sale application threshold for buildings of 50 years of age or above from 90% to 80%. In the course of formulating this proposal, I was reminded by many people that it was highly risky to put forth such a proposal, for the lowering of the threshold might easily attract criticisms for facilitating estate developers in carrying out acquisitions and undermining the rights of minority owners. I believe Members may have heard similar reasons put forth by certain alliances of minority owners at certain case conferences, or will hear so in the course of the scrutiny of the subsidiary legislation in future.

However, we have examined the issue again and again, and received many submissions on this. We found that it is a matter of majority shares and minority shares held by owners, but not one between major estate developers and minority

owners. I know that many elderly owners are now trapped in their flats in old buildings, which are the only asset they possess. But since these buildings are not provided with lifts, and no management and security services are provided, their living condition is most undesirable. If we can provide a favourable condition for acquisition, these owners may be able to cash in their assets, which residual value is very low originally, and their lives can be improved. It was out of this people-based principle that I took the risk to propose this Notice. I hope that the Subcommittee established by Members will understand the rationale adopted by us.

Why should the legislation relating to compulsory sale for redevelopment in Hong Kong be enacted? Certainly, it is because the number of cases requiring redevelopment in Hong Kong is increasing, and it is impossible for the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) to take up all the redevelopment work. The Legislative Council is good, for a number of Members are former and incumbent members of the URA, including Mr James TO, Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Mr IP Kwok-him. These Members may readily tell us that since the establishment of the URA in 2001, the URA has only carried out some 40 redevelopment projects, covering only 500-odd old buildings. In comparison with the figures I shared with Members yesterday, which state that the number of buildings over 50 years of age will increase by 500 every year in Hong Kong, and so the current pace of redevelopment can hardly cope with the increase. Hence, it is inevitable and necessary for private developers to take up the redevelopment work under suitable circumstances and in suitable cases.

However, there is one point that I must clarify here. Mr James TO is not here today, but he said yesterday that regarding certain redevelopment sites which had been acquired by estate developers, the URA would sometimes be subject to restraints from the Government, which prevented it from taking forward the projects concerned. Definitely, it sounds to be another allegation of collaboration between the Government and the business sector, and thus I must clarify this today. Yesterday, late at night, I asked my colleagues to check the Business Plans submitted to us by the URA every year, and we confirmed that the allegation was unsubstantiated. Assuredly, that has never happened. The URA was established for the accomplishment of certain social missions. Decisions on redevelopment projects thus hinged on the condition of the buildings and residents in the redevelopment areas. For this reason, according to the existing legislation or urban renewal strategy, the URA is required to conduct social

impact assessments on each redevelopment project, but it is not required to assess the impact on estate developers. Hence, regarding this remark, particularly when it is made by Mr James TO, who is an incumbent member of the Board of the URA, I must make this clarification.

Many Members know that the Urban Renewal Strategy review has been commenced since the middle of 2008. In addition to the review of the mission of the URA, many detailed particulars are covered by the review. We have made good progress, and we will soon enter the third stage of the Urban Renewal Strategy review, the so-called "Consensus Building" stage. To facilitate our communication with the public and the building of consensus, starting from this Saturday, I will host or participate in a radio programme for four consecutive Saturdays to have direct communication with the public.

To date, a number of Members, particularly Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Ms Cyd HO who have spoken earlier, have pointed out that consensus in some measure has been established on the general principles on urban renewal in future. These principles include the adoption of the bottom-up approach instead of the top-down approach in the determination of projects for implementation. Under the 4R principles, namely reservation, redevelopment, rehabilitation and revitalization, a better district-based balance has to be struck. Sometimes, the need for redevelopment may be stronger in a certain district, while in another district, the need for rehabilitation may prevail, and owners affected should be given the right to choose. However, the choices offered under the so-called "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" options are more or less slogans. We have to take follow-up actions to realize the "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" options according to the several major principles, and I believe at the stage of "Consensus Building" in future, these will be the principles to be advocated by the Development Bureau.

Hence, upon the completion of the Urban Renewal Strategy review, if it is found that amendments have to be made to the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance, I am completely open-minded about this, for legislative work is one of the important links in dealing with dilapidated buildings in Hong Kong.

Second, enforcement comes after a policy. In the information paper submitted by me yesterday, the enforcement work carried out by the BD over the past years is set out in Table 1 to Table 10. As evident in the figures,

prosecutions were initiated against some 3 000 cases in a year, and some 40 000 unauthorized structures were demolished. To some people, this may seem to be a great number, but Members seem to consider that a more stringent approach has to be adopted in enforcement, or that more powerful deterrence should be imposed under the legislation.

The understanding of Dr Margaret NG is entirely correct. Since the Buildings Ordinance involves personal safety, including the safety of public members other than owners, the Building Authority is given extensive powers. According to section 22 of the Buildings Ordinance, the Building Authority may enter any premises or land when he considers any structure, formed or man-made land is dangerous or liable to becoming dangerous. By the same token, section 26 of the same Ordinance empowers the Building Authority to carry out works in case of emergency. Hence, we have to identify ways to make the best use of the power conferred on the Building Authority under the Ordinance, so as to carry out enforcement work effectively, and I will examine this subject with the Director of Architectural Services in future.

I very much welcome the proposals put forth by Mr LEE Wing-tat and Dr Priscilla LEUNG on law enforcement, but I will not give detailed responses here, for we need time to examine the proposals. In principle, Mr LEE Wing-tat mentioned that there were good and bad owners. However, in the course of enforcement, it will be difficult to differentiate good owners from bad ones who deliberately defy the law, but we will follow up and examine the proposals.

The third aspect of work is the implementation of support and matching measures. Ms Cyd HO pointed out that legislation might not be an undesirable means, and mandatory actions might be required, but this had to be implemented cautiously, for owners of different social strata were involved, and it would be difficult in some measure to stipulate the detailed distinction in law. According to the current measures implemented, a standardized approach is stipulated in the Ordinance, but support and matching measures of great diversity are put in place. The support measures are targeted at incapable owners, for we must provide assistance to them. Members may notice that in the past few years, we have put in great efforts in this respect, which range from the introduction of the Building Management Grant Scheme for Elderly Owners to the Operation Building Bright (OBB). We do so for we understand that the problems faced by disadvantaged owners cannot be solved by legislation alone. Hence, we have to implement

tailor-made support measures before attending to the relevant laws, for this approach of administration may gain support more easily.

Mr KAM Nai-wai asked whether we could consider waiving the interest of the loans provided at present. Actually, under the loan schemes provided by the BD, recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and the elderly are given interest-free loans. Besides, the loan repayment period of the elderly is particularly long, which can be extended from 36 months in general to 72 months. For those elderly who claim to be incapable of repaying loans, we will register a charge against the title of their flats and deal with the issue later. Why did we introduce the Building Management Grant Scheme for Elderly Owners in 2008 to offer grants to help the eligible elderly? I would like to spend some time here to share this with Members, for this manifests the spirit of people-based administration advocated by the SAR Government all along. Between the end of 2007 and early 2008, we visited many elderly people. Colleagues in the BD also reflected to us that the elderly suffered from great anxiety despite the provision of the Grant Scheme, for the only asset they possessed was their relatively old flats, a point I have mentioned earlier. On the other hand, they might be living on the Old Age Allowance, the "fruit grant" so to speak. They thus had to raise money for the works concerned, and if they failed to get the money, they might have to borrow it, but still, they had to repay the loan. I was deeply moved by a couple who said they must repay the loan. Though we told them they did not have to repay the loan and we might just register a charge against the title of their flat, they insisted on repaying the loan. They then saved \$50 to \$100 each month to repay their loan. We considered that the problem must be dealt with, and we thus introduced the Building Management Grant Scheme for Elderly Owners.

I wonder if Members notice that never ever has any scheme been introduced with retrospective effect. I have handled many loans and grant schemes, and this is the only one with retrospective effect. What does it mean to have retrospective effect? That is to say, owners who had carried out repair works before the introduction of the scheme and borrowed money for such purpose, they would be allowed to obtain a loan from the Grant Scheme to repay the loans they had taken out beforehand. I hope this example will help Members understand that in the course of policy formulation, we do not only focus on the overall policy. We will introduce some minor and specific policies, for only by doing so can we make policies achieve the desired results.

A number of Members have acknowledged and praised the introduction of the OBB, but I have to add a footnote here that a lenient scheme like this cannot be sustained long term, for the Government has to adhere to the principle that taxpayers' money should be used to help people who are incapable of helping themselves. We should bear in mind that the scheme does not require applicants to undergo any means test, who may be tenants or shop owners, and was introduced at the time to create job opportunities. The OBB, which costs \$2 billion, is an initiative underpinned by new thinking. However, these initiatives of new thinking should be subject to restriction in some measure, otherwise, it would run counter to the concept we always mention, that is, owners are responsible for keeping their properties in repairs and maintenance. No matter how, the OBB still has much capacity to meet applications from owners. Perhaps, during the inspection of the 4 000 buildings of 50 years of age, if we identify buildings without OCs that require repairs, we may as well use the balance of the OBB to handle it. As for the question of whether additional funds will be injected into the scheme, I think it is a rather difficult issue. Mr IP Kwok-him hoped that the work could be expedited, and I think it is feasible. At present, the works on 1 000-odd buildings have not yet been commenced, which is solely because the OCs concerned have put forth some proposals, and thus procedures like meetings, tendering exercises, examination of tenders and awarding tenders have to be conducted.

Insofar as tendering exercises and examination of tenders are concerned, I would like to point out in particular that the OBB has offered us a golden opportunity to step up our efforts in corruption-prevention work. Mr KAM Nai-wai mentioned that consultancies had to be employed at a cost of several thousand dollars. In fact, I have come across a case where the consultancy was employed at \$1,200 for building repairs work, for the consultancy knew for sure that it would get the tender in future. Such conduct, which is known as "tender rigging", is dealt with in particular under the OBB this time around, for the Independent Commission Against Corruption has given us enormous support in this aspect.

I would now come to the role of the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS). Over the years, the HKHS has rendered great and enormous support to the Government in building management and repairs work. The 10 Property Management Advisory Centres established in the territory have rightly provided technical support to owners in need. In an interview with the media yesterday, the Chief Executive Officer of the HKHS said that the HKHS would step up its efforts to support the mandatory building inspection scheme and the mandatory

window inspection scheme introduced by us. The HKHS will also inject resources to cope with the \$150 million spent on the OBB. It also agrees that upon the enactment of legislation, the grant for the first inspection will be provided by the HKHS, and about 80% of the owners will get the grant for the first inspection. The HKHS will also introduce the Voluntary Building Classification Scheme about six months before the legislation comes into effect. Buildings having undergone inspection and obtained the certification can be exempted from mandatory building inspection.

Naturally, the role of the URA may have to be fine-tuned subsequent to the Urban Renewal Strategy review. But, by all accounts, the role of the URA, after fine-tuning, in fulfilling its social mission rather than its profit-making function will be enhanced. Hence, both the reverse approach for redevelopment mentioned by Mr CHAN Kam-lam, which is the bottom-up and district-based approach, and Dr Priscilla LEUNG's proposal for the URA to play the role of a facilitator, fall within the scope of the Urban Renewal Strategy review this time around. At the meeting of the Panel on Development to be held this month, I will submit a progress report and I look forward to hearing Members' views on the urban renewal strategy.

I have spent some time talking about the support measures for they are very important. However, I strongly believe that legislation is not the only solution to the problem. For with the best legislation and support measures in place, these social problems will persist if certain people neglect safety, make mistakes out of ignorance, take short-cuts and make quick bucks. Hence, the fourth aspect of work is public education.

The target recipients of public education include owners, who must be on the top of the list for they are held responsible for this. Second, tenants should make careful choices, and if they suspect that the flats offered by owners have undergone alterations and pose safety threats, they should in no way rent those flats. Third, some Members suggested that watchmen should be educated, so that they will report unauthorized renovation works once noticed. We should also educate contractors to be responsible and act in accordance with the law. We also wish to enhance the awareness of renovation workers, so that they will only carry out works under suitable conditions. Hence, the registration regime for minor works contractors and the training courses I mentioned earlier will greatly facilitate public education.

Prof Patrick LAU is a professor and the several points raised by him are very helpful to the follow-up work we have to carry out. First, some simple and straightforward guidelines should be issued to enable owners, tenants, minor works contractors and renovation workers to gain knowledge of renovation works and building structures. He also suggested uploading plans onto the Internet. Prof LAU, these plans are indeed available on the Internet now. In September 2009, the BD launched the Building Records Access and Viewing Online (BRAVO) services. Under the system, members of the public only need to open an account on the Internet, and through the Internet, they can gain access to over 2 million plans of private buildings of the territory and the relevant documents. Prof LAU also suggested including building safety in the curriculum of primary and secondary education, which is a very good suggestion. Actually, with the implementation of the new "3-3-4" academic structure, the Development Bureau has encouraged departments under its purview to participate and support the subject of Liberal Studies. So far, teaching kits have been developed for certain areas of work of the Development Bureau, including slope safety and urban renewal, and some teaching kits for primary education are in production, covering subjects on heritage conservation and water works.

Though Mr WONG Kwok-hing's proposal is also on computerization, I may have to let him down. Mr WONG proposed that information on unauthorized structures be computerized, but colleagues of the department consider the work not cost-effective. Such work is not included in the various prioritized tasks and work in this respect will not be commenced for the time being.

Having given an account of the four policy directions, I would like to respond to several questions posed by Members. First, it is on the standard of building inspection. As I emphasized yesterday, the incident that happened in Ma Tau Wai was an extremely rare case, and Ms Miriam LAU shared this view earlier. Precisely because the incident was rare, the police and colleagues from the BD have to investigate the case carefully and thoroughly. Again, I implore members of the public not to make any guesses, when the truth is not yet found and comprehensive information is not yet available, about the accident being caused by the inadequacy of our inspection.

Second, I have to thank Dr Joseph LEE for bringing up the issue of asbestos sheets. The department concerned announced yesterday that laboratory

results indicated that the risk in this respect was extremely low. However, they will keep this under watch, ensuring the issue will not cause concern.

Some Members have mentioned the problem of buildings built with seawater and cubicles, or now commonly known as "partitioned flats". The BD does not have any definition or statistics on buildings built with seawater. According to general understanding, these were buildings built with salt water or seawater. As mentioned by Prof LAU yesterday, these buildings were built with 1:2:4 concrete, composing of one portion of water and four portions of sand. At present, the Buildings (Construction) Regulation has stipulated the maximum chloride content of the admixtures in cement. As for buildings built with cement of relatively high chloride content in the past, the steel bars embedded in the concrete may suffer serious rusting, resulting in the spalling off of concrete, and we should be able to detect such problems during inspections.

As for converted or partitioned units, commonly known as "partitioned flats", truly, we have to address this social problem squarely. Surely, before anything else, we have to ask one question: Why do these families move into these flats even though they know clearly that these flats may be dangerous? According to the existing Buildings Ordinance, for construction works carried out on residential premises, including converting the premises into separate units or cubicles, prior approval and consent of the Building Authority has to be sought if the works affect the building structure, including the loads requirement, the public fire exits and drainage systems, and so on. Otherwise, the works concerned are regarded as unauthorized building works. Once unauthorized building works are discovered, the BD will take enforcement actions according to the existing policy on the removal of unauthorized structures, which include taking priority enforcement action to remove unauthorized structures constituting obvious or imminent danger to life and property. Certainly, the greatest problem is that the BD, though being the law-enforcement agency, may not necessarily know such cases. Even when they conduct investigations upon the receipt of complaints, they may not enter the premises concerned to carry out inspections. By all accounts, the issue of law enforcement warrants further examination.

Mr Frederick FUNG mentioned a lot of problems in relation to building management in particular, which surely reflected that the subject has been a cause of concern to him for many years. Colleagues from the Home Affairs Bureau have expressed their views in this respect. In respect of the mandatory

formation of OCs, in the Report on the Public Consultation on Building Management and Maintenance issued in January 2005, the result of the consultation on the feasibility of compelling owners to form OCs was published. It was reported that the community at large recognized OCs as the basic management structure for facilitating building management and maintenance. However, they at the same time pointed out that the formation of OCs could not guarantee proper building management. For the effectiveness of an OC depended heavily on whether the owners and the OC had the determination and professional support to manage and maintain their buildings. An inactive or defunct OC would not be helpful to proper building management and maintenance in any way.

Moreover, some Members suggested that the Secretary for Home Affairs might act in accordance with section 40C of the Building Management Ordinance, when a building was a danger or a risk of danger, to apply to the Lands Tribunal to name a specific owner as the convenor to deal with the appointment of a building management agent. However, in the event of a danger posed by a building, this arrangement is not as effective as the immediate direct intervention by the Building Authority, which is a practice stipulated in the Building Ordinance proposed by me. For under the former arrangement, a number of hurdles have to be overcome. Notwithstanding an order of the Lands Tribunal made under section 4, section 40C will apply only when a management committee has not been appointed under section 3, 3A or 4 of the Building Management Ordinance. Hence, as pointed out by Mr James TO yesterday, in the event that a building is a danger or a risk of danger, section 40C is only a remote solution that could not provide prompt remedy in the face of an imminent danger.

With regard to resources, Dr PAN and Mr IP Wai-ming have both expressed their concern about the manpower of the BD. I can understand their concern, for the two Members have all along shown concern for the work of colleagues in works departments. I have conducted a meeting in person with front-line staff through Dr PAN and Mr IP. I would like to explain here that the 500-odd colleagues concerned are not being dismissed. Since these 500-odd colleagues were employed back then under a 10-year project to remove unauthorized structures, it is only reasonable that the resource committed to the project will cease to be provided in view of the completion of the project early next year. As to whether these experienced colleagues can be absorbed by other work, I have to deal with the issue myself in the next ten months or so. To echo

the analogy drawn by Dr PAN, I express my full agreement that the decrease in the number of doctors does not mean a decrease in the number of patients, and by the same token, even if all the doctors are deployed to the operating theatre, there is no guarantee that we will all remain healthy. Hence, we must review the priorities and workload of the BD, and we may have to step up our efforts in preventive work. I think Dr PAN will also agree that more resources should be deployed on primary health care, and if we can keep the gate properly, patients can be spared of enduring pains in hospital. I am not saying that the condition of hospitals is dissatisfaction, but that patients will after all suffer a lot of pain if they have to undergo surgeries.

Ms Cyd HO expressed her concern about the impact of railway projects on old buildings in Hong Kong. In this connection, Under Secretary YAU will remind me about this. The railway works in Hong Kong are subject to the Buildings Ordinance and the relevant ordinances. The departments concerned will monitor closely the works at different stages, say before the commencement of the work project, during the course of works and upon the completion of the works, to minimize the impact caused by the works on the community, and this is particularly so in the cases of the Express Rail Link and the West Island Line, both being concerns to Ms Cyd HO.

Finally, I would like to conclude that insofar as the problem of buildings in disrepair is concerned, I must emphasize that we cannot rely solely and completely on the Government to handle the issue. We have to rely on the collective effort of society as a whole in ensuring building safety. I look forward to working together with Members in the future, be it through the various panels concerned or the special committee proposed by Prof Patrick LAU, to follow up the very constructive suggestions put forth by Members in the adjournment debate today.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Before I put the question on the motion for adjournment, I wish to remind Members that if the motion is passed, I shall adjourn the Council under Rule 16(3) of the Rules of Procedure. In that case, this meeting cannot proceed to consider the remaining items on the Agenda.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That this Council do now adjourn. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(No hands raised)

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

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is not 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, who are present. I declare the motion negated. We will now proceed to the remaining items.

(Motion originally scheduled to be moved at last Council meeting)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Three motions with no legislative effect. I have accepted the recommendations of the House Committee: that is, the movers of the motions each may speak, including reply, for up to 15 minutes, and the movers of the second and third motions may have another five minutes to speak on the amendments; the movers of amendments each may speak for up to 10 minutes; and movers of amendments to amendments and other Members each may speak for up to seven minutes. I am obliged to direct any Member speaking in excess of the specified time to discontinue.

First motion: Promoting the development of fishing activities.

Members who wish to speak in the debate on the motion will please press the "Request to speak" button.

I will call upon Mr WONG Yung-kan to speak and move his motion.

PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF FISHING ACTIVITIES

MR WONG YUNG-KAN (in Cantonese): President, it was only until two weeks ago that this motion was able to "get a catch", and a long line had to be cast to catch a big fish. Many people think it only takes a fishing line, a fishing hook or a fishing rod to fish, but this is actually not true. If you really "wait idly for a bite", you have to wait a long time for a fish to bite indeed. For the industry, fishing is a way to earn a living; for fishing enthusiasts, it is a sport or a hobby; and for many retirees, it is perhaps an activity to kill time. Actually, as far as I know, fishing activities are very diverse in nature and have become increasingly professional, with exclusive equipment, apparel and safety equipment. Just take fishing rods as an example, they cost a few hundred dollars on average, and can be as expensive as some \$100,000, and their selling prices are probably even more expensive than golfing gears. Those who have ever come into contact with members of fishing organizations should know that there are more people taking part in fishing than one would have imagined, and people of different ages are crazy about this activity.

During my previous trips, I had the honour of joining some national events. For example, during my sea fishing trip off New Zealand on a rented vessel a few years ago, I caught a shark. But we could not make that shark a delicious dish. Why? Because in New Zealand, it is specified that people who have caught any shark must release it back to the sea and let it continue to live. Fishing enthusiasts like us were inspired by the activity to think about our catches. For two reasons, I think fishing activities can bring enormous economic benefits. Fishing involves a number of related industries, which include fishing tackle, the hire and sale of vessels and the development of tourism-related industries, and thus it also includes the development of the catering industries, fishing services and the media. For example, there are at present two fishing magazines in Hong Kong which exclusively introduce favourite fishing spots in Hong Kong and give advice on how to take safety precautions to increase safety factors, so that anglers can enjoy the fun of getting their catches.

In the United States, economic benefits brought by fishing activities amount to over US\$100 billion per year, and over 100 jobs are generated by the angling trade. Countries which issue fishing licenses also get a huge amount of revenue from licensing fees. For example, Canada receives revenues amounting

to CAN\$6 billion per year from fishing licences; and in Australia, fishing licences also contribute AUD120 million to the government's annual revenue.

Another reason is that, through the angling trade, these places have achieved conservation and helped fishermen previously engaged in commercial capture fishery to undergo transformation. Governments of places such as the United States, Canada, Australia and even Japan and Taiwan have, one after another, required the application of fishing licenses for fishing in order to regulate fishing activities and have them comply with the principle of sustainable development. Besides, in these places, as fishing activities are primarily recreational in nature and thus consume less marine resources than commercial fishing, there are conscious efforts to encourage local fishermen to engage in businesses supporting the angling trade, such as the provision of passenger services and training, which will greatly reduce fishermen's dependence on commercial fishing, thereby facilitating better marine conservation. As I said just now, originally we did not know that, having caught a shark, we had to release it back to the sea, and it was the vessel owner who told us that whenever this kind of fish is caught, it has to be released alive; and those who do not want to do so must not catch it, and even if they have caught it, they cannot take it away.

President, Hong Kong, being surrounded by the sea, is a subtropical place situated at the estuary of the Pearl River. There are over 1 000 fish species in nearby waters, and the popular ones amount to over 200 species, and with convenient transport, which makes various fishing spots easily accessible by vehicles or boats, it can be said that Hong Kong has all the conditions of a famous fishing spot.

Actually, there are quite a lot of fishing enthusiasts in Hong Kong. According to the results of a survey conducted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) published back in 2004, the number of people who were fond of fishing activities was estimated to be about 500 000. As a result of promotional efforts in the community, the number of enthusiasts is continuously rising. Besides, many fishing enthusiasts from Japan, Taiwan and even East Asian places, out of admiration for Hong Kong's being so famous, participate in fishing activities in Hong Kong. Recently, some Japanese came to Hong Kong to participate in a competition. There is an increasing number of fishing tackle shops, fishing magazines and even websites in the form of fishing organizations. We have to know that it is not easy to operate a shop selling

fishing tackle or a decent fishing magazine, and efforts of the community are required. The fishing economy of Hong Kong has taken initial shape and laid the foundation for developing Hong Kong into a renowned fishing base. However, as I previously said that the development of leisure agriculture and fishery trades was possible in Hong Kong, the Government failed to see the potential of the development of the angling trade, and neither is it eager to consider how assistance can be rendered to the members of the trade who are painstakingly shouldering the heavy burden of developing the industry. There is no statutory regulation for the development of the angling trade so far, let alone its development as an industry and sustainable development.

Regarding the motion today, I would like to speak specifically on the direction of development for fishing activities, how assistance can be rendered to fishermen in their transformation and the safety issues of fishing activities. Actually, Hong Kong can take reference from lots of overseas experiences in the development of the angling trade. I consider it most important for the Government to change its mindset and elevate fishing activities to a higher level so as to treat them as not only leisure activities but also a sport, or even a trade. In the Mainland, there is a programme on the China Central Television specifically on fishing activities, which is very special. Whenever there are competitions, the television station will send a crew to make on-site records and shooting. Therefore, to promote this sport, I believe we have to start with management. The Government must study the establishment of a fishing licensing system and formulate a management framework for the sustainable development of the angling trade. It should also develop Hong Kong into a renowned angling base in collaboration with the tourism industry in order to attract overseas tourists to Hong Kong. As far as I know, just counting places where fishing licenses are issued, there are 40 million fishing enthusiasts in the United States, 5.5 million in Canada, 4.5 million in Australia and 37 million in Japan. These show that there are already over 100 million fishing enthusiasts, and coupled with the rapid development on the Mainland in recent years, tourism products and projects focusing on fishing activities have great potential.

Besides, in order to promote the Hong Kong brand of fishing activities, I think that, apart from promoting them to the media, it is more important to organize more local fishing activities for different ages; and externally, to encourage outstanding anglers in Hong Kong to participate in major international competitions and strive to host large-scale international competitions. However, I have talked to some organizations of fishing enthusiasts earlier and found that

they have lots of grudges when they talked about participating in international competitions. They pointed out that some countries intended to invite them to participate in competitions as representatives of Hong Kong, but they had great difficulties applying to the Government for the use of the regional emblem. Therefore, they took vigorous exception to this approach of the Government. This attitude adopted by the Government towards fishing activities has made them feel that they have no alternative. I think Hong Kong should take the opportunity of hosting the East Asian Games to organize sports activities for Hong Kong and also small-scale competitions for fishing organizations. As long as the Government has the heart and is willing to put in resources to co-organize these competitions with non-governmental organizations, I do not see any difficulty in organizing fishing competitions in Hong Kong.

Besides, many overseas brands of fishing tackle intended to organize exhibitions in Hong Kong, but they are often unable to obtain assistance from the Government, and neither can they find any exhibition venue, which have made them quite upset. I hope the Government will provide some help to these industries.

President, as in other places, the more prosperous the angling trade, the more conducive it is to the transformation of fishermen. Anticipating the favourable prospect of the leisure agriculture and fishery trades, the agriculture and fisheries sector and I urged the Government to relax the restrictions on angling at fish rafts and fish ponds as early as in 2000, and approval was only obtained after considerable efforts had been made. However, with all the conditions set by the Government, it was not easy to open up fish rafts. Let me cite a very simple example; some fish rafts have opened up, but even the cooking of instant noodles is not allowed. People who go fishing there may bring some bread but they cannot cook instant noodles, otherwise, they may violate the law. Therefore, I hope the Government will consider allowing people to do simple cooking on fish rafts.

Besides, I would like to say something about the safety of fishing. Earlier, I read from a news report that a man caught a red snapper of three catties and fell into the sea as a result. When he was rescued, he was still holding the red snapper in his hand. This shows that fishers may sometimes forget about their safety when they are extremely happy. I think the Government should make efforts to organize activities or talks on safety factors for anglers to remind them of how to take precautions to avoid accidents because there are precedents

of angling-related causalities. Therefore, I hope the Government will do something.

Besides, it can also organize some courses for anglers. Take Australia as an example, the local authorities offer courses for anglers to teach them what real fishing is, so that they do not have to resort to only observing how others fish or going fishing on a whim and being glad when they are able to get a catch but upset when they are unable to do so. A friend of mine stayed on a fishing vessel for two days while drifted by the waves because he loves fishing. When I asked him how he felt upon his return, he said he was very happy and he found fishing great fun. However, when I asked some ladies who were beginner-anglers what they felt about fishing, they told me that when they caught a squid, it squirted its ink at them, and their faces were even more black than my clothes because they did not know how to handle the situation. Nevertheless, they still found it great fun and were even more fascinated by this activity, and they said that they would go fishing again in the future. Therefore, I hope the Government will enhance the content of the courses, especially in relation to safety factors.

With these remarks, President, I move the motion.

Mr WONG Yung-kan moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, as fishing is both a sport and a leisure activity, which has the characteristics of having diversified ways of participation and being suitable for people of various age groups, it has attracted many enthusiasts; and the rapid development of fishing-related industries has caused governments worldwide to formulate policies to develop local fishing activities; Hong Kong, being surrounded by the sea and with convenient transport, has the advantages for developing fishing activities, and the number of fishing enthusiasts has also continued to increase in recent years, yet due to the lack of appropriate policies, the development of fishing activities in Hong Kong is subject to many restrictions; as such, this Council urges the Government to formulate effective measures to promote the development of fishing activities in Hong Kong, which include:

- (a) to relax the existing restrictions on angling at fish rafts and fish ponds, so that the operators can provide more diversified services to cater for the needs of the public;

- (b) to relax the existing restrictions on passenger capacity of fishing vessels and, provided that safety standards are met, allow fishermen to operate an additional business of carrying passengers to go angling at sea;
- (c) to organize systematic training courses and set up a knowledge bank, so that fishing enthusiasts have the opportunities to acquire the knowledge of fishing skills, safety management and marine conservation, etc.;
- (d) to step up publicity on reservoir angling and provide more comprehensive facilities to attract more members of the public as well as tourists to engage in such leisure activity;
- (e) to provide additional resources to improve the conservation of marine resources, enhance the environment of the harbourfront, and increase facilities and safety equipment which are conducive to fishing activities, so as to facilitate fishing enthusiasts to enjoy angling on shore;
- (f) to encourage and assist in the organization of local and international fishing competitions to promote fishing activities, and to promote the beautiful coastal environment of Hong Kong to other places;
- (g) to study the establishment of a fishing licensing system with a view to striking a balance between the conservation of marine resources and promotion of the sustainable development of fishing activities; and
- (h) to study co-operating with the Pearl River Delta region to achieve better development and conservation of the entire waters, so as to facilitate the development of fishing activities."

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

SECRETARY FOR FOOD AND HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr WONG Yung-kan for moving this motion, which has given us an opportunity to examine the development of local fishing activities in the Legislative Council. The topics raised in the motion involve the work of a number of policy bureaux, such as the Food and Health Bureau, the Environment Bureau, the Transport and Housing Bureau and the Home Affairs Bureau, and their departments, whose views are consolidated in my speech.

Fishing activities have become increasingly popular in recent years. At weekends and on holidays, quite a number of fishing enthusiasts take part in different kinds of fishing activities. While some may go angling at reservoirs or at sea, others may go rock fishing at the shore or enjoy the fun of angling on fish rafts. There are also many fishing organizations formed by fishing enthusiasts in the community, which organize different fishing activities and competitions on a regular basis to contact people sharing the same interests and exchange what they have gained from fishing and views on fishing. The Government highly encourages the public to participate in these activities that are good for body and mind and allow people to stretch themselves in an outdoor environment to relieve their heavy work pressure. That said, Members may also know such time and space does not come easy for government officials and Members.

Here, I would also like to introduce a book entitled *Hong Kong Marine Recreational Fishing Booklet* published by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), which is available at a very low price of only \$52. The book covers various related knowledge, including code of practice for leisure fishing and over 300 fish species in local waters. It is colour-printed and contains information on the shapes, colours, fishing methods, baits and distribution of many species, which species can be caught in the 12 months of the year, their breeding seasons and even how to cook them. I believe this information may help interested people to begin joining these healthy activities, and I believe I will also take part if I have the time.

Actually, promoting the development of fishing activities and the Government's active promotion of its policy on the leisure fishery trade are closely related to each other. In the face of changes in the local economy and environment, traditional fishery and fish farming industries must make corresponding changes and undergo transformation. Now, many fishermen have started to proactively develop alternative aquatic tourism activities, including operating leisure angling on fish rafts and taking passengers to go angling at sea. The increasing popularity of fishing activities will, to a certain extent, help further

promote the development of the leisure fishery trade and improve fishermen's livelihood. The Government will, as usual, actively help fishermen seize this new opportunity under the premise of ensuring tourist safety.

Besides, promoting fishing activities is also closely related to the policy on conserving marine resources. Only by properly protecting marine resources and the ecological environment will the sustainable development of fishing activities be possible. The Government has also introduced quite a number of measures in this regard to enhance our work on nature conservation.

I will listen to Members' remarks first and give a more detailed account of the Government's policies and my response later.

Thank you, President.

DR PAN PEY-CHYOU (in Cantonese): Very often, we are so used to the familiar scenes and things around us that we do not find them special, and neither do we cherish them. However, in the eyes of those coming from afar, what seems mundane to us may be extremely extraordinary and thus very touching and unforgettable.

Here, I would like to recite a well-known, ancient Chinese poem to illustrate this phenomenon. This poem is from the *Walking out of Summer Gate Ballad* by CAO Cao in the Eastern Han Dynasty, which reads,

I come to see the boundless ocean
From Stony Hill on eastern shore
Water rolls in rhythmic motion,
Islands stand amid its roar.

Tress on trees, from peak to peak,
Grass on grass, lush far and night,
Autumn winds blow drear and bleak,
Monstrous billows surge up high.

Sun by day, moon by night
Appear to rise up from the deep.
The Milky Way with stars to sleep.
How happy I feel at this sight!
I sing this poem in sheer delight.

In this poem, the poet, who was from the inland in the north, made a trip to Jieshi specifically to view the boundless ocean. Admiring the scenery, the poet exclaimed that this trip was most memorable and a blessing in his life, which obviously showed that he was very satisfied with this journey. If we replace the name of the place Jieshi in the poem with Hong Kong, the mood can still apply. Quoting this poem, I actually want to illustrate how attractive the sea surrounding Hong Kong is to our compatriots growing up on the hinterland.

Actually, since the implementation of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) for residents on the Mainland in 2003, more and more compatriots from the Mainland have travelled to Hong Kong and spent money here. Areas on the Mainland benefiting from the IVS are moving further into the interland, and tourists joining tours have become increasingly demanding. Affluent tourists are no longer satisfied with shopping tours with tight schedules. With the continuous development of the tourism industry, we badly need to provide tourists with more diversified tourism programmes.

The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) considers that the development of the angling trade proposed by Mr WONG Yung-kan can precisely provide a spectrum of activities to increase Hong Kong's appeal to tourists and create new jobs. Fishing activities have a long history in Hong Kong, and piers, dams, rocks, riversides and even fish rafts are places suitable for fishing. Those who would like to get away from the shore can take small boats to the sea and enjoy angling within local waters. Certainly, they can also take larger vessels to the South China Sea and enjoy angling in the fish farms there.

In short, people may take part in the sport of fishing with different budgets or at different time to suit their own needs. Rock fishing involves relatively less expenses while boat fishing is more costly, yet both activities are very attractive. Actually, Hong Kong has favourable conditions for strengthening the development of all these fishing activities.

First of all, let us take a look at boat fishing. Hong Kong, situated at a favourable geographical location, and its peripheral waters abound with various marine fish — Mr WONG Yung-kan also made this point clearly just now, and regarding knowledge in this field, he is very professional. Being adjacent to fish farms in the South China Sea, Hong Kong also provides very convenient mooring spaces for vessels. The long history of the fishery industry in Hong Kong, the

rich hydrological knowledge of our fishermen and their familiarity with adjacent fish farms provide favourable conditions for organizing vessel and boat fishing tours and activities. Members may imagine the kind of satisfaction one will have when he takes a vessel to the sea away from the shore with a few dozen friends, casting lines in the midst of a fish farm after detecting the whereabouts of schools of fish with the help of equipment and enjoying the excitement of wrestling with and catching a big fish. The experience of enjoying seafood dishes from the catch in a moon-lit night with the flavour of the ocean and the rhythm of the waves is indeed unforgettable.

As for angling on shore, besides the seashore, there are also some fresh water fish ponds, reservoirs and many fish rafts for fish farming in Hong Kong where fishing activities can be developed, so that fishing enthusiasts can indulge in the fun of angling and enjoy the delicious catches.

Developing the angling trade can help increase the overall employment opportunities of society. Mr WONG Yung-kan also provided lots of figures in this regard just now. In a business-led general environment, the traditional fishery and fish farming industries are gradually declining, and related job are reducing. If proper arrangements are not made, fishermen will lose their jobs and their professionalism in this respect will also be overlooked. In view of this, I agree with the proposals made in the motion to relax the existing restrictions on passenger capacity of fishing vessels and, provided that safety standards are met, allow fishermen to operate an additional business of carrying passengers to go angling at sea in order to increase their income and protect their livelihood.

Certainly, unrestrained capturing will only cause the disappearance of limited resources. Draining the pond to get all the fish is only a short-sighted tactic. Therefore, the Government is duty-bound to develop the angling trade. It should examine the introduction of legislation for the licensing of operators of the angling trade in order to limit the fishing volume. Besides, the Government should also restrict the size of catches, as mentioned by Mr WONG just now, so as to avoid fish fry from being caught so that they may grow up and breed. This way, the angling trade will be able to develop in a sustainable manner.

There are many fishing enthusiasts and fishing competitions all over the world, and these activities actually have certain market values. Hong Kong has

lots of favourable conditions for developing fishing activities, and fishing can become a very attractive theme of tourism.

Fishing activities can bring various benefits to Hong Kong, but the Government must formulate relevant policies and regulations to encourage and set the standards for these activities so as to enable these activities to develop well.

I so submit.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): President, it seems the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) greatly supports this motion moved by "Uncle Kan" because the FTU once proposed formulating an economic development strategy which gives priority to employment. While Mr WONG Yung-kan's motion today seeks to promote the development of fishing activities, we consider that this activity is worth supporting if it can be complemented by the development of tourism and employment policies, thereby creating more job opportunities. Regarding this point, our colleague, Dr PAN Pey-chyou, has already given an account.

Hong Kong, being surrounded by sea on three sides, has many nice islands and fish farms where these activities can be developed. Regarding relaxing the existing restrictions on angling at fish rafts and fish ponds and passenger capacity of fishing vessels mentioned in items (a) and (b) of the original motion — as pointed out just now by Dr PAN Pey-chyou — we consider such relaxations necessary.

For example, there are quite a number of fish rafts around the area of Sam Mun Tsai in Tai Po where many people go angling and enjoy themselves at weekends and on holidays. However, the restrictions under the existing legislation have made the operation of these fish rafts difficult. According to the "Code of practice for recreational fishing on fish rafts" in the *Hong Kong Marine Recreational Fishing Booklet* published by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) — that is, the code of practice mentioned by the Secretary just now — people who participate in recreational fishing must not carry out activities which will cause disturbance to the operation of fish farming, including cooking, barbecuing or other water sports. Actually, this code of practice has severely restricted the development of leisure fishing activities and

related industries. Some fish raft operators hope the Government will relax the relevant requirements so that fish farmers may transform their fish rafts into fishing grounds for leisure fishing to maintain their living and attract more visitors. Therefore, we hope the Government will conduct more studies in this area.

President, developing fishing activities is not only a matter of developing the fishery industry. As in the case of angling at fish rafts mentioned earlier, we consider it a local community economic activity. If the Government complements the development properly, social enterprises, in collaboration with fishermen organizations, may jointly develop the local community culture and economy. Besides, fishing activities, when properly developed, may also complement the development of tourism. Just like eco-tourism, which is gaining popularity in different places all over the world in recent years, fishing is also a form of leisure tourism. Our neighbouring city of Kaohsiung in Taiwan has actively developed the leisure fishery trade in recent years and has even developed the leisure fishery trade into four major categories, namely, the category with the mode of operation focusing on fisheries production, to be supplemented by angling; the category with the mode of operation of professional angling and leisure entertainment; the mode of operation focusing on education and the mode focusing on sight-seeing and tourism, integrated with tourist attractions. Actually, these experiences are worthwhile references for Hong Kong because these diversified modes of operation can enable Hong Kong to have greater room for the development of the angling trade and even the fishery industry.

Certainly, before formulating a long-term plan for the development of fishing activities and the leisure fishery trade, the Government must examine the existing situation, especially when rock fishing has become increasingly popular in recent years and a number of rock fishing enthusiasts would choose to engage in rock fishing on land, at cliffs at island shores and rocks at the waters' edge, and there were a number of relevant accidents in the past. We consider that if the Government intends to promote the development of fishing activities, it should show concern for these accidents because if it even fails to provide the most basic safe environment for anglers, this will severely restrict the development of fishing activities.

President, we hope the Administration, the Secretary and other relevant policy bureaux will consider how fishing activities in Hong Kong can be

developed into part of the tourism industry and make the best use of the favourable geographical conditions of Hong Kong to create more employment opportunities for Hong Kong.

With these remarks, I support the original motion.

MR KAM NAI-WAI (in Cantonese): President, just now Mr IP Wai-ming said the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) supports this motion. I believe fishing is an activity many members of the public Mr WONG Yung-kan mentioned just now that a few hundred thousand members of the public participate in this activity. As members of the Hong Kong community, we also support this motion. However, this motion has triggered our discussion on three aspects.

First, a host of proposals made by Mr WONG Yung-kan in his original motion warrant the Government's consideration to find out about the scope of existing restrictions on fishing activities and how their development can be promoted because, as mentioned by Mr IP Wai-ming just now, fishing activities will, to a certain extent, promote the local community economy. Actually, quite a number of people are fond of fishing, and how to attract more people to take part in fishing activities or enable tourists to know that besides visiting the Hong Kong Disneyland when they are in Hong Kong whether the development of fishing activities or fishing-related eco-tourism is Mr Paul TSE is probably very concerned about this. Therefore, the authorities should consider reducing the restrictions in order to promote the development of fishing activities.

If Members have the time to take a look in Central, they may find quite a number of people angling at the waterfront. Are Members aware that angling at both sides of the Victoria Harbour is actually prohibited under the Shipping and Port Control Ordinance? Besides the restrictions imposed by legislation, the water quality of the Victoria Harbour is in fact unsuitable for fishing. I do not know whether fishing will be feasible after the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme, that is, the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme, has achieved effects later on. My office has received many help seeking cases enquiring why fishing is not allowed at the Blake Pier and the West Point Pier, and Members can actually see many people fishing there. Therefore, if the water quality can be improved, I think it will be of certain help to fishing activities.

The second aspect has to do with conservation. Besides discussing how fishing activities can be promoted, ways of conserving marine resources are also very important. As all of us know, if marine conservation is not carried out, there may not be any more fish, how can fishing be possible? The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) conducted a survey to find out whether angling or fishing should be banned in marine parks. The results showed that banning angling or fishing in the Tung Ping Chau Marine Park had brought about an actual increase in fishes there. Marine parks only account for about 2% of the local waters. If effective conservation is carried out, I believe it will definitely be helpful to fishing activities to a certain extent.

The third aspect has to do with the sustainable development of the fishery industry. Members who attended the meeting of the Panel on Environmental Affairs in December would have received a document about banning commercial fishing in marine parks, and Members may recall that Honourable colleagues unanimously disagreed with the document. The Democratic Party has all along been supportive of banning commercial fishing activities in marine parks, but we also disagreed with the document back then. Why? Because the document was submitted by the Environment Bureau but Secretary Dr York CHOW of the Food and Health Bureau is actually responsible for matters relating to the fishery industry, and there is not any co-ordination between the two. When they have not effectively dealt with the issue of the sustainable development of the fishery industry, how can they show fishermen any prospect and help them decide whether or not they should switch occupation? Banning fishing alone by the authorities concerned may only arouse much opposition from fishermen, and how to enable the sustainable development of the fishery industry is probably the most important aspect of this motion debate on fishing activities. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Annual Report 2007 pointed out that fisheries practitioners would face various difficulties in transformation. These difficulties include stringent restrictions on angling at fish rafts and fish ponds and the passenger services provided by fishing vessels mentioned in the motion, which have made it difficult for fisheries practitioners to operate the business of carrying passengers to go angling at sea.

Besides, there is also the issue of fishing permits. The motion today may also trigger discussion on reducing restrictions on fishing activities, and reference may have been made to the relevant information of the WWF. I think effective conservation of the marine ecology is the most reliable support for developing eco-tourism. The three aspects discussed just now, namely, the issue of

conservation, the development of the angling trade and the sustainable development of the fishery industry, are closely related to one another.

The Secretary said just now that they involve many policy bureaux and departments. I hope the Secretary will tell us in his response later whether he will take the lead to co-ordinate different departments to tackle the issue instead of only showing us a book. To make efforts in this respect, there must be overall complementary measures, from improving the facilities and enabling the sustainability of fishermen's livelihood to conserving the marine ecology. Only by enabling these three aspects to complement one another can fishing activities develop more prosperously. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN HAK-KAN (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong, which was originally a small fishing village, has gradually become a world financial centre, along with social and economic development. Today, when we discuss the economic development of Hong Kong, we will only discuss how we can prevent our status as a financial centre from being taken over by other cities, and we have completely forgotten about the harbour which we depended on for a living and took pride in before. The development of the fishery industry is gradually declining as a result of economic transformation and the lack of support by government policies.

In recent years, a closed season for fishing has been implemented in Hong Kong and on the Mainland, and the period during which fishermen are allowed to catch fish at sea is becoming shorter and shorter, and their lives are becoming harder and harder.

The Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs recently held two meetings to discuss the Government's proposal of "banning of commercial fishing in marine parks", and all fisherman representatives present expressed strong opposition to it. I certainly understand the Government aimed to protect the marine ecology of Hong Kong, but the approach adopted was open to question. In particular, why was a "broad-brush" approach adopted to implement a total ban on fishing in marine parks by fishermen?

President, the fishermen I came into contact with have relied on fishing for living for generations and they have established contacts with the sea since an

early age. They have a deeper appreciation and affection for the sea than we "people on land" do. They understand very well that if the marine ecology of Hong Kong is damaged, they would be affected in the end.

Actually, I know the Government also understands that those who actually damaged the ecology of marine parks were Mainland fishermen engaged in illegal fishing in Hong Kong. The destructive fishing methods they employed were detrimental to the seabed and the ecology. "The white dog stole, the black dog took the blame", so the common saying goes. Its effort to combat illegal fishing was ineffective, but the Government has changed its focus and put the blame on local fishermen, which is very unfair and unreasonable.

A greater cause for concern for fishermen is that with the Government's provision of additional marine parks and geological parks, the area within local waters where fishing is allowed will become smaller and smaller. Fishermen are not opposed to the Government's effort to protect the marine ecology, but they consider it necessary to implement other complementary measures, such as assisting them in transformation, which is more important.

President, another problem faced by fishermen is that the implementation of major infrastructure projects in Hong Kong one after another in recent years has created certain impacts on local waters. For example, we have constructed a contained aquatic disposal facility in Sha Chau to the north of Lantau Island for the disposal of contaminated sediment from the Kai Tak Development. Although the projects have passed environmental impact assessments, fishermen are still worried that the waters around the area will ultimately be polluted. As for the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge to be constructed later, since it will also be located near Lantau Island, we are also concerned whether it will create any impact on coastal fry culture zones.

President, faced with the various difficulties mentioned just now, fishermen have tried to find alternative solutions rather than waiting passively for their doom. As the saying goes, "those living on the mountain live off the mountain; those living near the water live off the water". In order to survive, they will naturally cling to the sea. They have observed a trend in recent years that more and more people have developed an interest in fishing. Besides angling on both sides of the Victoria Harbour, some of these people may go rock fishing and

angling at fish rafts. Therefore, fisherman organizations hope fishing activities with the theme of leisure fishing will be developed so that they can undergo transformation successfully and no longer have to rely solely on incomes from traditional commercial fishing to maintain their living.

Mr WONG Yung-kan mentioned the experiences of many overseas countries in developing fishing activities just now. These experiences can serve as useful reference for us, especially when conservation can be achieved in parallel with development.

For example, the federal government and state governments of the United States require that permits be obtained for angling in public waters, and the annual licensing fees amount to US\$650 million, all of which will be spent on conservation.

As for Australia, which is closer to us, besides fishing, a licence is required even for catching lobsters and abalones. Part of the licensing fee is used for establishing a Fishing Industry Trust Fund, which provide subsidies for researches on the fishery industry and proposals relating to improving the policies on the fishery industry and visits.

Therefore, in order to promote fishing activities in Hong Kong, besides proper and sound planning, the Government should also adopt a new mode of thinking.

At present, more than 40 waterworks in Hong Kong are declared monuments. Actually, the Government can examine how to give full play to the characteristics of reservoir angling, and integrate archeological work, guided tours and fishing so that they will become a new selling point for green tourism.

Besides, the Government may also consider constructing more artificial reefs and expand the fish fry stock so as to enhance marine biodiversity. If the Government only focuses on banning fishing and angling, which is only a passive practice of sticking in the same old rut, it will only smother the survival of the fishery industry.

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

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

MR CHAN KAM-LAM (in Cantonese): President, I think this Council should give due weight to the subject of fishing. In this motion debate today, we can see that not many Members have raised their hands for their turns to speak, but I believe some of them at ordinary times show their support by taking practical actions in the manner of "fishing" in the Chamber. (*Laughter*)

In a programme of the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) entitled "The City of Black Kite" last month, it was pointed out that every winter, about 1 000 black kites fly south to Hong Kong to spend the winter. There are such a large number of them, they are rarely seen elsewhere in South China. This unique local ecology is worth promoting to the public as well as overseas tourists. Unfortunately, however, the Hong Kong Government usually ignores these unique edges of ours for promotion, and thus nothing has been done about them. Nevertheless, we finally noticed that a group of enthusiasts had organized an activity known as the "Black Kite Festival" in Sai Kung. This activity met with great success and attracted over 3 000 participants, and has thus enabled more people to realize that there are actually many unique features in Hong Kong which we have seldom paid attention to nor explored as a rule.

Actually, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan or Korea organizes some events every year in light of its local characteristics. I think that if there are some unique features in Hong Kong which can rarely be found elsewhere, we can also "showcase" them. When Keelung in Taiwan, in which a flock of only a few dozen black kites gather every year, can stage the "Black Kite Festival", why Hong Kong not do so? Have we let these chances of developing eco-tourism slip through our fingers?

President, when those flying in the sky are ignored, those swimming in the water will meet more or less the same fate. Hong Kong, being surrounded by the sea and situated at the subtropical region, has over 1 000 fish species in nearby waters, and fishing may be considered a popular sport. According to the surveys conducted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) in 2002 and 2003, leisure fishing was the eighth most popular sport in Hong Kong, as compared with countries where fishing activities flourish, such as Sweden, Australia and the United States, fishing is generally one of the top three popular sports. Therefore, fishing has much room for development in Hong

Kong, but this sport does not have a satisfactory momentum of development. Certainly, the Secretary has mentioned just now that, in recent years, more and more people in Hong Kong have participated in fishing activities. According to overseas experience, fishing is actually a very beneficial activity.

I would like to speak briefly on the existing development and situations of fishing elsewhere so that the people of Hong Kong may know that fishing activities are actually very popular in overseas places. For example, in Australia, almost over 4.5 million people participate in leisure fishing activities. How do we know? Because a relatively sound management and licensing system is in place there. If all anglers in Australia obtain a freshwater fishing licence, only the fees alone will amount to AUD120 million. Certainly, we are not saying that we have to make profits through licensing to generate revenue, but if the Government makes efforts in this respect, it can make fishing activities more appealing on the one hand and make use of such revenue to improve the environment for fishing or even carry out conservation on the other.

Back to the situation of Hong Kong, projecting on the basis of the surveys conducted by the AFCD mentioned just now, there should be over 500 000 people who had — I have to stress the word "had" — participated in leisure fishing, and the annual spending on leisure fishing was about \$1,600 per person. In fact, it should be more than \$1,600 because just renting a vessel to go fishing at sea alone would cost a few thousand dollars, and together with the spending on buying baits and so on, quite a lot of money is actually spent. A big shrimp used as bait for big fish costs dozens of dollars, and the relevant expenses can be huge. Despite a lack of fishing-related tourism products now, Hong Kong can still attract tourists from Japan, the Mainland, Taiwan and South-East Asian places to come here for fishing. Coupled with the increasing popularity of fishing activities in recent years, especially when there are even young and female participants, these activities can actually be developed into parent-child family activities. Therefore, we think the development potential of fishing activities should not be overlooked.

We hope the Government will develop this industry with advantages by making reference to practices adopted by overseas places in promoting these activities. Besides establishing a licensing system, we also hope the Government will improve the existing facilities and complementary transport services at fishing spots. We noticed that there were accidents involving people who went fishing at their popular fishing spots on outlying islands last year. It

will be very helpful to the promotion of fishing activities if the Government puts in resources to improve these areas. I hope the Government will give more thoughts in this respect as these efforts can facilitate the development of tourism in Hong Kong.

President, I so submit.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): If no

(Mr Paul TSE raised his hand to indicate a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members who wish to speak will please press the "Request-to-Speak" button and raise their hands in indication. Mr Paul TSE, you may now speak.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to add a few points. The fact that many of our colleagues who always say how much they care about people's livelihood and how they fight for public interest have not appeared in the Chamber this morning shows that when determining whether they have truly fought for public interest, hints can be found in many aspects. Mr CHIM Pui-chung reminded me that this meeting may abort if I request that the number of Members present be counted now. Does this mean that the agriculture and fisheries industries have no right to speak? This issue is worth probing into.

President, if time allows, I would like to address the issue from four perspectives that relate to first, the individual; second, tourism; third, the fisheries and fourth, conservation respectively.

I recall that at my childhood times, we enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Children could go fishing with their families at various locations. I frequently participated in fishing activities as I had relatives engaging in fisheries in Kap Shui Mun. Yet I rarely participated as I was not that fond of angling for

watching a fish struggling was not a pleasant sight for me. But I believe that angling can help refine a person's temperament. I have no doubt in its benefits. There are many fishing enthusiasts in China and abroad who regard fishing as a means to refine personal temperament or to foster patience.

The "Post-80s" being discussed frequently these days have questions and introspections on the values we have. Indeed, should we not give some thoughts about our having this "Choi Yuen Village" at sea that has some values that need conservation. It is not as simple as conserving the Star Ferry Pier. It is about Hong Kong's traditional values, including the word "Kong" (meaning harbour) in our name "Hong Kong" and the history of Hong Kong as a fishing port. Are we being forgetful to our origins if we discard all these and have no policy for something to be done in this connection?

President, regarding tourism, some colleagues have just spoken and their views were very correct. Taking an overview of other places in the world, we can see that the fisheries industry is an eco-tourism project with great potential for development. However, it is a great pity that, other than stringent regulation, the Government of Hong Kong does not have policies in place to offer help in this area. Although turning the fisheries industry into a part of the tourism industry is rather unlikely for the time being, and fishing is still a personal hobby rather than a popular activity carried out by groups of people, there are such activities but they are not very common. Hong Kong is indeed fully capable of and has the resources for the promotion. If only a fraction of the \$600 to \$700 million spent on promoting our so-called tourism image each year can be used on conserving and promoting Hong Kong's fisheries industry, marine ecology and the pleasure of angling, the idea will actually work. I agree with what Mr CHAN Hak-kan just said, "those who live on a mountain live off the mountain, those who live near water live off water". Hong Kong is gifted with such wonderful resources, why do we not make use of them properly for the purpose of development?

President, but the rare cases we now see are ponds artificially developed by some people at some remote places in the New Territories. They keep business going by painstaking efforts and they cannot attract tourists at all this way. If the Government is open to advice in this respect, I would suggest that it should think about ways that will facilitate the revival of Hong Kong's fisheries industry, tourism industry or fishing industry other than stringent regulation.

President, I may have made some rather cynical criticisms on an issue of concern to Members. As a matter of fact, the agriculture and fisheries industries make up a sector of Hong Kong. Some media suggested that the agriculture and fisheries functional constituency should be abolished as no one is engaged in the industries. Of course I find such comment rather inappropriate, but I noticed that many people are concerned, for example the "harmony" incident relating to the Tai O residents was still discussed yesterday. Do we have any idea what the Tai O residents originally did? Have we paid attention to these things? Apart from staging political shows, have we really been concerned about these people and the conservation of their traditional spirits, ecology and the way they support themselves and their families? This is again something for our introspection.

Besides, President, I would like to talk about conservation. I have contacts with Mr CHONG Dee-hwa, President of Ichthyological Society of Hong Kong recently. Mr CHONG, a person of mixed Chinese and Japanese blood is committed to self-learning for over 20 years, and he has devoted to studying the ecology and total amount of fishes in Hong Kong's neighboring waters. His study is very successful, yet he has not received any support that may give him ample room for development from the Government or any organizations including the academic institutions. I find this a great pity and would like to help him, to find out if there are any means by which the museums or other venues can accommodate the fruits of his works over the years — a rich collection of beautiful fish specimens which are indeed Hong Kong's treasures, so that his conservation work can go on. But most importantly, as some colleagues just mentioned, balanced development is more likely to be achieved if some of our conservation work can be subsidized by the income generated from licensing.

President, regarding the proposals under part (a) to part (h) in the motion, certainly it may be impossible for the Government to accept some of them immediately. In particular, Hong Kong is relatively crowded, the relaxation may need to be implemented in steps, but as a whole, I find that we I repeat what I just said, if all a sudden, we focus all our attention on industries or perspectives that are overly modernized and seeking short-term successes and quick profits, I am afraid that may not be beneficial to Hong Kong. We often talk about values with a view to inducing introspection. Indeed there are issues worth our attention in different aspects. Though they may be issues that colleagues in this almost empty Chamber are not too concerned about, they are worth retaining as they represent Hong Kong's spirits, values, traditions and heritage. As I just said, this is "being forgetful to our origins", have we really forgotten totally about Hong Kong's amazing history and traditions? I so submit, President.

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

(No other Member indicated a wish to speak)

SECRETARY FOR FOOD AND HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank the Members who have spoken just now for their valuable views.

Fishing activities in Hong Kong, such as leisure fishing activities, can be divided into three main categories: the first one is sea fishing, that is, carrying passengers to go fishing at sea; the second category is fishing on shore, such as rock fishing, pier angling, angling at reservoirs and fish ponds and so on; and the third category is angling on fish rafts.

At present, leisure fishing activities are permitted in most places in Hong Kong. Only fishing activities carried out in special aquatic ecosystems, including areas within marine reserves, marine parks, fish culture zones and reservoirs are subject to regulation. Generally speaking, all fishing and leisure fishing activities are prohibited in marine parks and marine reserves. In fish culture zones, anglers may only fish by hand or carry out fishing activities using rods on fish rafts authorized by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). Besides, people who intend to fish in reservoir areas must apply for fishing licences with the Water Supplies Department (WSD) for fishing in reservoirs.

There are currently quite a number of recreational fishing organizations and online discussion forums organized by fishing enthusiasts in Hong Kong, which provide platforms for information and experience exchanges among anglers. These organizations also organize regular fishing activities or competitions for people sharing the same interest so that they can exchange views on fishing skills and share the joy of fishing. Besides the small-scale fishing activities organized by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) annually, many community organizations also offer fishing courses and seminars on different fishing skills. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) welcomes the staging of international fishing competitions and events in Hong Kong by any organization and is more than willing to give advice and proper assistance on publicity and promotion targeting overseas tourists in the organization processes of these events.

Just now, I have mentioned a book entitled *Hong Kong Marine Recreational Fishing Booklet* published by the AFCD in 2004, which introduces various major leisure fishing methods, catches, code of practice for fishing, safety precautions and so on, in the hope that people who are engaged or interested in leisure fishing can acquire knowledge on the correct behaviours and concepts of leisure fishing.

Reservoirs are popular fishing spots. The WSD stocks a variety of fish fry into major reservoirs to maintain ecological balance and protect the water quality of reservoirs. Besides silver carp and big head, species commonly found in reservoirs also include tilapia, mud carp and edible goldfish. The WSD has all along been actively promoting reservoir angling through different means, such as producing and distributing promotional leaflets on reservoir angling and introducing such topics as reservoir angling on the WSD's website. Existing application procedures for fishing licences for fishing in reservoirs are very simple. The processing time of applications submitted by post is only three working days; and for applications submitted in person, licences can be issued within 10 minutes. The WSD will pay close attention to the number of anglers and their activities; and when necessary and without affecting the ecological balance in reservoirs, it will install additional facilities to facilitate and ensure safe angling.

Besides, quite a number of fishing enthusiasts prefer angling at waterfront promenades managed by the LCSD. In view of this, the LCSD has already provided fences and life buoys at the waterfront so that fishing enthusiasts can engage in fishing in a safe environment. Moreover, for the safety of other users of the promenades, the LCSD has also erected notices reminding anglers to use their fishing tackle with care to avoid causing any inconvenience or injury to others.

Just now, a Member mentioned a few accidents involving people who slipped and fell into the sea while engaging in rock fishing on the edge of cliffs. I would like to take this opportunity to urge anglers, particularly beginners, to be mindful of safety and carefully choose safe spots for angling as well as pay attention to the weather and the surrounding environment, including waves, in order to avoid accidents.

Fishermen's operation of leisure fishing activities at fish ponds and on fish rafts will not only provide desirable fishing spots but can also facilitate the

development of the leisure fishery trade and help fishermen in their transformation. Upon consultation with relevant government departments, the AFCD has allowed fish farmers to operate leisure fishery business on their fish rafts since 2002, provided that they have taken proper measures to safeguard the fish culture environment and tourist safety. So far, 39 licensees at nine fish culture zones have participated in the scheme. In response to some fish farmers' requests, the AFCD has recently streamlined the approval procedures and criteria for issuing the consent letter for recreational angling on fish rafts, in the hope of providing greater room and flexibility for the development of the trade.

The Lamma Fisherfolk's Village (the Village), with an area of about 3 000 sq m and situated at the fish culture zone in Sok Kwu Wan on Lamma Island, is one of the fish rafts engaging in leisure fishery. It has now developed into an innovative tourist attraction. Besides allowing fishing activities, the Village is also a showcase of the traditional local fisherfolk culture and the history of the fishery industry in Hong Kong. Exhibitions and other activities relating to fisherfolk culture, such as demonstrations of fishing by fishermen, are organized on the raft. Visitors can participate in these activities to have a first-hand experience of fishing and learn how to prepare salted fish, tie fish knots and make fish nets and so on. The Village is a good example of fishermen's successful transformation to the leisure fishery trade.

The AFCD is more than willing to discuss with fish farmers and explore the feasibility of providing other services on fish rafts, provided that public safety is safeguarded and fish culture operation and the fish culture environment are not affected. Some fish farmers hope that the provision of services, such as barbecuing and cooking, will be allowed on fish rafts. We have to carefully consider factors such as food safety, fire service equipment for cooking using naked flame, environmental hygiene, waste and sewage disposal and the impacts on fish culture operation and the fish culture environment in the fish culture zones.

Operators who wish to provide fishing and other services in their fish ponds must find out whether the provision of these services are in compliance with the land use planning and lease conditions of the sites, and they may need to apply for approval from the Town Planning Board (TPB) and the Lands Department before providing these services. The TPB will consider factors such as whether the relevant activities will have any impact on fish farms nearby, the

environmental hygiene and transport in the vicinity and the environmental safety within and in areas around the fishing grounds.

Besides, we understand that Mr WONG hopes that the authorities will relax the existing restrictions on passenger capacity of fishing vessels to allow fishermen to operate an additional business of carrying passengers to go angling at sea. The AFCD and the Marine Department have examined in detail whether fishing vessels should be allowed to engage in both commercial fishing and the business of carrying passengers for leisure fishing activities at sea in the mode of "one licence for two trades". In this regard, our primary consideration is passenger safety. As fishing vessels are not designed for carrying passengers, marine legislation therefore provides that fishing vessels shall not carry passengers. If existing fishing vessels are converted to meet requirements under existing legislation on the carriage of passengers, the conversion expenses involved may be substantial. Therefore, fishermen who intend to operate leisure fishing activities on a long-term basis should indeed procure pleasure vessels or passenger carrying vessels specifically designed for leisure fishery purposes.

Besides complementary hardware, the AFCD has been providing technical support and training to fishermen who are interested in the leisure fishery trade. First of all, with regard to the operation of pleasure vessels or passenger carrying vessels, the AFCD provides training for fishermen to help them obtain the certificates required for operating these vessels. Besides, the AFCD also provides them with training in practical skills, safety management, as well as the tourism practices, policies and legislation, so as to enhance the practical skills and service standards of leisure fishery operators.

Fishermen may also apply to the Marine Fish Scholarship Fund or the Continuing Education Fund for subsidies for taking the relevant courses. We will review the terms of Fisheries Loans and explore other modes of financial assistance to help fishermen in their transformation. The AFCD will continue to co-operate with the Tourism Commission and other government departments in terms of tourism planning for districts, thus helping fishermen develop tourism projects with characteristics of fisherfolk culture.

Local waters contain a wide diversity of fisheries, crustaceans, molluscs and other marine organisms, among which at least 150 species are of significant

fishery importance. Besides, a variety of marine fisheries breed in local waters. Commonly found in eastern waters is the red sea bream, which is one of the several sea bream varieties whose fry are abundant along the shores of Mirs Bay in early spring. Other fisheries, such as sea-perches, small-scale blackfish, groupers, rock cods and sweetlips, are common catches. Hong Kong is indeed a good place for fishing. However, facing the pollution problem, we need to step up our efforts in conserving the natural environment.

The Artificial Reef Programme launched by the AFCD helps in the conservation of fisheries resources and improving the marine ecological environment of Hong Kong. As at today, the AFCD has deployed 668 artificial reefs in marine parks, fish culture zones and major spawning and nursery grounds, with a total area of almost 180 000 cu m, and the invested resources amounting to over \$50 million. Results of AFCD's underwater monitoring have revealed that the number and species of fish were larger in the artificial reefs deployed than in the natural seabed, including quite a number of them with significant commercial values. For example, different species of groupers, such as Hong Kong groupers, leopard coral groupers, mud groupers, yellow groupers and green groupers. Artificial reefs can increase the catches of both fishermen and anglers.

Mr WONG's motion also proposed that the Government should study the establishment of a fishing licensing system. Among places all over the world in which recreational fishing is regulated, some have adopted licensing systems while others without such a system regulate recreational fishing through imposing restrictions on fishing tackle and the size, species and measurement of catches and introducing initiatives, such as designating recreational fishing zones or non-fishing zones. It can be observed from the different policies adopted by various places in regulating recreational fishing that the main considerations are the development and popularity of local recreational fishing in the areas and its impact on the natural environment. As recreational fishing activities in Hong Kong do not put great pressure on fisheries resources and generally do not cause any damage to the seabed, the Government considers it unnecessary for the time being to immediately regulate ordinary fishing activities, that is, fishing activities carried out outside reservoirs and other restricted waters, such as marine parks, by introducing a licensing system.

In the motion, Mr WONG Yung-kan also proposed studying co-operating with the Pearl River Delta region to achieve better development and conservation of the entire waters. The Hong Kong Guangdong Marine Resources and Conservation Special Panel, which is a standing mechanism, provides a forum for Hong Kong and Guangdong to exchange information and experience on fisheries management, marine conservation and law enforcement on a regular basis in order to enhance the protection of marine resources jointly possessed by both places. We will continue to actively promote marine conservation in the region by adopting the existing time-tested mechanism.

President, I agree with the broad direction proposed by Mr WONG Yung-kan and am grateful to Members who have spoken today. Promoting the development of fishing activities involves the policies for conserving the ecological environment, promoting recreational activities and the leisure fishery trade and the work under the purview of many policy bureaux and departments. I will relay the views collected today to the relevant departments, which will then carefully study these views and take active follow-up actions.

President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Yung-kan, you may now reply and you have one minute 53 seconds.

MR WONG YUNG-KAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I also thank the six colleagues who support my motion. I understand that this is an issue that no one would bother to discuss or give attention to during the British-Hong Kong era. Why should we discuss such issues? As for the SAR Government after the reunification, the topic is discussed only when I put it forward, otherwise, no one would bother about it.

Hong Kong as a port engaging in primary industry, the *status quo* is just as Mr Paul TSE has described, we are forgetful of our origins. We do not support things that deserve conservation. On the contrary, our minds and our society are troubled by things that do not make sense. I think the saddest of all is that we have not done something that we should do, but we have frivolously done something that we should not have done.

In fact, we can look at fishing activities from another angle. I have a book here, the ladies we see on the cover are not Hongkongers but Japanese who were participants in a fishing competition on Po Toi Island. This proves that fishing is indeed a kind of tourism activities. This is just like when we travel abroad and we rent a boat for fishing at sea; more than 10 people participating in these activities can help increase the income of local fish farmers or boat owners.

Hence, my view is that the Government and the Hong Kong Tourism Board should think more about this issue. They should not only focus on a single aspect, and neglect other issues after staging some fireworks displays and parades for a few years. I hope the Government and the industries would understand this. More important, I would also like colleagues in this Council to understand that the survival of an industry hinges on the support from everyone instead of just one person. I find it most painful that this industry will wither or even perish if we in this Council also regard it as insignificant. In fact, this should not happen in this Council, no matter whether you understand it or not (*The buzzer sounded*) I hope all of you will render support.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr WONG Yung-kan 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, who are present. I declare the motion passed.

(Motions scheduled to be moved at this Council meeting)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second motion: Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern.

Members who wish to speak in the debate on the motion will please press the "Request to speak" button.

I will call upon Mr TAM Yiu-chung to speak and move his motion.

ALLEVIATING POVERTY AND HELPING THE DISADVANTAGED WITH CARE AND CONCERN

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

The Financial Secretary will release the budget of the new financial year by the end of this month. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) hopes that the Government can adopt vigorous fiscal measures, with a view to alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged as well as improving people's livelihood. For this reason, I propose this motion on "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" on behalf of the DAB. Very regrettably, I still do not see the Financial Secretary here in this meeting up till now. As such, he may not be able to listen to our views directly, with only Secretary Matthew CHEUNG being here to be his representative. In the motion I am going to move today, as many areas are within Secretary CHEUNG's purview, I have great expectations of him, and I hope he can respond to us positively.

At the Question and Answer Session of the Legislative Council last month, Chief Executive Donald TSANG admitted that Hong Kong was face with many deep-rooted problems. Apart from economic restructuring, there are also political and social conflicts. Regarding the problem of poverty, the Chief Executive stressed that improving people's livelihood has all along been the Government's priority task. He also promised that he would seriously consider implementing measures this year, so as to alleviate the difficulties of low-income earners. I propose this motion today, hoping that the Government can have a

thorough understanding about the public's needs and prescribe the right remedy to their problems.

Although the economy of Hong Kong has gradually stabilized now and the unemployment rate has dropped gradually from its peak in mid-2009, wage earners do not have any increment in their actual income, whilst low-income earners are still facing their plights. In particular, with effect from 1 January, various public fees and charges have been increased, and this has added to the burden on low-income earners. On the other hand, once there is a slight recovery in our economy, property prices and rentals surge immediately. Coupled with fewer employment and promotion opportunities, the middle class and young people have a lot of grievances.

As for the fiscal situation of the Government, according to its latest estimate, the revenue generated from land sales, stamp duty and investment return of the Exchange Fund is far higher than that anticipated. This year, we do not have such a substantial deficit of \$39.9 billion as that anticipated by the budget last year. On the contrary, we may have a surplus of billions of dollars. As such, there is room for the Government to adopt more vigorous fiscal measures.

Vigorous fiscal measures cannot be interpreted as measures purely meant to "hand out candies". Undoubtedly, there is a need for the Government to "hand out candies" when its fiscal position is sound. However, being a government with foresight, it should utilize its fiscal resources effectively to implement various long-term measures which can ease social conflicts, especially those for alleviating the disparity between the rich and the poor. The most urgent task of the Government is to help the poor, low-income earners and the disadvantaged. It should not only assist them to integrate into society, but also provide them with more suitable social protection, so as to enable them to share the fruits of economic development. To care for and support the disadvantaged, we should make a start by showing sympathy to families with needy children, improving welfare for the elderly, enhancing assistance for persons with disabilities and the chronically ill, and actively assisting people who are unemployed and in working poverty.

With social transformation, a drastic change in the learning mode of school children has now emerged. It is a basic requirement in the curriculum to have exposure to other learning experiences and also participatory learning, such as participating in various extra-curricular activities. Computers and the Internet

have thus become the necessities for learning and growth of school children. If they cannot participate in extra-curricula and use computers because of poverty, they will lose valuable learning opportunities, which will directly affect their abilities to pursue further studies and compete in society after leaving schools, and hence giving rise to a new type of inter-generational poverty. In the past, government subsidies were confined to textbook and stationery grants to needy and poor school children. It should therefore progress with the times to provide an "extra-curricular activities grant for needy school children" and subsidies on Internet access charges, so as to ensure that children from low-income households have opportunities to use suitable computer hardware and software and can afford charges for using Internet services and taking part in participatory learning courses.

Welfare for the elderly is an important social investment by the Government. A survey showed that the public's confidence in the protection of their living after retirement will directly affect their sense of stability in their lives at present. Therefore, the DAB suggests the Government to enhance welfare for the elderly, including: to abolish the absence limit in respect of application for Old Age Allowance, and allow the elderly to receive Disability Allowance and Old Age Allowance concurrently; to continue to increase the number of subsidized residential care homes for the elderly, provide more residential and care home support for them and enhance community care services; to increase the value of elderly health care vouchers to \$1,000 per year and lower the eligible age to 65; and to introduce "recreation and sports vouchers for the elderly" and provide them with free access to facilities under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department such as exhibition halls and public swimming pools, so as to enrich their cultural life.

Regarding the assistance provided for persons with disabilities and chronically ill, the Government should also introduce a new measure to grant a "subsidy for carers of persons with disabilities", providing a monthly allowance of \$1,000 to carers of 120 000 recipients of Disability Allowance to alleviate their financial burden. Being family carers, they have strengthened their families, reduced social costs and made great contributions to society. Therefore, the Government is duty-bound to provide support for them. Moreover, the Government should also introduce additional "chronically ill dependant allowance" and "allowance for private medical insurance contributions" and raise the ceiling of tax deduction in respect of elderly residential care expenses and various types of salary tax allowances in respect of dependent family members.

Through these fiscal incentives, family cohesion can be enhanced, thereby promoting social harmony.

In order to ease the difficulties faced by the public in their living, the most important direction is to promote employment. As a complementary measure, the Government should introduce a long-term territory-wide transport subsidy scheme and enhance child care and community care services for the elderly, so as to ease the burden of transport costs on people in employment and allay their worries. On the other hand, in view of the serious employment problem of young people at present, the Government should create more suitable posts for them and enhance various training schemes, thereby upgrading their employability, and these will require the provision of more resources by the Government. There is a need for the Government to provide more subsidized training courses for young people, so as to assist them to be equipped with new working skills, especially helping them to join those industries with competitive edge, including creative, information technology and environmental protection industries.

As for relieving the burden of post-secondary students to repay loans, interest rate should be lowered. As such, the Government should replace the means-tested student loans with interest-free ones and lower the annual interest rate for non-means-tested loans to 2.5%. Moreover, in order to enhance protection for students to stay away from drugs, the Government should facilitate the provision of "two school social workers for each school" and employment of more teaching assistants in all secondary schools in Hong Kong, so as to encourage more schools to participate in the voluntary school drug testing scheme.

The disparity between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong is deteriorating and various sectors and industries have encountered difficulties in their operation. One of the major reasons leading to high property prices and rentals is high land price. Therefore, we request the Government once again to comprehensively review and adjust its land policy, so as to increase the land supply and prevent property prices from rising drastically. Moreover, the Government should resume the construction of HOS flats on an appropriate scale, extend the home loan interest deduction period, and strictly control increase in charges by public utilities. Only in this way can the public be relieved of the pressure of housing and various living expenses, thereby enabling them to live and work in peace and contentment.

As the Government anticipates that its fiscal situation will be improved, we also propose a few one-off measures, including reducing the levying rates or rates payment, as well as freezing various government fees and charges affecting people's livelihood for a year, so as to enable the public to share the economic achievements. We hope that the Government can listen to these voices and implement these relief measures in the budget of the new financial year, thereby improving people's livelihood and promoting social stability.

With these remarks, I beg to move. Thank you, President.

Mr TAM Yiu-chung moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, at the Question and Answer Session of the Legislative Council on 14 January this year, the Chief Executive Donald TSANG Yam-kuen said that improving people's livelihood was the Government's priority task, and that alleviating the difficulties of low-income earners and promoting the economic development of Hong Kong to create more employment opportunities was most important in its policy implementation; as such, this Council urges the Government to take measures to alleviate poverty, help the disadvantaged and relieve the burden of the people, so as to build a more harmonious society, including:

- (a) to offer subsidies to needy school children for their participation in extra-curricular activities, and introduce an 'extra-curricular activities grant for needy school children';
- (b) to provide subsidies on Internet access charges for poor school children to relieve the burden of academic expenses;
- (c) for the purposes of encouraging more schools to participate in the voluntary school drug testing scheme in the future and equipping the schools early with the necessary manpower, to allocate additional resources to facilitate the provision of 'two school social workers for each school' and employment of more teaching assistants in all secondary schools in Hong Kong;
- (d) to provide more career counselling and support for young people, enhance training and attract them to join those industries with competitive edge, including creative, information technology and

- environmental protection industries, so as to improve their employment situation;
- (e) to introduce a long-term territory-wide transport subsidy scheme and simplify the application procedure concerned, so as to reduce the transport costs for low-income earners working across districts;
 - (f) to abolish the absence limit in respect of application for Old Age Allowance, and allow the elderly to receive Disability Allowance and Old Age Allowance concurrently;
 - (g) to continue to increase the number of subsidized residential care homes for the elderly, provide more residential and care home support for them, and enhance community care services at the same time;
 - (h) to improve medical services for the elderly by increasing the value of elderly healthcare vouchers to \$1,000 per elderly person per year and lowering the eligible age to 65;
 - (i) to introduce 'recreation and sports vouchers for the elderly', and provide them with free access to facilities under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department such as exhibition halls and public swimming pools, so as to enrich their cultural life;
 - (j) to set up a 'subsidy system for carers of persons with disabilities', and provide a monthly allowance of \$1,000 to the family of each person with disabilities;
 - (k) to introduce additional 'chronically ill dependant allowance' and 'allowance for private medical insurance contributions', and to raise the ceiling of tax deduction in respect of elderly residential care expenses and various types of salary tax allowances in respect of dependent family members;
 - (l) to introduce a 'training scheme for fishermen during the fish moratorium' to provide training courses for the affected fishermen, and to grant them an appropriate amount of subsidy to cover part of their living expenses during the moratorium period;

- (m) to relieve the burden of post-secondary students to repay loans by improving the financial assistance scheme for post-secondary students, replacing the means-tested loans with interest-free loans and lowering the annual interest rate for non-means-tested loans to 2.5%;
- (n) to enhance the land supply policy to stabilize property prices, resume the construction of HOS flats on an appropriate scale and extend the home loan interest deduction period, so as to relieve the pressure of housing expenses on the people;
- (o) to introduce rates relief measures to reduce the levying rates or to waive the payment;
- (p) to freeze various government fees and charges affecting people's livelihood for a year; and
- (q) to strictly control increase in charges by public utilities."

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Mr Paul CHAN intend to move amendments to this motion. Mr LEE Wing-tat intends to move an amendment to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment, and Ms Miriam LAU intends to move an amendment to Mr Paul CHAN's amendment. This Council will now proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendments.

I will call upon the Members who intend to move amendments to speak one by one; but no amendments are to be moved at this stage.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): President, some time ago, our State leaders time and again used "deep-rooted conflicts" to describe the situation in Hong Kong, which subsequently led to different interpretations of deep-rooted conflicts in public opinions. At the very beginning, the Chief Executive argued

that our State leaders' remark only referred to the economic problem in Hong Kong and other aspects were not involved. However, such type of remarks made by the State leaders, which is full of Chinese characteristics, and intended to be evasive and even ambiguous with an undertone, has given the public unlimited room for imagination. "Deep-rooted conflicts" are interpreted by various sectors arbitrarily, from the problem of the unitary development of the economy, unsatisfactory governance, outdated political system, and even to people's livelihood and deteriorating disparity between the rich and the poor.

Faced with such a weak government and a governing team which inherently and seriously lacks public mandate, how possibly will the menacing media and people with wicked ambition who have an axe to grind let go of this golden opportunity? Not only do they condemn the SAR Government harshly on all fronts, but also resort to every conceivable means to make shocking speeches. Perhaps they simply wish to show off their foresight and attempt to make a clear break with such a weak government, while some people even wish to take advantage of it.

President, as remarked by political commentators, allying with a weak government only means self-destruction. As far as the political reality is concerned, it is not a wise move at all. It would be better to rub salt into its wounds, and perhaps, the opportunity could be seized to reap benefits, so this could do no harm at all! As a result, a vicious cycle is formed and the Government's prestige in governance has all gone. Small issues may become big troubles, whilst good policies may turn out to be draconian laws. There is no more rational discussions. Various sectors intensify their efforts to criticize the Government while society resorts to more and more drastic actions, making it hard for governance, not to mention political consultation. President, is it what we wish to see?

At first, the discussion on "deep-rooted conflicts", such as shortcomings of the unitary economic structure in Hong Kong, as well as the people's livelihood and the disparity between the rich and the poor about which I am most concerned, was just a flash in the pan and concluded hastily. Eventually, our State leaders' remark has only become a tool for them to praise themselves and criticize the Government. Everything just remains stagnant, not to mention that anyone will put forth a solution wholeheartedly. As a result, the disparity between the rich and the poor continues to deteriorate and the grassroots simply keep on living in dire straits.

President, as for what I have mentioned above, I absolutely have no intention to defend the Government. Throughout my career in politics for the last 20 to 30 years, I have chosen to speak up for reasons but not cronies bravely with the least reservation. But very often, I may find myself facing enemies on all fronts, arousing attacks from the pro-establishment camp and even queries from the pan-democratic camp. Of course, these are not important to me at all. But most lamentably, I find that the prevailing situation in society is not so optimistic. The basic political ethics of "convincing people by reason" and "commanding public confidence by kindness" have all been neglected. People become sentimental in all matters, upholding populism but not rationality, making exaggerated and sensational statements only to produce short-term effects and thus putting those medium and long-term social interests on the shelf. It is absolutely not the road that a pluralistic society which is moving towards democracy and upholding social contract and rationality should take.

President, this has eventually given rise to problems of people's livelihood and deteriorating disparity between the rich and the poor. The discussion on "deep-rooted conflicts", being led by manoeuvres for short-term political interests and transient public sentiments, has not been taken seriously. It has an impressive start but a shabby end. Not only those in opposition are doing this, as the Government in power also muddles along. It said shamelessly that the disparity between the rich and the poor is a by-product of capitalism and in a clear-cut manner, considered it a natural outcome of economic development. It has never been willing to squarely address and tackle the disparity between the rich and the poor.

President, I still remember that two weeks ago, the Heritage Foundation, an American right-wing think tank, and the *Wall Street Journal* announced that Hong Kong was ranked as "the freest economy in the world" for 16 consecutive years. The authorities came forth to claim merit for this at once. Press releases and senior government officials blew their own trumpets and what is more, the Chief Executive even gave himself airs and received the prize in person at the Government House. Such behaviors showing excessive excitement are laughable indeed. As a matter of fact, the so-called economic freedom, to put it ironically, is to ask the Government to sit back and do nothing, simply allowing the economy to be driven by the market. Under such dominance of the market, it is extremely easy for a government which adopts no concrete economic policies and displays no foresights and governs by doing nothing economically to obtain this prize. There is absolutely no point for us to be so excited.

On the contrary, when high-sounding comments were made by the reports of the United Nations and some overseas media last year that the seriousness of disparity between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong ranked top in the world, the Hong Kong Government, despite it being ranked second to none, nevertheless hid like a turtle pulling in its head, without giving any response. Does it not show the mentality of those in power, who simply cover up the shortcomings and put only the best foot forward, pretending that everything is going on well and taking the easy way out?

Regarding the disparity between the rich and the poor which can only be resolved by putting in tremendous efforts, the Government simply avoids it. It only cares about immediate applauses and does nothing while the deep-rooted poverty problem continues to deteriorate. As we can see, the Government has no foresight at all. It has also put the medium and long-term social interests on the shelf, neglecting that the grassroots are living in dire straits. "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" should in no way be an empty political packaging and promotional tactic. Rather, it requires the support of concrete actions and great determination of the Government.

President, in a nutshell, the deteriorating disparity between the rich and the poor is attributed to the severely imbalanced government policies, hegemonist commercialism and superiority of the free market. If the free market is so important and predominant, why should it be necessary for the SAR Government to remain? The authorities have simply turned a blind eye to the fact that the grassroots fail to catch up with the drastic changes in our society and economy. The Government still clings to the "trickle down theory" thinking that with sustainable economic development, wealth can naturally flow down to reach the grassroots.

President, I have said repeatedly for so many times that this theory is unable to stand the test. Put it accurately, "there is not a direct link between economic growth and alleviation of poverty". President, they are not necessarily related at all. This point has been shown in the statistics on household income over the past years. I am not going to repeat it here.

Therefore, over the years, I have all along stressed that unitary policies and short-term relief measures can only tackle those superficial problems of the complicated disparity between the rich and the poor. At the outset, the solution

will rely on a genuine "people-oriented" government, which will tackle the problem by adopting omni-directional strategies with utmost determination and vigour. As I proposed in my amendment, a high-level structure should be set up to review the overall social and economic policies and ascertain which systems and policies have given rise to the deteriorating disparity between the rich and the poor.

Obviously, this structure should command the work of relevant bureaux and departments. Moreover, it should, in various aspects including welfare, labour, education and economic policies, formulate strategies to alleviate poverty and implement the schemes concerned. Not only should we start from a macroscopic perspective and the economic structure to fundamentally reform our political system, we should also formulate clear objectives to alleviate poverty, as well as encourage and co-ordinate the work of various bureaux in this regard. All along, the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood has advocated that the Commission on Poverty, under the leadership of the Chief Secretary for Administration, can take up this important role.

President, I remember that last week, the President of the United States, OBAMA, mentioned in the State of the Union Address that creation of employment opportunities would be taken as a priority of his administration. The United States have learnt a huge lesson from the financial tsunami, and their people should give up the past development mode which merely relied on finance and consumer spending. Specifically, he has proposed that in the coming five years, exports of the United States should be doubled. In doing so, 2 million employment opportunities can be created. This shows that in view of its internal problems, the US Government has endeavoured to boost its development, solve its internal conflicts and create more manufacturing industries. What about our SAR Government? President, on promoting employment, the SAR Government has shown no vigor and no determination at all. Can such a SAR government resolve the disparity between the rich and the poor and the problem of poverty in Hong Kong?

The SAR Government still panders to the outworn beliefs. On one hand, it still stresses that the free market is the solution to the problems and uses this as a shield. On the other hand, it insists on adopting the established mode of development led by the financial services industry and refuses to support other industries which can create a lot of employment opportunities. Regarding the

six major industries, much is said but little is done. There is no concrete planning and objective whatsoever, and once again, the free market is given a free hand. As such, they will eventually vanish freely without a trace.

President, history tells us that a free market will only eliminate callously those grassroots who lack competitiveness and bargaining power, depriving them of the opportunities of development and upward social mobility persistently. There are a lot of things that a free market does not do, is unwilling to do, and cannot possibly do. In fact, they should be implemented by the SAR Government. The poverty problem in society will only keep on deteriorating and inflating. Therefore, the authorities should comprehensively review the existing mode of unbalanced economic development and conduct a fundamental reform. This will be a solution to the problem at root.

President, as the meeting was aborted last week, this motion is moved today. It so happens that there is a clash between this motion debate today and another meeting I am going to attend. At 2.30 pm, I will attend an important meeting with the Equal Opportunities Commission. Given that I am the chairman of that meeting and in which we have to discuss an important paper, I may have to leave earlier if I cannot move my amendment before 2 pm today. President, please kindly make arrangements in case I have to leave early. Thank you, President.

MR WONG KWOK-HING (in Cantonese): Mr TAM Yiu-chung has proposed the motion on "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" for debate today. In fact, I very much hope that the Financial Secretary can listen and respond to us in person. Very regrettably, he has not come here. I fully share the regret expressed by Mr TAM Yiu-chung. As for whether Secretary Matthew CHEUNG can respond to our speeches on behalf of the Financial Secretary today, I hope that he can do so. It is because the views put forth by us are not only restricted to the labour and welfare aspects, but extensive in scope. Therefore, I hope the Secretary can listen to our views, and convey them to the Financial Secretary for his positive response.

President, I propose to amend Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion today, as I wish to make supplementary proposals on the basis of the 17 recommendations put forth by him.

Today, I would like to focus my speech on the cessation of the operation of the library in Yat Tung Estate in April. Regarding this issue, it will be most desirable if the Financial Secretary is present, but it is still not bad to have Secretary CHEUNG with us because this is in fact related to the problem of inter-generational poverty. In case the library in Yat Tung Estate will cease to operate in April as scheduled, I believe that the problem so generated would not be remedied no matter how much effort Secretary CHEUNG has made.

Regarding the budget to be released by the Financial Secretary, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions has already put forth 15 recommendations, involving \$16.8 billion. I hope the Financial Secretary can really listen to us. As Secretary CHEUNG is in this Chamber, I wish to say a few more words here. Grassroots workers desperately hope that the provision of transport subsidy can be extended and improved. We also hope that the absence limit of the "fruit grant", as we have been striving for many years, can be relaxed until it can be abolished as soon as possible. That is what I wish to say. I do not want to waste time and I hope that Secretary CHEUNG can follow this up.

As stated in paragraph (s) of my amendment, we hope that the Government, being the largest employer in Hong Kong, can set an example as the best employer and should not tolerate any exploitation by the intermediaries. Therefore, if the Government continues to fill some posts which are supposed to be permanent ones through head-hunter agencies, I hope it can enhance its regulation against exploitation by intermediaries employed by head-hunter agencies, so as to reduce exploitation to the minimum.

Paragraph (t) is about how to help those sandwich class people who are "snails without a shell" to acquire their homes. We hope that the Government can resume the construction of HOS flats, re-launch the Home Starter Loan Scheme and provide further interest deduction for owner-occupiers. I hope the Government can respond in this regard.

However, as I have mentioned at the outset, I would like to devote most of my speaking time to voice out for residents of Yat Tung Estate in Tung Chung today. I hope the Financial Secretary can also hear me. At present, there is a remote district in the Northwest of Hong Kong, which is most impoverished. It is a "four-nots" district, as there is not any community centres, recreational venues, employment opportunities and premises for pursuing further studies.

Those living there are facing the problem of inter-generational poverty. Tung Chung has a population of over 80 000 and some 40 000 people are living in Yat Tung Estate. One-fourth of these 40 000-odd residents are aged below 15. Yesterday, they staged a petition in front of the Legislative Council, and someone held a child aged below 15 years in hand. There are more than 8 000 households among these 40 000-odd people. However, one-fourth of them (that is, more than 2 000 households) are receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). I believe that Secretary CHEUNG should know and be aware of this situation. Is it not the most impoverished district?

There are two one-fourths: one is that one-fourth of its households are receiving CSSA, and the other is that one-fourth of its population are aged below 15, who are desperately in need of timely assistance from the Government. Due to the imbalanced town planning, they move to this district as they believed what the Government said, but it is an isolated, remote district. They now urge the Government to continue the operation of the library in Yat Tung Estate. Not only does the Government refuse to do so, it even ignored objection from the locals and set up a Hong Kong Jockey Club betting centre just below three kindergartens in Yat Tung Estate in November last year. To them, the Government has not only failed to offer them timely assistance. This is downright rubbing salt into their wounds.

The library in Yat Tung Estate can be regarded as the only nourishment for mind, the only breath of life and the only community support to the residents. But its operation will cease soon. This library, serving 40 000 residents in Yat Tung Estate, has an extremely high utilization rate. Even the Government has admitted that there are 1 500 people using it every day. According to a survey conducted by us, the utilization rate of this library in 2008 was as high as 464 226. Of the 40 000 residents, 45% use it one to three times per week, while 20% use it once per month. Being their breath of life with such a high utilization rate and popularity, which is also the only community service available to them, the library will be replaced in April. Is it right to do so, Secretary?

According to our survey, over 90% of the users of this library borrow books, over 30% use the computer there, over 50% read newspapers and over 20% study there. Housewives place their children in the library before doing their grocery shopping, while young children study there after school. During summer holidays, as there is really no place for them to carry out activities, they

simply do revision there. This library, being the only facility which can genuinely help the poor, will outrageously cease its operation in April.

As advised by the Government, a library measuring some 2 700 sq m will be developed near the MTR station in Fu Tung Estate and \$12 million will be allocated to it annually. This library is much better than the old one, and it seems that the Government has lent them a helping hand. However, it takes more than 30 minutes for them to go there on foot; otherwise, they have to pay a round trip fare of \$6.2. According to calculation made by local residents, this will cost them \$1.91 million per year. They wonder why the Government does not allocate part of this sum of money to maintain the operation of the library in Yat Tung Estate. If the Government has no money, local residents indicate that they can act as voluntary workers. All the Government needs to do is to allocate \$3.3 million for rentals. In doing so, they can save the travelling expenses of \$1.91 million. Is it feasible? Can Secretary CHEUNG convey this issue to the Financial Secretary and Secretary TSANG Tak-sing and hold concrete negotiation with them?

If this breath of life in Yat Tung Estate is to be removed, how many social problems and problems relating to needy students will be generated there? How can the Government tackle the problem of inter-generational poverty?

I seldom touch upon a small library so specifically in an amendment. Since the Government claims that it has all along adhered to a people-oriented approach, that it will work for a harmonious society and attach importance to families, can all these be genuinely implemented? And now, we will have to see if the Government is so heartless as to cease the operation of the library in Yat Tung Estate. This will serve as an important test to the Government.

I very much hope that Secretary CHEUNG can convey what I have said to the Financial Secretary. Thank you, President.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): President, as for the betting centre in Yat Tung Estate mentioned by Mr WONG Kwok-hing just now, I think he should condemn those District Council (DC) members from the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB). It is because the Islands District Council, which comprises of DC members from the DAB, is in support of setting up this betting centre just below three kindergartens. However, in

discussing the issue on this library, it seems that they have no objection at all. I also do not understand why such a decision is made.

President, regarding the motion on "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" raised by Mr TAM Yiu-chung today, we notice that Mr TAM's motion is in fact a collection of most of the recommendations put forth by various political parties during the discussions on poverty alleviation. As such, we, the Democratic Party, is in support of it. However, I wish to make some supplementary proposals and amendments with regard to the details.

At present, it is an incontestable fact that needy school children cannot participate in extra-curricular activities because of financial reasons. Nowadays, education attaches much importance to the whole person development and encourages students to take part in extra-curricular activities. Those needy school children who have not participated in such activities have become the minority, which will affect their psychological development. Some schools even make it compulsory for students to participate in extra-curricular activities, imposing further burden on needy school children.

With the increasing popularity of on-line learning, some schools always make use of on-line learning platform, thus making Internet services an indispensable tool for school children. To the needy school children, Internet access charges have become a heavy burden on them at once. From the perspective of equality, given that the Government has implemented free universal education, it should provide school children with all the necessities in their learning, so that the needy students will not be deprived of their right of learning due to poverty. Therefore, it is imperative to provide subsidies on Internet access charges for needy school children.

The existing approving criteria for the "fruit grant" are also very rigid, which have neither considered the needs of the elderly nor provided them with any special convenience. According to the existing criteria, applicants for the "fruit grant" must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application. For those elderly persons who choose to reside in the Mainland, this is extremely inconvenient and not amenable to reason, nor has it taken their situation into account. Moreover, under the current arrangement, elderly recipients of Disability Allowance are not allowed to

receive the "fruit grant" concurrently. In fact, the objectives of providing Disability Allowance and the "fruit grant" are basically different, and there is no conflict between them at all. Therefore, we urge the Government to abolish this restriction, so as to benefit the elderly.

Given the serious ageing problem in Hong Kong, there is an increasing demand for services of residential care homes for the elderly. As such, we should enhance the services and increase the number of subsidized residential care homes for the elderly to provide more subsidized places for the elderly, so that more elderly persons, especially those in poverty, can be benefited. Such efforts can brook no delay. Moreover, we urge the Government to extend the opening hours of day care centres for the elderly, so as to provide convenience to their working family members and enable the elderly to receive more appropriate care. As such, both the elderly and their family members can be benefited.

At present, persons with disabilities can only apply for either Disability Allowance or Higher Disability Allowance according to their medical assessment. However, as we all know, a lot of additional expenses are required for taking care of persons with disabilities and it is inadequate to rely only on Disability Allowance. Therefore, it is very important to provide an allowance for taking care persons with disabilities to each of these families.

The Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme cannot fully cope with the needs of the retired at present. For example, some MPF schemes with a shorter term of contribution fail to give any protection to low-income earners, homemakers and the unemployed. Moreover, under the existing system, the higher the income, the higher the amount of MPF to which one is entitled and *vice versa*. This will widen the disparity between the rich and the poor. Therefore, I urge the Government to implement a universal retirement protection scheme, whereby all citizens aged 60 or above are eligible for receiving an old age pension, so as to ensure that the elderly will be able to maintain a reasonable standard of living. This is proposed by members of the community, including various political parties. In fact, the DAB has also promised to support the implementation of a universal retirement protection scheme during the election. I wonder whether it will object to it or not today.

President, I also wish to express some opinions regarding labour policies in items (d) and (e) of the original motion today. Item (d) mainly urges the

Government to assist young people to secure employment and enhance training for this age band. The Democratic Party is in support of this point. As for the details of our view, I would like to elaborate them in another motion debate to be conducted later today, namely, the motion on youth policy raised by Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che. However, regarding item (d) of the original motion, I think there is a point which merits our discussion.

President, in the policy address this year, the Chief Executive has put emphasis on the six major industries. However, the Democratic Party queries if the Government is capable of replacing the market with these six major industries in making a decision. Mr TAM Yiu-chung considers that the authorities should attract more young people to join these so-called industries with competitive edge. However, as the effectiveness of these industries has yet been proven, how can they be considered as having competitive edge? Therefore, in view of the after-effects of the financial tsunami, I think the Administration should insist on upholding the existing market mechanism and avoid practising the system of planned economy, with a view to encouraging young people to join various sectors and industries and give play their talents. If their prosperous future is restricted to these so-called industries with competitive edge of which the effectiveness has yet been proven, first of all, I do not know for how long they have to wait, and secondly, such an approach may be very unwise. It is because in doing so, it will only ruin their potentials of development in other industries, which is also tantamount to restricting their opportunities for upward mobility. This point does warrant our deep thoughts.

President, regarding item (e) of the original motion which urges the authorities to introduce a long-term territory-wide transport subsidy scheme, the Democratic Party has all along been striving for it proactively. The Democratic Party has insisted that the Government should extend the coverage of the Transport Support Scheme, so as to allow all eligible citizens of Hong Kong to apply for it. Moreover, it should enhance the flexibility of the application procedure. If the Government is reluctant to consider examining the feasibility of providing a long-term subsidy, I am afraid many people will be deterred from seeking jobs across districts or accepting low-paid jobs because of the transport costs. They will give up some employment opportunities easily, and it is not a good thing to the Government either. Therefore, extending the coverage of this support scheme and providing the subsidy on a long-term basis can not only reduce the cost for low-income earners to work across districts, but also bring about benefits to those unemployed who have an intention to seek jobs across

districts. The Democratic Party urges the Government to take this proposal into serious consideration.

As for the proposal of introducing an "allowance for private medical insurance contributions" in the original motion, the Democratic Party considers that we should, first of all, examine thoroughly if overseas countries have similar practice in place. If there are overseas countries which have introduced such allowance, have they set up any corresponding regulation systems targeting private medical insurance systems? More importantly, the Government should study whether developing a private medical insurance market will bring about any adverse impact on the overall health care system.

Introducing a tax allowance for private medical insurance contributions will be beneficial to the insurance sector, private hospitals as well as private medical practitioners, and the public can also be benefited on the surface. However, the Government should be cautious in dealing with measures aiming to encourage the development of private medical insurance. In some countries, the private medical insurance market has dealt a great blow to the public, patients and even the overall health care system. Among them, the United States is a typical example.

According to an international research conducted by the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), the administrative cost of private insurance is extremely high. In countries such as the United States and the Netherlands, marketing, insurance staff and product design account for an additional 10% to 14% of the cost, which is 3% to 4% higher than that of public medical sector. Moreover, as private medical insurance will lead to a greater demand for medical services and health care personnel, the cost of public medical sector will also be driven up subsequently. As shown by the research, even the public has spent a lot of money on taking out private insurance plans, public medical expenses are not reduced at all. On the contrary, in some countries, such expenses are even on the rise. In France, Australia and Switzerland where private insurance takes up a higher market share, the percentage of both private and public medical expenses in the gross domestic product is higher than that of other APEC member countries. Although private medical expenses in the United States are the highest, under the situation that many patients do not have medical protection, public medical expenses still account for 7% of its gross domestic product. As for Hong Kong, the percentage of the expenses on the overall health care system

is below 6%. Therefore, we consider that there is a need to conduct a comprehensive study on this proposal.

Lastly, I wish to raise some of our suggestions in my amendment, which are related to bus services, for it is a must to implement sectional fares and interchange concessions.

Under the existing system of bus fares, passengers have to pay the full fare when boarding. However, if bus companies can implement sectional fares, many people would not need to pay the full fare to reach their destinations by bus. As a matter of fact, the Octopus is already a very useful technological product, and I think it is not difficult to achieve this. The Democratic Party hopes that various public transport operators can provide interchange concessions for more routes in a pragmatic manner.

It is a main policy direction of the Democratic Party to assist the poor and the disadvantaged and advocate improvement of social welfare. We strongly request the Government (*The buzzer sounded*) to put forth measures to alleviate poverty and help the disadvantaged in various aspects, with a view to building a fair society which helps and supports the poor and the disadvantaged.

MR PAUL CHAN (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr TAM Yiu-chung for proposing this motion, so that this Council can once again remind the Financial Secretary of the 3Ls in society — the least, the last and the lost, before the release of the budget of the new financial year by the end of this month.

Around this time every year, the Government will announce its fiscal situation of the first nine months of that financial year. At the end of January, the Government has just announced that the fiscal deficit for the first nine months of this year is only \$1.2 billion. In fact, I already pointed out a few months ago that the fiscal situation of this year would have a much lower deficit than the \$39.9 billion as anticipated in the budget released last year. On the contrary, there would even be a surplus of over \$10 billion.

I bring up this point on the fiscal situation of the Government without any intention to comment on whether its budget is right or wrong. The global economic environment was extremely poor last year, and the financial tsunami

had also dealt a great blow to the economy of Hong Kong. We were all very worried about it, not knowing when we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is understandable that the Government made a conservative estimate. However, upon the release of the budget last year, I pointed out immediately that even though the economic environment was poor, the relief measures proposed in the budget were really too conservative and the Government was too mean. Public finance should not be tied down by a deficit or a surplus of the year. Rather, the Government should have foresight, and the vigour and confidence to lead social development. As we all know, in a poor economic environment, the most vulnerable group in society will be hit the hardest. In other words, the poorer the economic environment, the more concerns we should show to the poor and the disadvantaged in society, and there is a more pressing need to offer them support and assistance. As such, in encountering difficulties, they know that they are not alone and there is still love and care in this world. Even they have experienced hardship in their lives, they can still face up to it calmly and confidently.

Subsequently, the Government allocated \$16.8 billion to implement relief measures. But we cannot help but ask: Why does our Government always fail to sense public sentiments and social pulse in a timely manner? In fact, many organizations have already put forth a lot of recommendations to alleviate poverty and help the disadvantaged, and a consensus has even been reached on some of them in society. They all urge the Government to consider and implement their recommendations. Why does our Government always react so slowly? Do public officers really understand the minds of the public? President, as an old saying goes, "Ashamed of receiving pay when people flee the state". Have the senior officials, who are paid punctually every month, ever thought of the poor and the disadvantaged who can hardly sustain their basic living when they wake up in the middle of the night? When they think of them, do they feel uneasy at all? We do not only ask Secretary CHEUNG of the Labour and Welfare Bureau and his colleagues to show their care, concerns and empathy for the poor and disadvantaged in society. Public officers of higher ranks — the Secretaries of Department and the Chief Executive should do the same.

President, although I understand that we cannot merely rely on the Government to tackle the problem of poverty, the public have to know and feel that the Government does care about the disadvantaged. Even if only a small step is made, it should still do so. Let me elaborate by using two points in the original motion which I have all along supported, which include providing

subsidies on Internet access charges for poor school children and extending the coverage of the transport subsidy scheme to the whole territory.

As early as in 2005, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) released a study entitled "Basic Needs of Children in Hong Kong". As proposed in the study, all households with children attending school should be provided with a personal computer which can be connected to the Internet. Subsequently, in 2008, it was also proposed in the report of the Legislative Council Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme that the Government should consider the recommendations put forth by the HKCSS, which include providing each CSSA household comprising children attending school with special grants to purchase a computer and pay for the monthly Internet charges.

President, prior to this, that is, at the end of 2004, the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty was set up by the Legislative Council. After discussing and conducting studies for more than one year, the Subcommittee released the Report on Working Poverty in early 2006, proposing that the authorities should grant cash subsidies on transport expenses for working-poor households, so that members of these households need not worry about the huge transport expenses and lose the incentive to work.

President, those front-line social service organizations and this Council are supposed to be most capable of gauging public sentiments and pulse in society. Moreover, the above suggestions, being supported by concrete studies, are also viable. But very regrettably, after the launch of the pilot Transport Support Scheme in 2007, the Government simply turned a deaf ear to the request for further relaxing the eligibility criteria and extending the coverage of the scheme to the whole territory. It is most infuriating that regarding the learning needs of school children, especially the provision of subsidies on Internet access charges, government actions, though long overdue, were not taken until the release of the policy address by the Chief Executive last year, and all it had said was that the Financial Secretary would be tasked to co-ordinate the efforts of relevant bureaux to study the proposal. When can it be implemented? When can those children with genuine needs obtain such assistance? I sincerely hope that the Government should not keep them waiting anymore. Moreover, I also hope that the implementation of the relevant measures can be announced in the budget this year.

President, as for most of the points raised in the original motion, particularly those measures to alleviate poverty and help the disadvantaged, I do hope that the Government can take them into serious consideration and will no longer be lagging behind the public sentiments and pulse in society. As for the part proposed in the original motion on "resuming the construction of HOS flats on an appropriate scale", I had mentioned during the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the policy address last year that we should act prudently. It is because the lands of the Housing Authority are allocated by the Government. If the construction of HOS flats would affect that of public housing, this may not be able to assist the grassroots to tackle their housing problem and may even bring about an adverse impact on them. This problem should be considered cautiously. However, I do not think that the main theme of the original motion and most of its content should be opposed for this reason.

Regarding the proposal put forth in Mr WONG Sing-chi's amendment "to expeditiously implement a 'universal retirement protection scheme' whereby all citizens aged 60 or above are eligible for receiving an 'old age pension'", during previous motion debates on "Old age allowance and universal retirement protection system" in the Legislative Council, I have given my support for conducting a thorough study on universal retirement protection and working out a suitable proposal, so as to enable the elderly to enjoy a dignified life in their twilight years. In fact, to a very large extent, Hong Kong's achievements today are attributed to the lifelong efforts made by our last generation and the elderly. However, in implementing these measures, we should be mindful of not imposing excessive burdens on our next generation.

A joint alliance for universal retirement protection has proposed that the monthly MPF contributions made by all employees and their employers in Hong Kong should be increased by 2%. Such additional contributions will not be credited into their personal accounts. Rather, they will be pooled together for use by all retirees. This is equivalent to increasing the salaries tax and profits tax, and as such contributions are made before deducting the allowances, a very heavy burden may be imposed on individuals and employers. For this reason, I cannot support this proposal.

Regarding Mr WONG Sing-chi's amendment, as he has neither mentioned how to determine the amount of old age pension nor made a detailed projection

on the affordability of society and the public, I cannot support his amendment for the time being.

President, my amendment is in fact very simple, that is, "to allow owner-occupiers to claim full deduction of the home loan interest paid for their properties and to re-launch the Home Starter Loan Scheme". The former mainly targets at owner-occupied properties valued at \$5 million or below. I believe that this is not very much different from the amendment made by another Member to my amendment. It is because under the prevailing environment, it is very difficult for the middle class to repay their home loan principal and interest within 10 years. In allowing owner-occupiers to claim full deduction of the home loan interest paid for their properties, their burden can be reduced. This can also show the Government's sympathy for the pressure faced by the sandwich class in their living.

As for "re-launching the Home Starter Loan Scheme", I think this proposal is feasible and do not agree to the reasons for rejecting it. I have no intention to request the Government to act as a lender. Rather, I only ask it to assist those who wish to purchase their own flats, especially young people. As we all know, even two university graduates who have been working for 10 years may not be able to save up enough money for the down payment to purchase a small flat. If we do not lend them a helping hand, how can they take the first step and improve their living gradually? In putting forth this suggestion, I have no intention to aggravate speculations in the property market. Therefore, I agree with Mr LEE Wing-tat that we should be mindful of the supply of private properties when re-launching this scheme. In implementing the measures concerned, the Government should assess the property market and the trend cautiously.

President, I so submit.

MR LEE WING-TAT (in Cantonese): President, in this motion debate, in fact, I have only proposed a minor amendment. My amendment is related to housing and properties. Just now, Mr Paul CHAN mentioned me. In fact, it does not matter if this point is put on record or not but I think that sometimes, it should be debated from a philosophical point of view.

I cannot remember which well-known person once said that sometimes, the road to hell is paved with roses. This figure of speech is very relentless and the scenario is extreme. There are many apparently desirable things that, if used without careful consideration, can be exploited recklessly.

As a philosophical subject, what we have to debate is whether or not there is the need for the Government to provide subsidies in the form of loans to the public to buy properties. Of course, if we delve further into this issue, it is about whether or not the Government has the responsibility to build Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats but this is another issue. I prefer the latter because the supply can be better regulated. If a good job is done in respect of the supply, this will be conducive to the regulation of property prices. This is also the position of the Democratic Party. We support the construction of a small number of HOS flats to provide a choice for people with the need. In addition, a small number of HOS flats will more or less serve as a relief to the property market. Why do property developers oppose the construction of HOS flats? Apart from their fear that the quantity of HOS flats built by the Government may increase over time, thus taking business away from them, if the Government builds HOS flats, property developers will no longer be the only supplier in the market.

This is also what I said in the debate on the policy address three months ago. I strongly criticized the Government for changing from the former strategy of so-called government-initiated land supply to a strategy of land supply to be initiated by property developers under the Application List system. In the past few years, the facts have shown that this policy is a failure. Property developers care only about profit but not other social factors, nor do they care if members of the public can acquire their own properties, still less do they care about whether or not young people can acquire their own properties. For this reason, I have reservation about the proposals put forward by two Honourable colleagues on relaunching the Home Starter Loan Scheme at this stage.

Some members of the public will not be pleased to hear me say so because naturally, the public would like to have someone lend them money to buy properties. However, we must bear in mind that the purchase of properties is not a decision involving a short period of time. Property buyers have to first make a down payment, then take out a loan and this loan will tie the borrower for 15 or 20 years at the shortest and more than two decades at the longest. For this reason, people taking out loans from banks have to consider prudently whether or

not their family circumstances allow them to buy flats. In addition, not only do they have to consider their present circumstances, they also have to consider whether or not in the next five years, their financial position or job security would be very good and whether or not the global financial market would also be stable. For this reason, any loan scheme introduced by the Government has moral responsibilities attached to it and must reduce the risk borne by the borrowers.

We have seen many such instances. I also played a part in some of these matters but I am not sure if I have done anything wrong. The President may recall that in 1997 or 1998, the financial market was very turbulent and many people bought flats at high prices under the Sandwich Class Housing Scheme (SCHS) introduced in the Chris PATTEN era. In 1997, many of these people became people with negative equity assets and a group of teaching staff members of universities also borrowed money at that time. Hence, they had an excessively positive evaluation of their affordability and it did not occur to them that the world could change in a few years to one of financial meltdown. Not only was this the case in 1997 or 1998, in 2003, there was also the IT stock crisis and there was also a financial meltdown last year. If we make a tally, such instances do not occur once in a decade, rather, there is one financial recession about once in five years.

Why do I want to speak on this amendment? Back then, I provided assistance to those owners of SCHS flats, who asked me, "Mr LEE, either the Government provides top-up loans to us or we cut losses expeditiously, just like a brave man cutting off his arm and withdraw from the SCHS market. How should we choose?" At that time, in buying a flat costing \$2 million, property owners would often have to pay \$400,000 to \$600,000 as down payment. To an owner of SCHS flats, \$400,000 to \$600,000 was a large sum of money. Many owners, about 1 000 to 2 000 in all, sought my assistance but I did not offer them any advice. I said, "On this, I cannot offer any advice because the properties are yours. You have to decide whether or not you want to cut losses expeditiously, just like a brave man cutting off his arm and lost \$600,000 or to seek top-up loans from the Housing Society.". At that time, the top-up loan arrangement was not yet available and it was available only subsequently. There were people who opted for either course of action but those choosing to cut losses were few. Several years ago, I came across someone who chose to cut losses. He actually chose to discontinue the mortgage and lose more than \$500,000. He told me happily, "Mr LEE, it is really great that I chose to discontinue the mortgage at that time.". Back then, the Government was well-intentioned and of course, I

also played a part in calling on the Government to provide top-up loans but President, even now, I cannot conclude whether or not this was helpful to those property owners.

Concerning the moral risk involved in making investments, sometimes, it is difficult for the Government to decide for investors and property buyers. For this reason, on the proposal relating to the Home Starter Loan Scheme this time around, I wish to make it clear that if the supply of properties does not increase substantially, this would affect property buyers in assessing their ability to pay off mortgages; moreover, this is again to entice them into a trap that they should not fall into. Therefore, my premise is that without an increase in the supply of flats, I am personally opposed to relaunching the Home Starter Loan Scheme. Although many members of the public and young people may not like what I say, having been through so much, I cannot act against my conscience and voice support for just about any loan scheme. Thank you, President.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): President, it is incumbent upon a modern civil society to help the poor and the disadvantaged, particularly given that Hong Kong is basically an affluent society, so it is only right to provide appropriate support to the disadvantaged groups in society. The original motion and the several amendments spell out a number of proposals to help the poor and the disadvantaged and the Liberal Party agrees to most of them.

All along, the Liberal Party holds that we should make optimal use of precious public resources and focus our efforts on helping the neediest people. In other words, even as we hand out fish to satisfy the hunger of the needy, we should also lead them to a big fish pond yielding big catches and teach them how to fish — President, I am not speaking on the previous motion. We believe that it is only by providing opportunities and teaching survival skills that poor people can be lifted out of poverty. Therefore, the Liberal Party believes that helping the poor all boils down to revitalizing the economy and creating employment opportunities. The Government should step up its efforts in promoting the development of the four major pillars and the six industries in which Hong Kong possesses clear advantages.

On the proposal to turn the territory-wide transport subsidy scheme for low-income people into a long-term measure, the Liberal Party will be happy to consider lending its support but we believe that the Government should solve the

problem at root, for example, through the revitalization of economic activities in remote areas and offering concessions such as double tax deductions to attract various manufacturing industries to return to Hong Kong, so as to create a large number of employment opportunities and enlarge the pool of "fishes" in various districts, so that more people can be fed and clad.

Of course, even if there are fishing activities, it is still necessary to learn how to fish. For this reason, the Liberal Party strongly advocates the provision of more training and counseling to young people, including offering more programmes in tertiary institutions tailored to the needs of economic development. For example, as far as we know, of the six industries in which Hong Kong possesses clear advantages, the testing and certification industry requires at least 15 000 talents but so far, no tertiary programme in this area is being offered.

To address the training needs of middle-aged people with low education attainment, the Liberal Party proposes that in the next three years, the Government should introduce a training scheme for the middle-aged at a cost of \$300 million to provide at least 10 000 places for further studies to middle-aged people with low education attainment and low income. The programme will last six months and apart from free courses, a self-enhancement subsidy of \$1,500 each month should also be offered, so as to attract people in employment to enhance their knowledge and skills to meet the requirements in the development of a knowledge-based society.

At the same time, the Liberal Party holds that although the Government has announced the injection of \$1.2 billion into the Continuing Education Fund last year, it should make further fund injections to double the subsidy for further studies to \$20,000 per person, that is, even people who have received the subsidy of \$10,000 will also be eligible to apply for another \$10,000, so that they can pursue self-enhancement and upgrade themselves continually.

In addition, the Liberal Party also strongly urges the Government to provide subsidies for extra-curricular activities and Internet access charges to needy school children. We hope that their fate could be changed through the acquisition of knowledge and the knowledge gap can be bridged through education, so as to alleviate cross-generational poverty.

In the face of a serious shortage of residential care places for the elderly, the policy address only proposes to increase the number of subsidized residential care places for the elderly by 500 in three years, so we think that this number is rather inadequate and we are fairly dissatisfied. For this reason, we propose that the Government should increase the number of residential care places for the elderly by at least 1 000 each year, that is, a total of 3 000 places over three years. In addition, if the children of these elderly people hire local home care workers trained by recognized organizations to take care of their elders, they should be entitled to a tax deduction of \$60,000 for caring for their elderly family members at home. For one thing, this can encourage the care of elderly people at home; for another, this can create local employment opportunities.

President, the difficulty of young people in acquiring their own homes also merits our attention. Take the recent announcement by the Hong Kong Housing Society concerning the purchase of Sandwich Class Housing Scheme flats in Tseung Kwan O by single people as an example, since these people are accorded the lowest priority in choosing flats, I am afraid this category of applicants can only submit their applications but will have no chance to choose their flats. Although some people think that resuming the construction of Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats will serve to solve the problem easily, the Liberal Party still holds that the Government should not assume the role of a developer too readily to avoid inappropriate intervention in the market. Otherwise, should there be a downturn in the market, the problem of negative equity assets would recur again. As an alternative, the Government can put on sale all the 4 000-odd unsold HOS flats this year and actively reconsider relaunching the Home Starter Loan Scheme to assist people with the need in acquiring their own properties.

In addition, the Government should also find ways to stabilize the property market, for example, by lowering the trigger price to 60% of the reserve price, so as to attract property developers to trigger land sales and offer flats with floor area less than 500 sq ft as "flats with floor area limits designed for first-time home buyers", so as to increase the supply to prevent great fluctuations in the property market and meet the demand in the market.

As regards the proposal of Mr Paul CHAN to offer full deduction of the home loan interest paid for properties, we believe that his intention is good but we are concerned that if the amendment to be proposed by me today is not included, the very good intention of Mr Paul CHAN would be misconstrued as designed to help buyers of luxury properties or speculators. For this reason, I

have proposed an amendment to make clarification by limiting the tax reduction only to owner-occupiers of non-luxury residential properties.

Mr WONG Sing-chi requested that universal retirement protection be introduced as soon as possible. We think that this will very likely do us a disservice out of good intentions. Not only will this increase the burden on the next generation, this may also create another poverty problem, so we consider that a decision on this subject must not be made hastily. For this reason, we will vote against the amendment proposed by Mr WONG Sing-chi.

Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): First of all, I thank Mr TAM Yiu-chung for moving this motion on alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantage with care and concern and Mr Frederick FUNG, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr Paul CHAN, Mr WONG Sing-chi, Mr LEE Wing-tat and Ms Miriam LAU for proposing their respective amendments on the motion.

Assisting the poor and relieving their plight has all along been one of the key initiatives of the SAR Government and also an issue of increasing concern to Hong Kong people. The Government is very concerned about the needs of low-income people and socially disadvantaged groups and adopts a pragmatic, holistic and multi-pronged strategy in tackling poverty. Apart from providing social security and various support services to the poor, we are also determined to assist those who have the ability in achieving self-reliance, so as to transcend the sole reliance on financial support or a reactive mode of assistance. At present, the Government provides various free and heavily subsidized services in education, health care, housing, and so on, through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme to ensure that socially disadvantaged groups and low-income people can meet their basic needs. We are also committed to the promotion of economic development to create more job opportunities and the provision of training and retraining to enhance the competitiveness of the working population.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS MIRIAM LAU, took the Chair)

The Government also invests heavily in education and child development to foster social mobility and reduce cross-generational poverty. In the light of the economic situation, in the past two years, the Government has implemented a series of relief measures to promote economic development, improve the public's living and employment in order to assist low-income families and people in need.

Today, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and sponsors of the amendments have altogether put forward over 20 proposals covering a wide scope. Some of them are one-off measures and some are medium-term or long-term proposals. I will give a consolidated reply after listening to Members' speeches.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, each time before the release of the budget, debates like this would take place. In the past, they took place at Christmas time whereas this year, the debate takes place somewhat later than Christmas but still, just like a Christmas tree, Members can hang their wish lists onto it. However, I am getting tired of this. Is the Government actually listening to our views? Today, even the Financial Secretary is not present. In fact, he has made clear his attitude, that is, the Financial Secretary just does not bother to pay heed to us. I also want to tell the DAB that I am sick of their way of making some requests first and then definitely giving their support when voting on the budget. I have never seen the DAB vote against any budget and the situation is the same each year. Each year, before the release of the budget, they would always raise a lot of requests — honestly, some of them would always become reality — but each time, this ritual was duly performed and supporting votes would then be cast. Since the Government knows full well that it would have their support, what need is there to listen to their views?

Of course, they may retort, "What good is the pan-democratic camp then? Would the Government listen to you?" True, the Government does not have to listen to our views. Why? Because each time after we have raised our requests, even if we vote against the budget, there would not be enough votes. Last year, after the financial tsunami, we requested measures costing \$20 billion to ease public hardship but in the end, we could not get it, so we voted against the budget. If the entire legislature could join hands in making the request, that would be another story. If all of us make clear to the Government that if it does not agree to the demand, we would vote against the budget, we would then have

earnest negotiations and a bargaining process would be possible. What happens now is just like a show, with the DAB performing a show of bogus lobbying to make people see that it is lobbying for something and when it has succeeded in lobbying for something, it trumpets that it has succeeded and then the whole show would end. Are we truly representing the Hong Kong public and can we solve the problems? At present, the Government is indifferent to our proposals precisely because it knows that the royalist camp would give its all-out support when it is bidden to do so.

Another indication of the indifference of the Government can be found in the recent announcement of public interest concerning the consultation on the budget carried out by the Financial Secretary. I wonder if the Deputy President has noticed that some of the scenes are particularly striking. For one thing, he is very furtive as he would suddenly stick out his head, and this is why the general public said that he is like a phantom when he suddenly appears. However, another scene is even more disagreeable. I remember that in it, a man and a woman are talking. The man says, "I hope the Government could improve public livelihood.". Then, the woman says, "No, we should spend appropriately.". The Financial Secretary then sticks out his head immediately, grinning. Deputy President, what is his mentality? What is the Government's mentality? If this mentality is not changed, in fact, the problems can never be solved. Concerning the improvement of the living of the public, he would never show his smiling face, rather, it is upon the utterance of such vague words as "spending appropriately", which the Financial Secretary likes, that he would emerge grinning, looking quite pleased. The Government should bear in mind that the public funds do not belong to it and it is only a caretaker, so it should respond to the existing problems facing the Hong Kong public properly.

What is the greatest problem in Hong Kong at present? Of all the deep-rooted conflicts, the greatest one is wealth disparity. Despite Hong Kong's development thus far and no matter if Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city or "Nylonkong", which are flattering descriptions though, it is a disgrace to Hong Kong to be ranked the first in the world in terms of wealth disparity. In fact, behind all this prosperity, over 1.2 million people are living below the poverty line and all of us should open our eyes to look at their misery. This is not the fault of the Secretary, rather, this has to do with the mentality of the entire Government. How is it going to resolve the issue of wealth disparity? This is very simple, that is, wealth redistribution has to be effected and the funds in the Treasury have to be used to subsidize all the expenditures on social welfare,

education and health care. If the subsidies are inadequate, wealth disparity would then occur.

What are the deep-rooted conflicts at present? On the one hand, it takes money to resolve the wealth disparity; on the other, the representative assemblies and the Government of Hong Kong are completely skewed toward consortia. If the Government wants to levy more taxes from consortia to solve the problem of wealth disparity, the functional constituencies would definitely refuse. The Government often talks about "big market, small government" but in fact, we are being undermined by this mentality of "big market, small government". Members may read a recent issue of *The Economist*. In the United Kingdom and the United States, given their sizes, almost 50% of the GDP in the United Kingdom is now spent on public expenditure. Of course, some people may say that this is excessive and at present, the proportion is only 20% in Hong Kong. However, surely it would not be too much if the proportion in Hong Kong is raised to 25%, would it? If we want to resolve wealth disparity, all the proposals put forward today have to be implemented. The proposal of the CTU is actually very simple. The Government must increase its long-term financial commitment and we demand that it be increased by \$16 billion each year — this is a long-term measure rather than a short-term measure of "handing out candies" — and be spent on such areas as social welfare, health care and education, so that funds are available to all the problems pointed out by Mr TAM Yiu-chung just now. Deputy President, we hope that an additional allocation of \$16 billion can be made. (*The buzzer sounded*)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Your speaking time is up.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President.

MR WONG KWOK-KIN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, on this motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung today, to put it bluntly, of course, many Members would seize the opportunity to take advantage of it but worse still, some people even want to take advantage of it politically, so one really does not know whether to laugh or to cry over this. Although in its past policy programmes, the SAR Government constantly stressed the need to provide support to low-income

earners and the disadvantaged groups in society, the poverty problem still persists. A study points out that by the first half of 2009, the total population living in poverty in Hong Kong has increased to over 1.3 million, hitting an all-time high and our Gini coefficient has also remained high for a long time. In the report "State of the World's Cities 2008-2009: Harmonious Cities" released by the United Nations, it is pointed out forthright that Hong Kong is the city with the greatest wealth disparity in all of Asia and even though the overall unemployment rate has declined, this is no consolation. In the ranks of the unemployed, the undesirable trend of the unemployed being younger and having higher education attainment can be observed, so it is difficult for socially disadvantaged groups to escape the danger of being marginalized.

For this reason, on the motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung, this Council expresses its agreement with it and strongly urges the SAR Government not to just pay lip service; rather, it must implement effective measures to truly and effectively ease the burden of living borne by the public and attain the long-term goal of helping the poor and the disadvantaged. There are two points that I wish to raise in particular.

The first is the ageing of the population and the shortage of residential care homes. The trend of population ageing in Hong Kong is an undisputed fact and according to the demographic projections made by the Planning Department, from 2008 to 2018, the proportion of elderly people aged over 65 in Hong Kong will increase from 12.6% to 16.2% and the ageing of the populations in the Eastern District, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin will be particularly pronounced.

However, the existing care for the elderly and other services such as medical care and residential care homes in Hong Kong are totally insufficient to meet the demand. A case in point is that each year, over 1 000 elderly people waiting for residential care places died before being admitted into residential care homes, so the objective of "home for the elderly, a sense of security for the elderly and care for the elderly" cannot be realized for these elders. In this connection, the Government really cannot shun its responsibilities. Some elderly people who have been admitted into residential care homes are also neglected due to a shortage of manpower in these residential care homes. Even such incidents as giving out the wrong drugs and an elderly person having been dead for nine hours without being discovered have occurred.

For this reason, it is necessary for the Government to allocate additional resources. Apart from building more subsidized residential care homes for the elderly, it is also necessary to recruit more manpower and provide support in a greater number of areas. On the one hand, this will have a positive effect on the labour market and ease the unemployment problem; on the other, instances of neglect of inmates due to the excessive workload of care workers in these homes and occupational injuries due to their hectic duties can be reduced. Since elderly people have toiled for the better part of their lives, society really has the responsibility to let them live out their old age in peace and improve their lives properly.

The second point that I wish to talk about is the problem of indebtedness of poor students after graduation. According to conventional thinking, we stress that knowledge can change our fate and often, parents would tell their children that if they do not apply themselves to their studies, they would be no good in the future, that it is only by studying hard that they will have a future, be able to make money and will not have to suffer from poverty. Does it still apply nowadays? With the transformation and development of society, young people nowadays have many opportunities to receive education and various institutions also offer various types of programmes leading to diplomas, higher diplomas, sub-degrees, bachelor's degrees, and so on, and the Government also offers loans to people who need them. Basically, most people who want to study can do so. Equal opportunities in education have enabled many young people in low-income families to obtain tertiary qualifications and it seems that all is well. However, the facts tell us that these education opportunities cannot change their fate of being poor.

Many students from low-income families became indebted upon graduation and the greatest irony is that their debt was incurred from their studies. Our education from a young age teaches us to study hard and strive for continuous improvement but it turns out that after receiving education, one may not always be able to overcome poverty. Moreover, it may even be necessary to shoulder heavy debts arising from the tuition fees. Take a university graduate as an example, if he has to apply for the full amount of living loans from the Student Financial Assistance Agency in all his three years of university studies, he has to repay over \$100,000 after graduation and interests are also payable. What we can see in their case is that apparently, knowledge is unable to change their fate, only that the phenomenon of the poor getting poorer and cross-generational

poverty is manifested. Of course, we do not rule out the possibility that some of these people may be able to land good and well-paid jobs on graduation but how many of them are like this? For this reason, it is essential for the Government to review its existing policy to ease the burden borne by impoverished graduates in making repayments.

Deputy President, for many years, the phenomenon of socially disadvantaged groups being marginalized in society has not been eliminated and problems such as wealth disparity and social divisions persist. Moreover, a trend of deterioration can also be seen, so this problem is a time bomb in society and one of the root causes for the great grievances of the public. The Government must take action to implement measures to ease their hardship and help the disadvantaged, so as to resolve this deep-rooted conflict in Hong Kong.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the original motion and all the amendments.

MS LI FUNG-YING (in Cantonese): Deputy President, today, the Legislative Council is again discussing the issue of alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged. When the Chief Executive attended a Question and Answer Session of this Council in the middle of last month, he admitted that this is a deep-rooted conflict in Hong Kong. However, this conflict has been a subject of discussions in society for many years and even the Commission on Poverty (CoP) was once established to conduct studies and make recommendations. However, so far, this problem has not been solved and the Chief Executive did not tell us why this is so.

Here, I hope Members will bear with me as I wish to cite the remarks made by the Chief Executive on that day, when he attended the Question and Answer Session of the Legislative Council. He said (and I quote), "In the face of an economic slide, enterprises have no choice but to cut expenditure. Quite a few wage earners have seen their wages reduced and are even laid off. In spite of the small improvement in the economy recently, rents have risen soon in tandem and the real wages of many employees have not seen any marked increase. A survey shows that there is an increase in the poverty population. The increases in various fares and charges since 1 January came as one disaster after another for low-income people. It has always been our primary task to improve people's lives. I undertake that the Government will seriously consider introducing

measures this year to alleviate the difficulties of low-income people, promote economic development and create more job opportunities.". (End of quote) Deputy President, on the face of it, the Chief Executive has been looking for ways to introduce measures to ease the hardship of people who are in deep water.

The Chief Executive made this pledge with all solemnity. I could only get a hazy picture and I do not quite understand what he was driving at because the comments of the Chief Executive are at great odds with the administration of the SAR Government as I see it. At least, it runs directly counter to what we have seen in the public consultation carried out by the Financial Secretary on the 2010-2011 Budget, which has great bearing on the living of the public. The Financial Secretary pointed out in the background information on the budget provided to the public that in the future, the threat posed by deflation to Hong Kong will be even greater and stressed that the Government had already introduced several rounds of relief measures. In this context, the public are consulted on how the Government should prioritize the use of resources and their views on the widening of the tax base. In fact, the answer to the question of what kind of budget the Financial Secretary wants to prepare is already self-evident. While the Chief Executive said that the primary task was to improve people's livelihood, what did the Financial Secretary say? He said that as the economy was picking up, the priorities in the use of resources should be reconsidered. The Chief Executive said that this year, he would seriously consider introducing measures to alleviate the difficulties of low-income earners. Mr TSANG — I mean the Financial Secretary — said that the actual tax rates of the salaries tax in Hong Kong, particularly that of the lower-middle income group, was among the lowest in the world, so it was necessary to consider how to increase tax revenue to cope with the challenges posed by fluctuating public revenues.

I do not know how Honourable colleagues look at the internal contradictions between the comments made by the Chief Executive and those made by the Financial Secretary in his consultation. However, according to media reports, the latest news is that the Government, due to the political pressure arising from the opposition to the Express Rail Link and the issue of resignation *en masse* by Members from the five geographical constituencies, the Government will continue to introduce relief measures in the budget to be released soon. That means the relief measures adopted by the Government are only a step taken out of expediency and the aim of easing public hardship is to ease the political

pressure on the Government rather than tackling the poverty problem at root. This is a deep-rooted conflict that has been bedeviling Hong Kong in recent years.

All along, the so-called measures to help the poor are just a window-dressing exercise under the free-economy policy of "big market, small government" but this has led to conflicts between the rich and poor in society nowadays and the situation of "the rich being so fat that they cannot put on their socks but the poor being so poor that they have no socks to put on". To solve the poverty problem in Hong Kong, the first step is to tackle the problem at root by rectifying the mentality of the Government in its governance, so that Financial Secretary John TSANG will not lift a rock to hit the mouth of Chief Executive Donald TSANG.

Concerning the vast array of proposals in the original motion and the amendments, in fact, I also have some views. For example, all along, I have been considering and reflecting to the Administration the demand that it should establish an unemployment loans fund. For this reason, originally, I also intended to propose an amendment on this occasion, so that the motion proposed by Mr TAM Yiu-chung and the amendments today can look even grander. However, after careful consideration, in the end, I consider it more appropriate to put up my proposal in my speech.

Deputy President, concerning what measures the Government should take to help the poor and how poverty can be alleviated, it is not the case that society has provided no input at all. At least, in 2007, the CoP submitted a report before its dissolution to put on record the observations of its members on the poverty problem in Hong Kong and propose a series of recommendations on poverty alleviation. This Council also established a Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation to follow up the task of helping the poor. I also joined these two committees and as a member of the CoP, although I was not satisfied with the effectiveness of the CoP, I think its report can serve as a new departure point for our efforts in helping the poor. We can examine the inadequacies in the functioning of the CoP and the reasons for the ineffectiveness of its recommendations and then embark on our mission to help the poor again.

Thank you, Deputy President.

DR PAN PEY-CHYOU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, apparently, this place called Hong Kong is affluent but if we look at the Gini Coefficient in Hong Kong closely, we will find that the problem of wealth disparity is quite serious and is worsening year after year.

In 1991, the Gini Coefficient was 0.476 and by 2001, it rose to 0.525. In 2006, it rose further to 0.533 and recently, it has probably risen to 0.54. This reflects the fact that the incomes of households in Hong Kong are getting increasingly uneven and the wealth gap is widening. At present, the Gini Coefficients of most advanced countries range between 0.24 and 0.39. As a developed city, the Gini Coefficient in Hong Kong is as high as 0.533. Moreover, it is the city with the greatest wealth disparity in all of Asia, so the authorities must face this problem squarely.

If the economy is good, the living of the public will also be good but is this really true? In fact, this is an illusion. At present, wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small group of people. As Ms LI Fung-ying said just now, many members of the grassroots have difficulty even in meeting their basic needs. Today, I wish to focus on the poor elderly. According to the by-census in 2006, the average monthly income of singleton elderly in 1991 was \$5,900 but by 2001, after taking into account inflation, their income decreased by over 20% to \$4,600. Moreover, the number of singleton elderly was also on the increase during this period. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of singleton elderly increased by 16%.

Just like many other cities, Hong Kong is also facing the phenomenon of an ageing population. According to the HK Population Projections published by the Census and Statistics Department in 2004, by 2033, the proportion of people aged over 65 will have increased to 27%. In addition, in the Healthcare Reform Consultation Document published in early 2008, it is also mentioned that the Hong Kong population will age rapidly, increasing from one elderly person in every eight people in 2007 to one elderly person in every four people in 2033.

Whenever we talk about the policy on the elderly, "care for the elderly" has always been the Government's mantra but can the existing policy on the elderly really turn "care for the elderly" into a reality? As the cost of living on the Mainland is lower and the living environment is more spacious, many elderly people hope that they can live out their old age across the border.

Unfortunately, owing to the existing restrictions on receiving "fruit grant", elderly people cannot leave Hong Kong for more than 240 days, so many elderly people are finding themselves in a dilemma. They can only choose between "fruit grant" and living out their old age on the Mainland. For many elderly people, their old age cannot be described as being cared for, rather, they have no one to care for them and nothing to depend on. They can only receive a meagre sum of fruit grant or subsist on scavenging for carton boards or drink cans. Going back to one's home town to live out one's old age is basically not a bad choice and yet, the authorities are asking them to choose between the two options. Why can they not have the best of both worlds? Is this what the authorities mean by its mantra of "care for the elderly"?

In the face of the pressure from an ageing population, health care expenditure is also rising. So far, the response to the Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme (HCVPS) has been lukewarm and although the authorities have undertaken to carry out an interim review one year after its implementation, we have received a lot of views suggesting that the value of these health care vouchers should be increased and the eligibility threshold should be lowered.

At present, the age threshold for applying for senior citizen cards is 65 years and we believe that we should make reference to this threshold and lower the age threshold of the HCVPS, so that elderly people aged 65 or more can be eligible for the health care vouchers. As elderly people are old, weak and illness-prone, and as many of them are patients with chronic diseases, health care vouchers with a total value of only \$250 each year are inadequate in providing financial support to them. For this reason, we propose that the value of these health care vouchers be increased to provide more substantial support to them.

In addition, many elderly people are waiting for the services of elderly health centres, which are quite well-received. However, since the number of elderly health centres and the service quotas offered by them are insufficient, sometimes, the waiting time can be as long as several years. These elderly health centres can bolster primary care, which is worth promoting. We in the FTU hold that the Government should increase the number of elderly health centres and the service quotas as soon as possible to enable them to serve the function of being the first line of defence for the health of the elderly. At the same time, the Government can consider running such centres jointly with non-governmental organizations through the provision of subsidies, so that such

basic health care services as simple physical examinations can be provided to the elderly. Developing this kind of primary care services can promote the health of the elderly on the one hand and reduce the medical expenses incurred by elderly people due to incidence of serious illnesses and hospitalization on the other.

As we should "care for our own aged parents and also extend the same care to all aged people in general", I hope that our Government can show greater care and love for the elderly and make "care for the elderly" and "a sense of security for the elderly" a reality.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the title of the motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung today is "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern". On seeing it, I had the wrong impression that this is the fund-raising slogan of a charity. In fact, to help the poor, eliminate poverty and support the disadvantaged is not just intended to show the care and love of the Government and Hong Kong society. I think that more importantly, in Hong Kong society nowadays, it is necessary to help and support socially disadvantaged groups from the perspective of deep-rooted conflicts.

Many people think that at present, the Hong Kong economy has already recovered from the crisis caused by the international financial tsunami the year before last. In fact, during the better part of last year, the property market in Hong Kong was booming. This was not just the case for the property market but also for the stock market. The retail industry also recorded double-digit growth and many commentaries even said that the economic condition this year would be better than last year's. However, Deputy President, I wish to point out that although the economy is picking up, I think this is only the outer appearance and the economy is not in as good a shape as it is said to be in society. In fact, I can see that even with the so-called signs of recovery, many social strata have been unable to benefit from them. More importantly, during the better half of last year, the economic recovery shows us time and again that the greatest problem in society still persists and has even taken a turn for the worse and this problem is wealth disparity.

Deputy President, the social contradictions in Hong Kong at present are arguably quite pronounced and the life of the grassroots is even miserable beyond words. During the past year or so, unemployment rate has increased by 2% and the number of the unemployed has increased by almost 100 000 people. Although in recent months, the unemployment rate has slightly decreased, the number of unemployed people still stands at 50 000 more than the pre-financial tsunami level. It seems the crisis of the financial tsunami is easing but to wage earners at the grassroots, particularly poor families and families experiencing financial difficulties, they still cannot see any marked improvement. Quite the reverse, the general public are now very worried about the onset of inflation. Without any improvement in employment or pay, they will have to cope with inflation. I believe that the living of the grassroots will face yet another blow and their quality of life will regress again.

The life of the grassroots is deteriorating year after year but this is not so for the finance of the SAR Government. As I said just now, with the locomotion provided by the property market and the stock market, the fiscal situation is constantly looking up and I believe that this year, the phenomenon of overflowing funds will occur again. Although the Financial Secretary originally estimated that there would be a deficit of some \$39.9 billion or close to \$40 billion this year, I predict that such a situation would not occur. Not only would a deficit not occur, it is possible that there will even be a surplus. However, no matter if there will be a surplus or a slight deficit this year, so far, the Government still has some \$400 billion or close to \$500 billion in reserves, so I believe that if the Government has the resolve, it is capable of improving the life of the grassroots, only that it lacks the will to implement effective measures to help the poor.

The original motion and various amendments put up a total of more than 20 proposals to help the poor. In general, I agree to and support all the proposals but the problem is: Even if we agree to and support them, so what? As Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said just now, often, we have put forward many views but how many of them have the Government heard? Rather, the question is whether or not we can actually make the Government implement these policies. For this reason, I believe that the most important thing is not to put forward new proposals; rather, many existing proposals have not been really implemented by the Government and no proper response has been given. For this reason, I hope that in future budgets, the Government can truly implement these measures and only this is the most desirable course of action.

Anyhow, I must point out that in order to resolve such deep-rooted conflicts as the unequal distribution of wealth and the impoverishment of society, apart from short-term measures, it is even more important to have a long-term policy on poverty elimination. I have to reiterate that if we are to effectively assist the lower class in solving their problems of employment and livelihood, the Government cannot rely solely on past short-term measures that are tantamount to "putting people on saline drip" or individual policies. Rather, it must face the overall problem of poverty in society squarely and tackle the problem at root. In fact, in overseas countries, there is not any particularly excellent measures to solve the problem of poverty either, only that they have done one thing that our SAR Government is still unwilling to do even now, that is, to establish a poverty line. Why is establishing a poverty line useful? In fact, a poverty line is used by a government as an indicator to gauge poverty and once it has done so, it can see how many families or people are living below the poverty line and then introduce targeted measures. Some countries have even put in place policies to lift people living below the poverty line out of poverty within a specified period of time and indicators are set for this purpose. Unfortunately, so far, the Government has still not put in place any indicator and only says that it has introduced policies. However, if there are only policies but not indicators, it appears to us that this is tantamount to having no policy.

For this reason, I must reiterate here that in order to get to the root of the problem, several points have to be implemented. First, establish a poverty line; second, establish a highly representative Commission on Poverty and formulate a comprehensive policy on helping the poor and third, set a clear timetable and roadmap for reducing the proportion of the poor in the population step by step.

Deputy President, to help the poor and the disadvantaged, we cannot rely solely on charitable measures, nor can we rely on Premier WEN Jiabao to remind us constantly that our deep-rooted conflicts have not been resolved. It is only when the Government, in particular, the Chief Executive and the Financial Secretary, are willing to truly face up to the problem and show their resolve that the poverty problem can truly be solved. For this reason, I hope the Government can put in place a good policy on helping the poor, so as to resolve these fundamental conflicts.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): I personally find this subject of "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung very meaningful.

Hong Kong is facing deep-rooted problems in many areas. Apart from political and economic problems, many social contradictions, in particular, problems such as wealth disparity, the impoverishment of the grassroots and the lack of upward mobility for young people, have led to the discontent felt by an increasing number of Hong Kong people.

In order to make Hong Kong a harmonious and caring society, the Government must face these social contradictions squarely. If these problems are to be solved, first, we must face them courageously, find out the root causes for them and administer the right cure.

Deputy President, in particular, I wish to discuss the problem of wealth disparity. Be it the number of poor people in Hong Kong or the Gini Coefficient, which reflects the income gap, they are all at a high level. The Government should contrive ways to solve the problem of poverty. However, if it does not understand the root cause of the problem, it can only get half the desired result with all its efforts.

In fact, the widening wealth disparity and the imbalance in income distribution, which cause the worsening contradictions within society, are inseparable from the population policy adopted in Hong Kong.

According to the figures of the Immigration Department, from 2004 to the first three quarters of 2009, the number of people coming to Hong Kong on one-way permits ranged from some 33 000 to 55 000 and the total number of arrivals to Hong Kong stood at 260 995 people.

I wish to further analyse two sets of figures therein together with Members. According to the information of the Immigration Department, from 2004 to the first three quarters of 2009, among the people coming to Hong Kong on one-way permits, on average, 70% of them were 15 years old and above, and their median age was as high as 27 to 29.

As regards their level of education attainment, over 70% of them were educated to secondary level, over 10% possess tertiary or higher education

qualifications and on average, the occupation of 40% to 50% of them on the Mainland was homemaker and those without work also accounted for 7% to 12%.

Members can see from these figures that 70% of these people were already over 15 years of age when coming to Hong Kong on one-way permits and their average age was as high as 27 to 29. In general, their level of education attainment was secondary standard, so given their qualifications, it is inevitable that they have to take low-pay jobs after coming to Hong Kong.

In addition, since many of them grew up on the Mainland or gained their past work experience there, after coming to Hong Kong, it would take them some time to adjust and they may also need support.

The Home Affairs Department has all along conducted surveys on the difficulties facing new arrivals from the Mainland settling in Hong Kong and the target group is people aged 11 or above coming to Hong Kong on one-way permits.

When looking up the survey figures of the past six years, I found that each year, an average of 50% of the respondents said that they had adjustment problems in work and 50% to 60% of them even needed help in looking for work.

The surveys also show that the major source of income for 70% to 80% of the respondents was wages but they also find that the median household income of the respondents was on average only \$6,500 to \$7,800.

It can thus be seen from the foregoing analysis that the Government absolutely needs to examine in depth the problem of poverty resulting from unemployment and low income, which are caused by the population policy.

In fact, I personally strongly support the reunion of family members and the Government also has the responsibility to provide such a channel to enable members of the public to be reunited with their family members. However, when implementing the population policy, the Government should also adopt more complementary measures, including refining the population policy and adopting more creative solutions. Otherwise, the impoverishment of the grassroots will only continue and more and more people will have to face the misery of poverty, thus giving rise to more contradictions and conflicts in society.

Deputy President, on the proposals raised in the original motion and the several amendments today, I agree fully to many of them and the beneficiaries would cover various age groups ranging from small kids to elderly people. I hope the Government can listen carefully to the proposals put up by Members and after analysis, have the courage to propose forward-looking policies to solve the worsening poverty problem in Hong Kong.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MS AUDREY EU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, in fact, a total of 26 proposals can be found in the original motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung and the amendments proposed by a number of Members today, so it is not possible for me to go over them one by one in seven minutes. Having listened to the speeches of the Secretary and all Honourable colleagues carefully, I found that they actually share many points in common. We all agree that wealth disparity is very serious and we all agree that in fact, it is the cause of social division and instability. To solve this problem, it is necessary to introduce a number of measures. On the measures, I have listened to the speeches delivered by Honourable colleagues, who agree with many of the proposed measures, and many of these proposals have all along been advocated by the Civic Party. For example, I have met with the Secretary to discuss ways to help poor students pay the expenses for Internet access and outdoor activities. On transport subsidies, a consensus was reached in this legislature long ago. In addition, other measures include the removal of restrictions on the period of absence from Hong Kong for the payment of "fruit grant" to the elderly, providing more health care services, taking care of persons with disabilities, increasing the number of residential care homes, and so on.

Deputy President, in fact, the Legislative Council has discussed these measures countless times. If the public say that the Legislative Council should use its time efficiently, as we have been proposing these measures over and over again, this is by no means an efficient use of our time. For this reason, I think what is more worthy of consideration is: Since all of us evidently agree with the measures that should be taken and we also agree with where the problem lies, why do things remain in such a state? What is the reason for this and where does the core of the problem lie? Deputy President, I believe this is where the differences can be found. For example, I heard Ms Miriam LAU say earlier in her speech that to help the poor, the most important thing was to revitalize the

economy, which means creating a trickle-down effect. She thinks that it is only necessary to help small and medium enterprises and improve the business environment for every member of the public to fare well.

In addition, I also heard Mr WONG Kwok-kin ask why, since we were discussing the problem of wealth disparity, some people had exploited this issue politically? He holds that people's livelihood and poverty alleviation are unrelated to politics. Deputy President, I think this is exactly where the core of the problem lies. Why do we often distinguish between the pro-establishment camp and the pro-democracy camp? In fact, the greatest difference between them is that the pro-democracy camp often finds that the root cause of the problem lies in the need to establish a fair system in society. At present, the public have a great deal of grievances and as Mr CHAN Kin-por said just now, there are many immigrants and new arrivals in Hong Kong — in fact, Hong Kong has always been a city of immigrants — everyone wants to climb up the social ladder, hoping that after one generation has toiled hard, the next generation would have more opportunities. However, the present problem is one of cross-generational poverty. If we want to release the grievances of the public, we have to let them see that there is hope ahead and that there are equal opportunities in society.

Why are the grievances so great at present? Precisely because the system is very unfair. I often explain to others that the nature of the electoral system will determine the nature of the legislature; the nature of the electoral system will determine the nature of the Government and the nature of the Government will determine the nature of the policies formulated and how public resources are distributed.

Therefore, political issues, democratic elections and the right of political participation by "one person, one vote" all have a great bearing on the lives of the public. For example, when the Chief Executive said in the election, "I will get the job done", the public were smart enough to ask, "Who is your boss?" Mr Alan LEONG said, "You are the boss only if you can choose.". Many wage earners also understand this rationale. To solve the poverty problem, it will not do just to carry out some tinkering. Each time a budget is read out, it is said that the Financial Secretary is handing out candies. The Civic Party is very averse to hearing such comments as "the Financial Secretary is handing out candies". In fact, the public often say that they do not want any "candies", rather, they want

"rice bowls". If they are given a level playing field, Hong Kong people, particularly given that this city is made up of immigrants, definitely have the perseverance and diligence. If they are given a platform of fair competition, naturally, they will forge ahead.

However, nowadays, the political system is often unfair. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said earlier that each time, the situation was always like this: The DAB would propose many views but in the end, it would invariably support the Government. The Government can always have enough votes. It has enough votes just from the pro-establishment camp alone, in particular, it can secure half the votes just from the functional constituencies alone. Since the Government already has enough votes, there is no need for it to listen to other people's views. If we look at the incident of the Express Rail Link, a lot of people were neither related to Choi Yuen Village nor Tai Kok Tsui but why did so many people come out to voice their opposition? This is because they can see that no matter how many times we have discussed the issue of helping the poor with the Government, no matter how we demand that more public rental housing be built, HOS flats be reintroduced, transport subsidies be offered and students be subsidized in accessing the Internet, no matter how we talk until our gum is bleeding, in the end, all is to no avail. However, so long as infrastructure projects are involved, particularly projects relating to the concept of "Progressive Development" advocated by the Chief Executive, public funds amounting to tens of billions of dollars or billions of dollars would be splashed out — and this is what aroused the grievances and indignation of the public. Why do they often talk about "collusion between business and the Government"? They use this term to express their denunciation of this unfair system, so this is certainly not a matter of "taking political advantage".

Deputy President, I also wish to talk in particular about the issue of public rental housing. Members of the property sector estimated that the supply of new flats this year would stand at only 13 000 units, which is lower than the 22 000 units in 2003. In fact, since 2005, the supply of new flats each year is about 15 000. With decreasing supply, naturally, the prices of property are driven up. The Government's policy should also be blamed for such a situation. I have said here many times that the Government is implementing the investment immigrant scheme to attract people from outside Hong Kong to invest in properties. I learnt from today's news report that according to members of the property sector, buyers from the Mainland accounted for more than 18% of the buyers in the

luxury property market and this is higher than the figures cited recently by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Mr Norman CHAN. Together with the present moratorium on the construction of HOS flats imposed by the Government, even if there is still a supply of medium and small flats, ordinary members of the public still cannot afford them.

Deputy President, concerning the proposal to relaunch the Home Starter Loan Scheme, we in the Civic Party have reservation about this because the bad debt ratio of the last exercise is still very high. Before a review is conducted, we can only support the proposal put up by Mr WONG Kwok-hing as amended by Mr LEE Wing-tat, that is, we will support the relaunch of the Home Starter Loan Scheme only if there is a sufficient supply of private residential housing.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Your speaking time is up.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): Deputy President, today, Mr TAM Yiu-chung proposes a motion on alleviating poverty, which I think has echoed the earlier remark of Premier WEN Jiabao on the deep-rooted conflicts in Hong Kong, because the problem of poverty, uneven distribution of wealth and social mobility coming to a standstill are issues that Hong Kong society should examine and resolve seriously.

Actually, we have noticed from recent social incidents that the disparity between the rich and the poor has already caused anxieties and divisions among different strata of society. The division will in turn lead to conflicts and disagreements, and even unrest, which is a situation that no one wishes to see.

Hence, I think the Government should focus its attention on social and livelihood issues and do its level best to alleviate the problem of disparity between the rich and the poor at root by policies and specific measures, to restore social cohesion.

Deputy President, it is true that the economy has shown signs of slight recovery and the unemployment rate has declined, but not many social strata and not many people in society have benefited from the recovery. Take the youth as an example. The figures announced by the Secretary last month indicate that the

unemployment rate for youths between 15 and 24 stands at 11.9%, which means some 40 000 young people are unemployed. The unemployment rate for those aged between 15 and 19 is 20.1%, and that for the group aged between 20 and 24 is 10.5%. Young people are always regarded as the future pillars of society, but why is unemployment so serious among them? Has the assistance provided by the Government been rightly focused? I think the Administration has to think about it and make improvement. In this connection, I and my colleagues from the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions have all along maintained communication with the Chief Executive, and we consider that the Government seems to have attached little importance to the problem of youth unemployment.

Deputy President, Hong Kong is a knowledge-based society, but we fail to keep up with the times in respect of employment and training of the youth. Take the apprenticeship scheme I proposed recently as an example. Under the new economy, the apprenticeship scheme should be relaunched. The rationale behind the scheme is to enable young people to benefit from a process of work in which they can learn and practise concurrently. Besides, their teachers can act as mentors to them and serve as a model for them to follow. However, the existing Apprenticeship Ordinance is lagging far behind the social environment. The service industries which are now dominant in society, as well as the innovation and technology industries and environmental industries to be developed in future, are not included in the Ordinance. No amendment has been made to the Ordinance in response to the economic development of society to provide some tailor-made services to young people. Hence, we think that though an ordinance is in place at present, it is almost like not existing at all. I hope the Government will conduct a review to open up a new path of vocational education for the youth.

On the other hand, though the economy has improved, wage earners have not yet benefited from it. In times of difficulty, corporations urged their employees to ride over the hard times together and their wages were resolutely cut by 5% or more. But when it comes to pay rise, the increase is moderate, ranging only from 2% to 3%. More often than not, their salaries have turned out to be less due to the pay rise. Wage earners are facing increasing pressure in their daily lives, particularly after January, for more and more public utilities and suppliers of foodstuff have indicated their plan to increase charges and prices. Though public utilities may only apply to the Legislative Council for an increase of a dollar or two, or 10 dollars, which is insignificant, all the increases, when

being added up, will put heavy financial burden on wage earners. Hence, we hope that the Government will step up its efforts to alleviate the pressure they face in their daily lives. Take the cross-district transport subsidy as an example. We all along hope that the Government can continue implementing this policy and extend the coverage to the entire territory, and this issue has been discussed for a long time.

Honestly, the target recipients of the transport subsidy are grass-roots workers, so I do not understand why the Government keeps refusing implementing this measure that can help the grassroots. Actually, it is indisputable that the transport fares are high for remote districts, and we hope that the Government will continue implementing this policy.

Second, the issue of alleviating poverty has been discussed for many years. However, the Commission on Poverty, having operated in a high profile for a few years, backed off before accomplishing its mission, and has even disappeared. As for the subsidy on Internet access charges of students, Members have been discussing it for a long time. This Friday, the Finance Committee will examine the funding application from the Education Bureau for the promotion of e-learning in schools. I have pointed out to the officials from the Education Bureau that if the Legislative Council approves the funding but if the provision of a subsidy on Internet access charges to students will remain unsolved, it will create some kind of inequality in the distribution of education resources. In view of the increasing reliance on e-learning in education, how can students in poverty, who have no access to the Internet in doing their homework, compete with the others?

Moreover, my colleagues Dr PAN and Mr WONG Kwok-kin have put forth many problems relating to the residential care homes for the elderly. Why does the Government not increase the residential care places for the elderly? This can promote employment and also enhance the service quality of the sector, which is a win-win situation. Why does the Government not do so?

In discussions on the policies to alleviate poverty in the Legislative Council, many have been said over and over again but the Government remains headstrong, refusing to change its mindset. This will only intensify social conflicts. If the Government is unwilling to put in more efforts, Hong Kong may find the consequences we have to face in the end unbearable. Hence, I

hope the Government will think about this. It should change its mindset in alleviating poverty, assisting the disadvantaged and promoting employment.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion and all the amendments.

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): Every year, before the announcement of the budget, Members will surely put forth motion debates on similar topics to review afresh the issue of poverty. However, the motion proposed this time includes a particularly large number of details. There are 17 proposals in the original motion, and taking into account of the amendments, nearly 20 proposals are made. But what we need to deal with is indeed a structural problem. The 10-odd to 20 proposals, which cover transport subsidy, education, housing and elderly care, and so on, can actually be grouped into three categories.

First, Deputy President, I would like to comment on the Government's attitude towards poverty. Despite the numerous proposals put forth by us, the problem of poverty, which exists in the view of members of the community, will not be solved if the Government adopts a mistaken attitude and understanding on poverty. Obviously, the Government's attitude towards poverty is to turn a blind eye to the problem. When the Government is asked whether it has the relevant figures, or figures on street sleepers, it will probably say that the departments concerned do not have such figures. But some academics once escorted the former Director of Social Welfare in a visit to the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. They found that some 70 to 80 street sleepers slept outside the Hong Kong Cultural Centre at night, and some 50 to 60 people slept in the Southorn Stadium. Alright, when the Government can no longer turn a blind eye to the problem, what will it do? It drives them out, and simply sweeps the problem under the carpet. As a result, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department closed the spectator stands at Southorn Stadium, prohibiting street sleepers from spending the nights there. Though street sleepers can no longer sleep there, they can sleep elsewhere. Hence, the Government cannot simply cover its eyes and turn a blind eye to the problem, and then consider that the problem has been solved.

I recall that at the last Question and Answer Session, Chief Executive Donald TSANG explained what poverty referred to. He gave a self-contradictory answer. He said that people eligible for the Comprehensive

Social Security Assistance (CSSA) were living in poverty. If people who are eligible for the CSSA are granted the CSSA by the Government, it means that the Government has solved the problem of poverty completely. Following this logic, there should be no poverty in Hong Kong society. But when we go to the streets, we will see that this is not the reality in society. Hence, Deputy President, no matter how many proposals, details, implementation measures and policies we have proposed, what we primarily have to deal with is the understanding of senior government officials, the Chief Executive in particular, on poverty, and whether they have the determination to solve the problem of poverty.

In 2003-2004, the Commission on Poverty was established, but it has been dissolved now. Among the measures proposed by the Commission on Poverty, I think the cross-district transport subsidy is the only measure which has been implemented most thoroughly. But still, the measure seems to be subject to a review for continuation every year, which means it cannot be implemented as a structural measure and become the second safety net. Hence, Deputy President, we can see that when poverty in society is a structural problem, structural changes within the system should be made as a solution to the problem. As for the best solutions to the problem, the first is to set a minimum wage at a reasonable level. As, we have all along been suggesting this level should mean that the income of a full-time employee should be enough to support the living of a two-member family; otherwise, he will need the low-income allowance under the CSSA scheme, which is unfair to taxpayers. Hence, I hope that during the scrutiny of the Bill on minimum wage to be carried out soon, the authorities and the legislature will be able to work towards this objective.

The second concrete measure for alleviating poverty is the setting up of a universal retirement protection scheme. Though the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme has been put in place, only people at work can make contributions, and those not at work, particularly full-time housewives We often say that women in poverty cannot benefit from the MPF scheme. Under the present level of contributions, for workers aged 50 who are approaching the retirement age of 60, the monthly amount they will receive from the MPF scheme may not be adequate.

Deputy President, in view of this structural problem, we have to address it not only from the income aspect by introducing minimum wage and universal retirement protection, but also from the expenditure aspect. Among the

expenditures on clothes, food, housing and transport, the expenditure on housing constitutes the biggest problem. Just this morning, we had a debate on the tragedy in Ma Tau Wai, which is not only a deep-rooted conflict relating to the building structure, but also a problem of poverty in society. Why do people still rent and live in flats of these dilapidated buildings? Because they have nowhere else to live, and they are not eligible to live in public rental housing. That is why no matter how dangerous these buildings are, they can still be rented out. However, we see that the expenditure on housing borne by the public is increasing. Not only have the prices of luxury flats reached an unrealistic level, the rent of flats for the middle class are also on the rise. Even for small flats located in old districts with an area of less than 40 sq m (kitchen and toilet included) which are usually rented by the grassroots, the rent is also increasing. To tackle this problem relating to the basic expenditure on housing, the authorities must increase the supply of public rental housing and relax the requirement for applying for public rental housing. Only with these measures will the grassroots be able to balance their expenditure on other public utilities, such as transport fares or electricity tariffs which do not have a free market, and maintain a reasonable standard of living.

Deputy President, lastly, it comes to the investment on education. If we are to help the grassroots to get rid of poverty, investment on education is a must. This will include the provision of subsidy on Internet access charges for students, the adjustment of the repayment framework of tuition fees loans for tertiary students, and the development of a career path for the many students who cannot go to universities and choose to continue their studies in vocational training or prevocational schools. Moreover, I hope that the Government will offer a second or even a third chance for students not being able to stay in mainstream schools. Investment on education in these aspects is indispensable. Otherwise, the immediate savings achieved today will only impose a heavy burden on society in future. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR ANDREW LEUNG (in Cantonese): A few days ago, there were reports in various newspapers that due to better-than-expected income from land sales, regrant premium, stamp duty and investment of the Exchange fund, the deficit of this year's budget, which was estimated to be \$39.9 billion, would definitely decrease substantially. According to the latest estimate of the Government, the budget this year will not have a deficit and may even have a surplus of billions of

dollars. Members hold different views on how the surplus should be used. The Economic Synergy and I consider that the Government should make good use of the surplus. It should take proactive measures to create employment, promote upward mobility in society, enhance the competitiveness of the grassroots, facilitate the development of new and creative industries and assist the restructuring of conventional industries. It should improve the livelihood of the grassroots by creating more employment opportunities. The Government should take proper relief measures and assist the disadvantaged, for we all know that relying solely on "handing out candies" to win applause cannot truly help the poor and the disadvantaged.

To preserve job, the authorities should start from supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), so that enterprises will invest more resource to recruit staff. Many SMEs in Hong Kong are engaging in the manufacturing industry and the creative industry, which involve product and technology development, but the investment they made and the number of employees recruited are on the low side in comparison with neighbouring regions. Last year, the authorities announced the introduction of the \$200 million Research and Development Cash Rebate Scheme for five years. Though the subsidy provided is low and the rate of rebate is limited, the industrial and business sectors have responded positively to the scheme. Many enterprises have stepped up their effort vigorously in research and development and employed more staff. The Government should adjust the subsidy amount flexibly and consider raising the cash rebate rate and even increasing the tax concession for expenditures on design, research and development. When enterprises make enormous investment, it will offer training and working opportunities for graduates and provide a platform for young talents in the creative industry and also in the areas of design and research and development. This will allow the younger generation with less experience to understand the enormous potential and room for development in the global innovative and creative economy, opening up a path for them to develop their career.

The environmental and recycling industries always employ a large number of low-skilled grass-roots workers. The authorities only need to implement measures to support these enterprises, and this can in turn enhance the quality of recycled products to and facilitate the separation and screening processes. Take electronic products as an example. The procedures involved are labour intensive. Products with no damage or minor damage can be resold after repair

and screening. A certification system may be introduced to facilitate trading of second-hand goods in the industry for the benefit of the grassroots.

I propose that the Government should freeze all the charges of services related to people's livelihood and SMEs for one year, and waive the rates payment for one year, subject to a ceiling of \$1,500 per quarter. It should also waive the business registration fees and licence fees for one year to alleviate the burden of SMEs, particularly those engaging in the tourism, logistics, catering and retail trades, for they employ a large part of the grass-roots labour force.

In addition to creating employment opportunities by supporting SMEs, the Government is also obliged to assist other members of society who need to upgrade their skills but do not have the means to do so. For instance, it should provide subsidy for Internet access charges for students from grass-roots families, so that they will not be put at a disadvantage under e-learning. The financial assistance and loan scheme for post-secondary students should also be reformed. The Government may draw reference from the repayment methods adopted in the United Kingdom and Australia. It can examine the feasibilities of including the loan repayment of student as part of the tax regime, and appointing the Inland Revenue Department as the agent to collect the loan. Under the arrangement, graduates may postpone the repayment of loan when seeking job or earning a relatively low salary. Moreover, the Government may examine the feasibility of the privatization of non-means tested loans provided for post-secondary students, so that the interest rate charged for student loans may be lowered with reduced costs and administrative fees.

More learning opportunities should be provided for the younger generation. The authorities should enhance their competitiveness by providing training courses which are pegged to the qualifications framework, thereby promoting the upward mobility of young people. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) should adjust its training courses and their contents in response to changes in society and the economy, to ensure that trainees can truly learn some practical skills to earn a living. Moreover, the training period should be extended, say from nine months to even one year, to enable trainees to grasp the basic knowledge. On the other hand, the ERB may also step up the technical training for trainees, so that they can obtain the recognized qualifications to move up the qualifications framework of their trades step by step. For instance, they may start from the level of junior artisans and move up to the senior artisan level, and may even reach the master level.

Deputy President, the people of Hong Kong make the greatest investment on housing. To alleviate the pressure faced by the lower middle class in purchasing their own homes, and assist first-time buyers to own their homes, a lot of methods can be used. For instance, it may revitalize the secondary market for Home Ownership Scheme flats by raising the limit of family income to \$33,000 and introducing arrangement for the regrant premium to be paid by instalments. For those who intend to buy their homes in the private property market, the relaunching of the Home Starter Loan Scheme is a desirable option. The authorities can examine the feasibility of increasing the supply of "lower price flats" by adjusting its land policy, so that the lower middle class may realize their dream of owning their homes.

Finally, the Government has revealed in advance that a health care financing scheme will be implemented in future. In this connection, I propose that before the introduction of the scheme, the Government should provide tax concession for premium on voluntary medical insurance to alleviate the tax burden on taxpayers.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung today puts forward a number of measures aiming at caring for the disadvantaged. I think these measures are comprehensive and should be supported. In fact, concerning the many suggestions which Mr TAM has made, we had already raised them up with the Financial Secretary last year. These include: providing subsidies to Internet access charges, abolishing the permissible absence limit in respect of application for Old Age Allowance, increasing resources for the school drug testing scheme, expanding the scope of the transport subsidy scheme and providing more support for youth employment and so on.

At this time and age in Hong Kong, apart from trying our best to help the disadvantaged, I would also like to point out here that we should pay attention to the middle class people. They may not be a very conspicuous group but they are also of key importance to the development of our society and we should pay more attention to them and help them. This applies especially to the so-called sandwich class in the middle class. I believe they are busy making arrangements in these two months to pay their tax. This is because the tax demand note may

have already been sent to their homes. Every time when we pay tax, we would think of them as they are not entitled to any welfare benefits. So we often say that the middle class is the most miserable group of people because they are stuck in the middle.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

I attended a meeting today in the Kowloon City District Council held to discuss the collapse of a building on Ma Tau Wai Road. As we discuss the issue of redevelopment, we would think that if these blocks of buildings are to be rebuilt, the first thing that will appear is the numerous legal issues involved, such as who caused the accident and who should bear the responsibility. At this point it may occur to Members that the owners concerned may have some assets and that block of tenement building is all they have. But it is reduced to shambles. If people from the middle class are asked to put up a defence for themselves or to delineate rights and responsibilities from a legal point of view, I am sure most of them would never be able to do it. So I have always pointed out after I was returned to this Council that it is always the aspiration of the middle-class people that they should be entitled to justice in law.

Earlier on when I met with the Financial Secretary, I raised a point together with some members of the Kowloon West New Dynamic that we hoped when the Government was to develop the six major industries, emphasis should be placed on creating job opportunities. We hoped that the jobs created would benefit the middle class, the professionals and especially the grass-roots workers in Hong Kong and enable the jobless to hop onto this express train of the six major industries which should be seen as the emerging industries of Hong Kong. Besides, the Government should commence the infrastructure projects as soon as possible, an example of these is the West Kowloon harbour-front promenade. This project should be able to create many jobs and hence be of help to people from different classes.

Due to the occurrence of the collapse of a building on Ma Tau Wai Road, we would like to point out specifically that the Government must pay more attention to launching redevelopment programmes if it is to solve the problem of the disparity between the rich and the poor. The Urban Renewal Authority should play a more important role by taking the lead and acting as an overseer to

co-ordinate the implementation of redevelopment projects in the old districts where redevelopment is very much required, so that through collaborative efforts, the old urban areas and dilapidated buildings which may endanger the people's lives can be redeveloped quickly. The four areas of clothing, food, housing and transport are very important, but life is even more important. Now there are some poor people who do not even have the resources to repair and maintain their homes, I think we must face this problem squarely in terms of policies. As the saying goes, it would be better to teach someone to fish than to give him a fish. We must provide jobs to them so that they can be self-reliant. I am sure this is the direction of development in which our society can go.

The amendment from Mr Frederick FUNG raises the issue of social mobility. As a matter of fact, this issue of social mobility has aroused widespread public concern in recent years. I believe the problem related to the post-80s generation is caused mainly by these young fresh graduates who think that it is difficult for them to climb the social ladder while at the same time, there is a downward mobility of the middle class, resulting in the polarization of the rich and the poor. To put it more precisely, there is a huge gap between the two and a very thin stratum in the middle. This is a so-called "M society". This decrease in the size of the middle class results in a drastic change from the bygone times of getting rich quick and hard to earn a living to the situation now which is actually, there is a growing sentiment in Hong Kong of people hating the rich and despising the poor. In the face of so many burdens and with such a large amount of welfare costs to bear, they get scared. As property prices soar to such insane heights, people think that this is out of balance. All these result in a very unbalanced situation in our society.

In my opinion, the Government must help the unemployed get a job quickly, and this includes the setting up of an interest-free loan fund to help the jobless switch to another occupation, extending the home loan interest deduction period and so on. The authorities should devise policies to help the young people find a job. Many young people have said that the school curriculum these days can never match with the work types available in the market. I believe the business associations and trades must explore into this problem more in order to meet the needs of young people in looking for jobs.

In Britain there was a time when the young people paid for their own internship because they wanted to gain more working experience. I hope very much that the new generation of Hong Kong can work hard and strive to better

their lives. For us who have gone through the experience or others who have worked (*The buzzer sounded*) and have gathered some experience, we can help them build a home. Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr Priscilla LEUNG, speaking time is up.

MR CHEUNG HOK-MING (in Cantonese): President, in 2008 Hong Kong was severely battered by the financial tsunami and people from all walks of life, especially the disadvantaged, the poor elderly and people with low education attainment, low skills and low income were the first to bear the brunt. Recently, there have been quite a number of public transport providers which apply for a fare hike and the composite consumer price index has registered increases during the past few months. At a time when the Hong Kong economy has not yet fully recovered, lay-offs, pay cuts, and pay freezes are expected to continue. So I appeal to the Government to undertake effective measures to assist the disadvantaged and the grassroots in order to ease their burden of life.

For wage earners with a low income, transport costs are a very heavy burden on them. Under the current transport subsidy scheme, the Government only offers transport subsidy to people living on outlying islands and in Yuen Long, Tuen Mun and the Northern district who need to work in another district. But this transport subsidy is time-limited. Although earlier on the Government had relaxed the eligibility criteria and extended the period for such a subsidy, people in other districts are still unable to benefit from the scheme. In addition, the eligibility criteria are too strict and people who live in these four districts and who engage in casual work or working part-time in another district are not qualified. Both the DAB and I hope that the scheme can be extended to cover all districts in Hong Kong and that all people in need can benefit from the scheme. This will achieve the goal of helping the grassroots get a job and make those low-income wage earners more inclined to find a job in other districts.

President, the DAB has all along been very concerned about putting into practice the sectional fares and transfer concessions of the buses and we have pointed out that there are three unreasonable things about bus fares: the cross-harbour, feeder and air-conditioned buses charge fares unfairly and the practical needs of the passengers are neglected.

Therefore, the DAB has all along been asking the Government to compel the bus companies to review the charging guidelines of the above types of buses in the hope that bus companies can put in place more sectional fare stops and determine the fares by considering the actual distance of the trips and hence be fairer. In the past, the bus companies launched the return trip concessions for long-haul buses and the MTR Corporation Limited used to have "Ride-10-Get-One-Free" fare concession and a fare concession given to passengers taking the MTR after riding on the ferry in an outlying island route. We hope that the Government can urge these transport providers to implement or extend such concessions as these can reduce the financial burden of the public.

President, now there are some two million people living in public rental housing estates. I therefore suggest that the Government should waive two months' rental of the rental units under the Housing Authority and the Housing Society as well as a year's rates payment for all property owners in Hong Kong. Also, the subsidy in electricity tariffs should be continued as well for the benefit of all Hong Kong people.

Also, regarding the planning of new towns, the Government has planned some new development zones in the New Territories. When planning these new development zones, the authorities must learn from past experience and lessons, balance the development in these zones and create job opportunities. The design of these new development zones must aim at achieving self-sufficiency in terms of community network, job opportunities, sports and leisure facilities, commercial facilities and so on. This will reduce the need for residents to travel to other districts for work, upgrade their quality of life and avoid the recurrence of incidents occurred in Tin Shui Wai and other districts that we do not wish to see.

President, the Government has pledged to exert more efforts in helping residents of Tin Shui Wai seek employment and promoting tourism in the district. One of the moves that can be taken is to make use of a plot of land with an area of 320 000 sq ft situated next to the Wetlands Park in Area 112B of Tin Shui Wai and turn it into a place where economic activities of attraction can be run. It is learned that a well-known gourmet has proposed to operate a gourmet village there. Some other people have also made applications for building a games park, wine cellar or garment shopping centre and so on. All these plans can increase job opportunities substantially. It is unfortunate that the authorities have disclosed to the media that it is very likely that the lot will be leased on a short-term basis or be used as a car park. Obviously, this runs counter to and is

greatly different from the original design intended to create a large amount of job opportunities.

Recently, my office got some telephone calls from some community groups in Tin Shui Wai which expressed their hope that Members can be concerned about the long-term use of the land there. They also asked when the Government would honour its promise of attracting manufacturers to come to set up factories in Tin Shui Wai. I hope that the Government will stop procrastinating and do something practical which can benefit the people and ease the difficulties faced of residents in Tin Shui Wai in employment.

Also, the people face problems in rent increase and difficulties in buying homes. In order to maintain sustainable development of society, the authorities must improve the land policies, resume the production of Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats in an amount as appropriate, put up the surplus HOS flats for sale on the market and reduce the waiting time for applicants of public rental housing to be allocated a flat.

I so submit to support the original motion.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): President, I wish to thank Mr TAM Yiu-chung and a number of Honourable colleagues who propose this motion debate and the amendments. I notice especially the 17 measures to alleviate poverty proposed by Mr TAM Yiu-chung and also the many measures proposed by other Honourable colleagues. As a matter of fact, the total number of these measures proposed by Honourable colleagues adds up to more than 20, some of which have far-reaching effects like the one on universal retirement protection.

Owing to the fact that Honourable colleagues have been in contact with the residents over long periods of time, therefore, the suggestions they have made are in line with public opinion and are able to address the current social problems. So they are of great value. Although I am also a Member of this Council, I wish to point out that while on one hand we urge the Government to respond to public demand and offer assistance to the poor and the needy, we have to take into account the principle of financial prudence which the Government practises. I would think that this is a very important point to make today. President, I do not know if you notice that when the top management of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority attend meetings of this Council, they often say that the US dollar will

not always be weak and they say that we do not have to worry about our huge amount of reserves pegged with the US dollar. It turns out to be true that the US dollar took a swift and sharp upswing last night, and this is because some European countries, the five so-called PIIGS countries of Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain are all heavily in debt and deep in the red. Hence their currencies drop and some commentators even describe the situation in Greece as a "Greek tragedy". It can be seen that we in Hong Kong are in fact very fortunate, for we still have a large amount of reserves.

I trust Mr TAM Yiu-chung and many Honourable colleagues who are more well-informed than me would know that public coffers are indeed inundated this year. At the beginning of this fiscal year, though cries of wolf were heard, now public finance is very much sound. Our fiscal reserves amount to more than \$400 billion and according to the most conservative estimates, this could meet our public expenses for at least 18 months. The actual amount may even exceed this when figures are released. Our foreign exchange reserves are more than \$2,000 billion. That is why the Government really has resources for its deployment. But I think the care and concern extended to the poor should not be some fragmented measures made every year in the likes of one-off waiver of government rates, electricity tariffs or rentals for public housing units and so on. Though it is certain that the public welcome these measures, popularity ratings for the Government can never stay high for more than just a matter of a few weeks. A bad precedent is set because people begin to expect the Government to hand out money as a stopgap measure and this way of doing things can never offer a solution to the problem of poverty beyond a temporary and superficial level.

Therefore, if the Government is really to assist the poor and the disadvantaged, it must formulate long-term policies. I would think that the first thing for the Government to consider is an effective policy on the industries, such as the six major industries which the Government has mentioned. Quite a number of figures from the Government point out that even if these six major industries can be successfully promoted, they would only take up 5% to 6% of the local GDP, which is just a small amount. The increase in the working population is even less, and the effect in some cases would not be seen only after a very long time.

If any technological innovation is going to be undertaken effectively, great efforts must be put in scientific research. But the fact is that the money spent on

scientific research in Hong Kong is only a miserable 0.8% of the GDP. I was told by a vice-chancellor of a local university that in the case of Shenzhen, such expenses have been pushed up to 7% of the GDP. How are we to measure up with them with the tiny amount of resources we have put in research? How are we to drive a restructuring of our economy and hence create more jobs? So if the Government is really to assist the poor and the needy, the first thing to do is to have a good policy in place concerning the industries, and the second thing is a policy on education. As some Honourable colleagues have said earlier, the Government only sends Secretary CHEUNG to attend this meeting and that is really far from being desirable. Actually, a Secretary of Department should come to listen to our views and make a response.

On education policy, apart from the persistent shortage of post-secondary places which has to be addressed by some self-financing places, our basic education is also not adequate. Many local graduates have said to me that there are still many inadequacies in secondary schools. When a place is to rid itself of poverty over long periods of time, its government must have longer-term commitment in the industries and in education. It remains of course, that this hinges on that government's fiscal policy and whether it thinks that government efforts should be made every time to help the poor. The situation is like when the people say that they have nothing to eat and they hope that their government can do something to ensure that they can have food over a long period of time, but their government gives them a piece of durian when it has got money, saying that it is a wonderful thing and it will be given to them when these things are available. But this cannot meet the people's demands, because they ask to have food over a long period of time and lead a decent life, but they are only given a piece of strawberry or durian when it so happens that their government has got the money. This can never be said to be any genuine poverty alleviation measure.

Honourable colleagues have given many pieces of valuable advice and with respect to the universal retirement protection scheme which Mr WONG Sing-chi has proposed, I would like to say that in many other places in the world where universal retirement protection is practised, the citizens have to make contributions, that is, all people who are employed have to pay. Last weekend I was in Singapore. I think the Secretary knows it very well also that they have a CPF, that is, Central Provident Fund, and both employers and employees have to make contributions to the amount of more than 10% of the income. In the United States, the social security benefits mean as much as 8% to 10% of people's

income are to be deducted. With respect to a universal retirement protection scheme that does not require any contributions, I do not think there are many places in the world which can achieve that. What the Government can consider is to improve the benefits for the elderly, such as by increasing the medical protection for people who reach a certain age. But the problem is, for a very long time, the Government is not willing to increase its recurrent expenditure. I think Secretary CHEUNG knows it well what is meant by recurrent expenditure and how the Government cannot change its current approach of financial management (*The buzzer sounded*) and so things are handled just in the manner of giving away a piece of durian once in a while as I have said.

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

MR CHAN KAM-LAM (in Cantonese): President, I think the key words for today are not how policies should be revised but more care and concern should be given. Care and concern are a kind of attitude. When the Government is to formulate a policy, it must be so formulated as to be able to be used by the people and this is crucial. If only the Government is to hold an attitude of care and concern in the course of its work, then I would think that there would be a countless number of policies on the part of the Government which are able to assist the poor and the needy.

With respect to the original motion from Mr TAM Yiu-chung today, many Members have hung up their own demands. If we are really to find out what should be done in our society, I am sure there would not be just 21 items but it could well be 210 instead.

It is a matter of course that efforts should be made to further the well-being of the people. It is unfortunate that in the motion debate today, we hear that some people are speculating out of an unbalanced political mindset that the reason why the DAB is making these proposals is because the DAB is staging a show with the Government. I think I do not have to make a rebuttal of this view, for the speech made by Mr Frederick FUNG has precisely addressed it and this has been the most suitable criticism directed against such kind of people.

Coming back to the topic of care and concern, this reminds me of a motion on promoting the thinking of Confucianism which I proposed not long ago.

Care and concern are among the core values of Confucian political philosophy. Confucius advocated a rule of virtue, benevolence and the way of the King. The so-called rule of benevolence means that the ruler should be people-oriented, that he should maintain a close affinity with the people and love them and he should extend his heart of benevolence to the way he governs a country. This is the essence of Chinese thinking in democracy and the rule of benevolence in ancient times. Now we are always talking about democracy. What in fact is democracy for? Does democracy mean that everything should be probed into or that an accusing finger is always pointed at the Government?

The meaning of democracy is that the people should be made as the centre of things. It is never a form but an essence of politics, something real. If a government can do everything with the people in its mind and if it can serve the people with a true and honest mind and if policies can be formulated from the perspective of the people, it is only natural that the people will benefit from such policies of that government. Their quality of life will be constantly raised, society will be prosperous and the people can live and work in it happily. This is how democracy should be realized.

Recently, we have been exploring the question of deep-rooted conflicts in society. Such conflicts would include those in the economic area, that is, those which appear as society develops. And these conflicts also include those at a political level. In my opinion, in order that these conflicts can be solved, the major principle to adhere to is that the people-centred approach should be undertaken and a rule of virtue should be practised. Conflicts in the economic area are caused by uneven distribution of resources and the wealth gap. All these are in fact inevitable in a society where free economy is practised. But the Government is duty-bound to solve such a disparity between the rich and the poor.

The budget is going to be released soon. Of course, we hope that the Government can roll out some measures to show its care and concern for the elderly, persons with disabilities, the low-income earners and such like disadvantaged groups.

Mencius once said, "When a ruler rejoices in the joy of his people, they also rejoice in his joy; when he grieves at the sorrow of his people, they also grieve at his sorrow." I would think that when Mencius said, "when he grieves at the sorrow of his people" and "they will also rejoice in his joy", these are exactly

the focus of a virtuous rule. If a government can think for the people and do the best it can to dispel the worries and solve the problems of the people, it will not place itself in opposition to the people and it will work out some solutions together with the people to ease their hardship. The people will be in one mind with that government and together they will overcome the difficulties. And there will be no conflicts between them.

When policies are to be formulated, they should be formulated in such a way that the policies would be useful to the people and from a practical, people-oriented angle. An example is the Old Age Allowance which many Honourable colleagues have talked about. Originally, the Old Age Allowance is a good thing for it enables those advanced in years to get a certain amount of allowance. But now the Government has imposed certain restrictions requiring those who receive it cannot be absent from Hong Kong for more than 240 days in a year and they must reside in Hong Kong for no less than 90 days in the same year. The result of this requirement is that if the elderly people want to return to settle in their hometown, they will lose their eligibility for the Old Age Allowance. In this way, the Old Age Allowance has become some sort of fetters for them.

I would think that when the Government is to consider these policies, it must take into account the practical needs of the people. The Old Age Allowance is a good policy, but there are some unnecessary requirements attached to it. These can actually be lifted.

President, Confucius also advocated to rule with virtue and he attached great importance to moral education. Now as society becomes more and more liberal and open, has the Government done anything to advance the cause of morality in the footsteps of the great sages and has it done anything to enable our young people to receive an education with correct values? So I think while it is right for present-day society characterized by freedom and openness to pursue a course to develop individuality, there is a lack of moral education in the young people. This is very important. As the saying goes, knowledge is power and values are the direction of life, if the young people do not have a sound sense of moral values, even as they may be overflowing with knowledge, it would do no good to their life.

Thank you, President.

MR WONG YUNG-KAN (in Cantonese): President, the motion topic proposed by Mr TAM Yiu-chung today reminds me of one thing and that is: To show care and concern, what the Government should do besides giving out money and serving the people is to deal with the mentality of the recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), including the problem about social workers which I talked about yesterday.

Let me cite one case. More than one month ago, a person with disabilities came to my office and he made a complaint. He was very angry and he said that he did not have any money to see a doctor. He did not have anything. I sought help from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) at once. That person had spent all his CSSA payment and he had to go to three hospitals everyday to dress his wounds. He was furious as he stepped in, saying, "None of you Members and government departments helps me and nobody cares for me." When I saw that, the first thing I did was to notify the SWD. At about some time past 6 pm, colleagues from the SWD came despite the late hours and tried to see what could be done to help this man. This is a real-life experience I have.

This case also involves the Housing Department and the Water Supplies Department because these two departments overcharged two months' fees from that man. He lives alone, and when the departments overcharged him some \$1,000 to \$2,000 a month, this renders him having no money even for his meals. Finally, I talked with the SWD and other departments and as a result, they have not charged him any fees ever since. This shows if the Government is willing to listen and understand the needs of the residents, I am sure this kind of conflict will change and things will get better.

Owing to longstanding conflicts with government departments and medical departments, this man has even tried to commit suicide. There was one time when he carried two LPG containers and threatened to blow up the floor of his building. But the problem was solved after mediation from the department concerned. Recently, the Housing Department renovated his flat. But he almost came to blows with the people from the department during the renovation works. This is because this man is hot-tempered. This may be due to his injuries. Then colleagues from my office and I myself talked to him and we listened very carefully to what he said. We handled his case carefully. And colleagues from the Housing Department were very co-operative and they did not require him to produce any proofs. All they knew was that he had some problems and his request was quickly acceded to after they had a meeting with

him. Now he has moved into a flat in Tai Wo estate. His flat is being decorated. The Water Supplies Department has sent people to fix the water pipes for him. If government departments can listen and care more, and if our social workers who are professionals can also do the same, I trust these things can be solved very quickly.

It remains of course, that for some other cases, things do not turn out as well as we would have wanted. There is one item in Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion about training scheme for fishermen. After two years' discussions with the Government, at last the Government agrees to provide some courses for people from this trade in 2010. Some people say that the fishing industry is on the decline, but I have never admitted that it is a sunset industry. Why? In the past, there were no such things as organically grown vegetables. But now 30 000 catties of this kind of vegetables are produced every day. This is a production process in development and many people are finding hopes in it now although they had never seen any ray of hope before. There are people in the trade saying that they cannot find any workers. So we discussed with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and in the end, we managed to find some workers. It remains another matter whether the number of these workers is enough. But at least the Government is willing to listen and it is willing to do something.

If all trades and industries in our society are willing to show mutual support and if the Government is willing to lend a listening ear, I am sure some problems can be solved. And as a result, our trade can develop instead of getting stuck and making no progress. Some people may say that I never stop talking about my own trade. But as a representative of a functional constituency, if I do not even talk about my own trade, how can I face up to the brothers in my trade? If this training scheme runs well, the situation could be like fishing activities which I have just proposed for debate earlier, in that it may help many people switch to another occupation. If more can be done and people can be more open-minded, I would think that this is good for society. I know at least that for myself, if I am upset, I would take up the fishing rod. Angling makes me more cultivated and it improves my patience. This is because when one is angling, one must wait before a fish gets caught.

When I had just come to this Chamber, I heard Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming talk about transport subsidy. There is no such subsidy for people living in Tai Po. Only those in the Northern District are eligible for that. Some people in Tai Po have asked if they are only eligible for this subsidy if they move to the

Northern District. In the District Council constituency to which I belong, many people hold very strong views. They think that some review should be conducted by the Government and improve this way of doing things. It should see if things can be changed, rather than sticking to the old rut. If a review is to be conducted, it should be conducted expeditiously on the question of whether this policy is an appropriate one. If not, can it be changed so that more people will benefit? Some people from Tai Po who work as security guards have to travel to Kowloon to work. They work eight hours a day and they are only making some \$6,000 and some even some \$5,000. How do we expect them to lead a decent life after taking away the transport costs? So they hope that the Government can review afresh this policy and be more sympathetic to the people. It should change some of its practices and must not be resistant to change.

President, I so submit to support the motion.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr TAM Yiu-chung, you may now speak on the amendments. You may speak for up to five minutes.

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I wish to thank the six Members who have proposed amendments or further amendments to the motion "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern" which I have proposed. The suggestions made in these amendments have served to supplement and enrich the contents of the motion. As Ms LI Fung-ying has said, the motion has been made to look grander. In terms of contents, the DAB agrees to most of these suggestions. The measures proposed in the amendments concentrate mainly on housing and employment such as increasing the production of public rental housing units, relaunching the Home Starter Loan Scheme and increasing the amount of deduction of the home loan interest, strengthening support for social enterprises, employing more permanent staff and so on. The DAB is supportive of these suggestions.

We can see from these amendments that apart from the suggestions made in the original motion, Members agree that improving the housing and employment situation is what the Government should exert more efforts to achieve. Social conflicts in Hong Kong cannot hope to be eased solely by "giving out candies" in the budget once a year or so. Of greater importance is that the Government should have some comprehensive measures. An example is that with respect to housing policy, after the suspension of the sale of Home Ownership Scheme flats, there is a sudden loss of continuity in housing policy. The result is that the well-off tenants of public rental housing (PRH) flats cannot move out of their PRH flats while people whose income exceeds the ceiling for PRH applicants are turned into a sandwich class because they are unable to buy a home in the private sector. After the regular land sales are cancelled, the stagnation in land supplies have fuelled this rapid rise in property prices, hence aggravating the disparity between the rich and the poor and intensifying grievances in the public. All the abovementioned problems are inter-related and so the financial measures of the Government must take into consideration this kind of social impact.

Mr Paul CHAN suggests allowing owner-occupiers to claim full deduction of the home loan interest paid for their properties. This suggestion is well-intentioned, but what is undesirable is that it does not propose separate treatment for luxury residential properties. So this may actually spur the turnover of luxury residential properties, hence producing a chain effect leading to the rise in the prices of ordinary residential properties. So it may on the contrary increase the difficulties faced by the ordinary people when they want to buy a flat. Moreover, this is not a proposal for a fair allocation of social resources and it will not help alleviate the disparity between the rich and the poor. Therefore, the DAB will only support the further amendment from Ms Miriam LAU to Mr Paul CHAN's amendment.

Mr WONG Sing-chi proposes that a universal retirement protection scheme should be implemented expeditiously and he said in his speech that the DAB had shown its support for the idea during the election. Actually, when elections are held, some groups would ask the DAB to sign some undertakings. We would study the contents very carefully and we do have our own views. We think that there are some inadequacies in the existing retirement protection system. It is because it only depends on the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme and the shortcoming is that there is no protection for homemakers and the elderly. Both

the DAB and the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions have been advocating a double-tier social security plan. This universal retirement protection system is to exist apart from the MPF system and a social security insurance system is to be set up with tripartite contributions from the employees, the employers and the Government. The aim is to provide for the basic living of the elderly. We hope that the Government will examine this proposal carefully and put it into practice at an appropriate time. Also, at a time of increasing financial volatility across the world, the Government must ensure that the MPF system is sound and the regulation should be made stricter so as to enhance safety of the assets entrusted to MPF schemes by the public.

As for work in poverty alleviation, the DAB thinks that the Government must put into practice the recommendations made by the Commission on Poverty and increase the co-ordination of government policies. When devising public policies, the Government should introduce a set of indicators for the purpose of assessing the wealth gap, so as to reduce the possibility of widening the wealth gap by any new policy. Also, the formulation of corresponding relief measures should be made compulsory.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I wish to thank Mr TAM Yiu-chung once again for proposing this motion and the 20 Members who have put forward many pieces of valuable advice and suggestions. I would now like to highlight on certain points expressed by Members in their speeches and make a response to them.

First of all, I wish to talk about how the issue of poverty is to be understood. There are various ways to interpret the term poverty. Poverty can be divided into absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the use of a barest minimum standard of living as defined by some objective means and those who do not reach such a standard are considered poor. Relative poverty refers to, relatively speaking, people who do not own as much as other people in society.

The former Commission on Poverty is of the view that basically, Hong Kong is an affluent society and if the problem of poverty is to be examined in a

holistic and objective manner, we cannot just use concepts like absolute poverty or the ability to maintain a basic living; likewise, we cannot just look at household income. Instead, we must consider the practical situation and the needs of the poor and their families, such as whether they are able to get the services essential to their living and whether they have a chance to get them. These services include housing, health care, education and employment. We agree with such a view and so the Government has all along adopted a set of 24 multi-dimensional indicators as recommended by the former Commission on Poverty to examine the problem of poverty in Hong Kong, understand the needs of various groups of people in society, including children and adolescents, people at work, the elderly as well as people in various districts, in order to formulate policies to help those in need and assess the effectiveness of such policies.

Just now, many Members expressed concern about the problem of the disparity between the rich and the poor. With the continuous shift of our society to a knowledge-based economy and the ever-increasing demand for professional and managerial people with high academic qualifications and skills, many positions offering a higher salary have been created, thus further widening the gap with the income of workers in various stratum. This is commonly seen in many major economies as they go in the direction of a high value-added and knowledge-based economy. With our ageing population and the growing tendency of households becoming smaller in size, the number of low-income households has continued to rise.

With changes in the social and economic structures, it is inevitable that there is an income gap in Hong Kong. It is reported that the Gini Coefficient for Hong Kong in 2006 before adjustment was 0.533. But if factors like taxation, including government rates and government rents and various kinds of social assistance like housing, health care, education and so on are taken into account, and the effect of the drop in the number of households is discounted, the post-tax post-social transfer Gini Coefficient calculated on the basis of the population was actually 0.427 in 2006. This was similar to the adjusted figure for 1996 and represented only a slight increase of 0.006 as compared to 2001. This shows that there was little change in income disparity during that period.

Although the fact does not approve of effecting a redistribution of wealth by resorting to high tax revenue or welfare in a bid to close the wealth gap, it has been striving to promote social transfer in order to reduce income disparity

through its taxation policy and such measures as social assistance. We will continue to adopt an omni-directional and multi-pronged approach to address the poverty issue in a pragmatic manner.

Many Members are concerned about the issue of inter-generational poverty. As children and young people are the pillars of our society, we have always devoted a large amount of resources to education with the pre-school education voucher scheme implemented since the school year of 2007-2008 and 12-year compulsory education implemented since the school year of 2008-2009.

We are also concerned about the chances of needy school children taking part in extra-curricular activities. Each year the Education Bureau sets aside \$75 million to implement after-school learning and support programmes to raise the learning effectiveness of needy school children, broaden their learning experience outside the classroom and enhance their knowledge of society and sense of belonging to society. Besides, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) offers a great variety of activities for children and adolescents through the 136 integrated youth service centres in the territory and will consider reducing or waiving charges according to the family circumstances of students.

As the young people are living in a digital age, it has become increasingly common for them to use the Internet and other electronic devices in their learning. The Chief Executive announced in the policy address of 2009-2010 that the Financial Secretary will be tasked with co-ordinating the relevant bureaux and study how more convenient and suitable learning opportunities can be provided to students in need through co-operation of civilian groups, the business sector and the Government. The task group formed by the relevant bureaux and government departments is presently studying various feasible options.

With respect to post-secondary education, the Government has all along been offering substantial assistance to provide loans and subsidies directly to students in need. This is to ensure that students who are capable of continuing their studies can continue to receive tertiary education. Eligible post-secondary students with financial difficulties may apply to the Student Financial Assistance Agency for grants that do not require repayments to meet their tuition fees and learning expenses, as well as low-interest loans to meet their living expenses. While the annual interest rate for income-tested and asset-tested loans stands at only 2.5%, interest is not charged during the study period. We consider the

relevant arrangement reasonable and we do not have any plan for the time being to turn the non-income-tested and non-asset-tested loans to interest-free loans.

As for non-income-tested student loans, the Government will adjust the interest rate from time to time according to the established mechanism. Now the interest rate is about 3.6% and it is far lower than that for unsecured loans in the market. The Government is about to conduct a review of the operation of various non-income-tested loan schemes and examine how interest rates can be suitably determined. We will gauge public views when the review is conducted.

I would also like to respond to the concern expressed by Members on youth drug addiction. In December 2009 the Government launched a pilot scheme for drug testing on the campus in Tai Po schools and, through providing resources by the Beat Drugs Fund, provide support for schools, increase the number of school social workers and outreach social workers, as well as enhancing beat drugs activities and case management work. The Government has commissioned a research institute to fully assess the design of the scheme, the implementation process and results, as well as to make recommendations on improving the scheme. After considering the report of the study, we will decide whether or not to expand the scope of the scheme to other schools and districts.

Mr IP Wai-ming is especially concerned about youth employment. I would like to point out that apart from taking care of young people in schools, the Government also provides training and retraining opportunities for the young people and various schemes to promote youth employment are launched.

Members should know that regarding the requirements to enrol in courses under the Manpower Development Scheme run by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) have been relaxed to cover persons who are 15 or above and with an educational attainment of associate degree or below. The ERB also collaborates with the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and other training bodies to launch the Youth Training Programme which aims at addressing the special needs of non-engaged youth and trainees are offered placements in work or further studies. A follow-up service lasting for six to nine months is also offered concurrently.

In addition, the Labour Department has set up two Youth Employment Resource Centres which provide one-stop employment and self-employment counselling and support services. In 2009, these Centres served more than

70 000 young persons. The enhanced Youth Pre-Employment Training Programme and Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme have also been changed to accept applications for enrolment all the year round and provide one-stop pre-employment and in-service training. Up to now more than 10 000 young persons have enrolled.

At the same time, the Construction Industry Council Training Academy launched in September 2009 a construction industry youth employment scheme to offer professional skills training to young persons and people who are interested in joining the construction industry to help them obtain the relevant recognized qualifications. During the training period, they can receive wages and their income will gradually increase as their qualifications are upgraded. Each year, the Development Bureau offers, through the graduate professional training schemes, in-service training to graduates of the five professions, namely architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, surveying and urban planning, to prepare them for the relevant professional examinations as well as nurturing them to pursue long-term development in their own professional fields. The training scheme attracted 140 graduates during the year 2009-2010.

The latest employment figures show that the unemployment rate for young people aged from 15 to 24 is 11.9% and this represents a drop of 1.1% compared to last month's figure of 13.0%. The unemployment rate for young people aged between 15 and 19 has recorded an aggregate drop of 8.6% from the quarter of May to July this year to the present. This shows that a certain result has been achieved with respect to our efforts in assisting the young people in their employment.

Now I wish to talk about priority industries. The Government is keen on promoting the development of the six industries in order to steer Hong Kong towards a knowledge-based economy. In order to prepare the young people to join the six industries, both the Youth Pre-Employment Training Programme and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme have rolled out a number of training courses. On the other hand, the Create Hong Kong Office has collaborated with various creative industries to launch projects which can help train up creative talents. The Government also supports the advertising and design sectors to launch student internship schemes and graduate internship schemes to enable postsecondary students and fresh graduates to gain relevant working experience.

In order to tie in with the development of a green economy, the Government will continue to study and work with professional and training bodies, enhance the relevant professional or skills training, and satisfy the demand for talents in the market in respect of energy audit, carbon dioxide emission audit, energy efficiency engineering, and so on. The VTC has also operated two courses in energy and carbon audits. With respect to recovery and recycling trades, two non-profit-making organizations will run two recycling centres in the Eco-Park in Tuen Mun this year, creating some 100 jobs with on-the-job training.

Mr Frederick FUNG has just left this Chamber. He has suggested that the support for social enterprises should be strengthened to create more job opportunities. I agree with his point. The Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme, which is operated under the Home Affairs Department (HAD), has given approval to a total sum of about \$94 million to provide seed funds to about 90 social enterprise projects to finance their start-up operation. A total of 1 500 jobs have been created as a result. The HAD is now processing the applications for the first phase of the Partnership Programme. Early this year, the formed a Social Enterprise Advisory Committee to further pool the strength of the Government and civilian groups to jointly study more effective policies and measures to support social enterprises and promote their development.

Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr WONG Yung-kan are particularly concerned about the impact of the fish moratorium on fishermen. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will launch four training programmes related to the fisheries industry during the period of the South China Sea fish moratorium. These programmes are free of charge and targeted at fishermen, mariculturalists, and the family members and employees we mentioned earlier. Eligible trainees will be granted a training allowance. At the same time, the ERB is exploring with the AFCD the operation of four free courses on a trial basis to help those fishermen wishing to switch to other trades and industries to acquire the required skills and obtain recognized qualifications. The trainees can similarly be granted training allowance.

In respect of transport subsidy, we are now conducting a full review of the transport subsidy scheme to decide on the way forward. We will consider carefully the views expressed by civilian groups, especially the views expressed

in the special meeting of the Manpower Panel on 14 January. We will give the Panel an account of the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

Mr WONG Kwok-hing suggests that the Government should put in more efforts to employ more permanent staff. Over the past year, various policy bureaux and departments speeded up the recruitment of civil servants and a total of 7 700 letters of appointment were issued. But under the principle of prudent management of public resources, the Government will only create new civil service posts unless there are sufficient operational needs, existing staff cannot be deployed to carry out the work concerned or other forms of service provision are infeasible.

Mr WONG is also concerned about the terms and conditions of employment for staff employed by employment agencies acting as intermediaries for government departments. The Civil Service Bureau has reported on the use of the service of employment agencies for government departments in the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Public Service in January this year and a package of improvement measures have been proposed. The Bureau will issue related guidelines to various policy bureaux and departments in the near future.

Many Members are concerned about the welfare of the elderly. The Government is very much concerned about that issue as well. This applies especially to my portfolio. In fact, the Government has been putting in resources to increase the supply of residential places through various ways. At present, we provide about 26 000 subsidized places in various residential care homes for the elderly (RCHE), representing about 44% of elderly residents in RCHEs in Hong Kong. In the next three years, five new contract RCHEs will be commissioned and the SWD has set aside 12 sites for RCHEs. I stress again, 12 sites for RCHEs have been set aside for the building of contract RCHEs for the provision of more residential places.

As a matter of fact, "ageing in the community" is the wish of most elderly persons. This is also the basic principle of our elderly policy and a global trend. In order to help elderly persons in need of long-term care to age in the community, the Government has provided a series of subsidized community care services, including centre-based daytime care service for the elderly and home-based home care service. In the long run, the Elderly Commission will study how community care services for the elderly that better suit the needs of the

elderly can be provided in a more flexible and diversified manner, thereby encouraging social enterprises as well as the private sector to develop home care services and offer more options.

Mr WONG Sing-chi suggests extending the service hours of day care centres for the elderly. I wish to say that the present service hours of these centres are from 8 am to 6 pm from Monday to Saturday and some of these centres have already extended their service hours flexibly to meet the needs of individual elderly persons.

As for the manpower ratio in RCHEs, which is a cause of Members' concern, the Schedule to the existing Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Regulation has specified the minimum manpower requirements for various kinds of RCHEs, and all kinds of subvented RCHEs must comply with the manpower requirements besides those specified in the law. The information provided by the SWD shows that the manpower ratio of many RCHEs is higher than that required by the law. Also, the SWD has all along been offering regular training and organizing topical talks to the staff of RCHEs in order to enhance their abilities in caring for the elderly as well as the quality of the RCHEs while issuing guidelines on major areas of care and attention in these residential institutions.

As Members are well aware, the Government introduced the elderly health care vouchers trial scheme in January 2009 on concern about the health care needs of the elderly. Under the scheme, elderly persons aged 70 or above may receive partial subsidies to meet expenses for primary health care service in the private sector. The Food and Health Bureau will conduct an interim review of the scheme in the middle of this year and will conduct a full review of the effectiveness of the scheme, the scope of application of the vouchers, the number and face value of the vouchers, and so on, upon the completion of the three-year scheme.

Recreation and sports are important to the mental and physical health of the elderly. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) offers all sorts of concessions to encourage elderly persons to take part in recreation and sports activities, including organizing all sorts of free recreation and sports activities for the elderly offering half-price concessions for the elderly to rent the various recreation and sports facilities under the management of the LCSD. In addition,

the seven museums, the film archive and two heritage centres run by the LCSD have offered free admission to the public. As for the remaining seven museums, admission fees are waived every Wednesday, and elderly persons can enjoy half-price concessions on other days of the week.

Some Members request that the elderly be allowed to receive the Old Age Allowance and the Disability Allowance concurrently under the Social Security Allowance Scheme. I hope Members will understand that the objective of these two allowances are to help the elderly and people with serious disabilities to cope with the special needs arising from old age or serious disabilities. The Social Security Allowance Scheme is a non-contributory scheme and beneficiaries are generally not required to pass any means test or asset test. In order to avoid receiving double benefits and to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, an applicant may only choose one of the allowances. As for the permissible limit of absence from the territory for those on the Old Age Allowance, we are studying in an in-depth manner whether the limit should be further relaxed.

As for caring for persons with disabilities, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) scheme is currently offering higher standard rates of assistance, various kinds of supplements and special grants to people with disabilities, including Grant to cover fees for Home Help Service/Integrated Home Care Service; Grant to cover Enhanced Home and Community Care Services; and Grant to cover costs of Community Support Projects for People with Disabilities and their Families. As we know, many grants are being offered. If a recipient is certified by a medical practitioner to have a need for frequent care and recommended by a social worker, he or she can even apply for Care and Attention Allowance to pay for the use of special care and attention service at home, including actual expenses for hiring carers.

Mr WONG Sing-chi suggests that a universal retirement protection scheme be set up by the Government. The Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme Ordinance, which came into effect in end 2000, the non-contributory social security system, and individual voluntary savings underpin a three-pillar retirement protection system in Hong Kong. A study on its sustainability is now underway. We must be careful in considering the impact of the related system on preserving traditional family values, maintaining our overall economical competitive edge and a simple tax regime, as well as ensuring the sustainable development of the current social security system.

Many Members are concerned about the property prices and housing supply. In the policy address for 2009-2010, the Chief Executive says that he will keep a close watch on the development of the property market and the land supply arrangement will be improved as when necessary and that land ready for residential development will be put up in the market expeditiously. Some Members suggest resuming the production of Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats and helping the people to buy their homes. According to the Government's existing policy, the first and foremost task is to provide public rental housing (PRH) to low-income families who cannot afford renting private flats. Resuming the production of HOS flats will reduce land available for building PRH flats and the number of PRH flats produced, hence greatly affecting the target of keeping the average waiting time at about three years.

We will continue to work with the philosophy of optimizing the use of land and the principle of achieving maximum effectiveness and sustainable development to build PRH flats in order to meet the needs of the public for public housing. According to the five-year public housing construction plan of the Housing Authority, in the five-year period from 2009-2010 onwards, it is estimated that the number of newly produced PRH flats will be 74 000. Coupled with the repossessed PRH flats each year, the Housing Authority reckons that this production amount should be able to keep the average waiting time at about three years. The Housing Authority will continue to monitor the situation of land supply for public housing, the construction progress and the supply of flats, and the plan will be adjusted and extended annually in accordance with the people's demand for public housing.

Some Members suggests that the Government should re-launch the Home Starter Loan Scheme. In our opinion, members of the public should decide whether or not to buy a home according to their personal preference and affordability. The Government should not play the role of a lending institution to affect the decision of the public.

Mr Frederick FUNG and a few Members are concerned about the effects of urban redevelopment on the established economy and the mode of social developments. The Urban Renewal Authority has in recent years taken various initiatives to ease the impact of redevelopment on tenants and small business operators and assist affected tenants with difficulties. Measures adopted include carrying out major redevelopment projects in phases to preserve the economic

vitality of the district concerned; making arrangements for shops to relocate back to their original district in order to preserve the special characteristics of the district; offering *ex gratia* allowance for business operation so that shops can receive a more generous amount of compensation to restart their business, as well as improving the removal grant, and so on.

Mr WONG Kwok-hing highlighted the need to maintain the operation of the small library in Yat Tung Estate in Tung Chung. I know from the LCSD that the main function of the small temporary library is to provide basic library service to local residents before the completion of the new district library in Tung Chung. It is estimated that the new library will come into full operation in the middle of this year to provide more comprehensive and diversified quality services to the residents of Tung Chung. The LCSD has planned to rearrange the mobile library service within the outlying islands and provide a new mobile library stop in Yat Tung Estate.

With respect to public utilities, for applications for fee increases by public utilities which have a direct impact on people's livelihood, we will certainly perform our gate-keeping role to the best of our abilities while taking care of the interests of the shareholders of these public utilities and the public at large.

In public transport, we have all along encouraged operators to strive to adjust their fares downwards and provide concessions to reduce the public's transport expenses in the light of their operational and financial situation, the social and economic environment and demands of the passengers. At present, all the major public transport providers have offered various kinds of fare concessions. With respect to bus service, a total of about 400 franchised bus routes, representing approximately 70% of all bus routes, have adopted sectional fares, benefiting as many as 680 000 passenger trips daily. Besides, about 400 bus routes provide about 230 interchange concessions, benefiting more than 120 000 passenger trips daily. The Transport Department and the bus companies will continue to discuss offering more interchange concessions on suitable routes.

Mr Paul CHAN is of the view that our population policy and the poverty problem are closely related. I wish to point out that the objective of the population policy in Hong Kong is to attract and groom talents, improve on the quality of our population to promote and support Hong Kong to become a

knowledge-based economy. Currently, we accord priority in dealing with specific policies and measures in the following five major areas: First, it is important that more training and retraining opportunities be provided to new arrivals with low educational attainment and skills in order to enhance their employability; second, enhance the quality of education by developing education in a holistic manner and promoting education reform; third, develop Hong Kong into a regional educational hub and attract more outstanding students to come here for education; fourth, attract talents to come here for employment and taking up residence in order to maintain our competitive edge; and lastly, implement health care reform measures and enhance health care effectiveness and improve the well-being of the public at large in a holistic manner.

Some Members have also raised many suggestions on increasing tax allowances and remissions and launching one-off measures such as waiving government rates, freezing government fees and charges and waiving rentals for PRH flats and so on. As we know, the Financial Secretary is now consulting the public on the 2010-2011 budget. He will, having regard to the latest economic situation and adhere to the three basic convictions of pragmatism, social commitment and sustainability, formulate a budget for the coming year in a most prudent manner achieve an appropriate balance in public expenditure, revenue and fiscal reserves.

President, rendering assistance to the poor and improving people's livelihood are our ongoing efforts. The Government feels duty-bound about this and we will try our best to deal with the poverty problem in a holistic and practical manner, in order to build a society of harmony, care and concern. The Task Force on Poverty, which is chaired by me, will make continuous efforts to co-ordinate poverty alleviation efforts among government departments and explore new plans and measures to assist the disadvantaged groups and people in need.

Before I end my speech, I wish to add a very important point. Although the Commission on Poverty has finished its work, most of its 53 recommendations have been implemented fully. This is my major task. I would like to cite a few examples which I think are well familiar to Members. They include: the Child Development Fund is operating in full swing; the Cross-District Transport Allowance has been in force for two years; we are planning to set up a one-stop employment and retraining centre which will open in Tin Shui Wai early next year, and a series of elderly services will be enhanced,

with most of them already implemented. So Members must not have the misconception that our poverty alleviation work has stopped. Such work has never stopped. Actually, we have been exerting more vigorous efforts in taking it forward.

President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG has informed me that as he cannot stay in the Chamber to move his amendment, he has withdrawn it. I now ask Mr WONG Kwok-hing to move his amendment.

MR WONG KWOK-HING (in Cantonese): President, in accordance with my revised amendment, I move to further

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Kwok-hing, you need not revise your amendment. Please refer to page 27 of the script. You only need to move your amendment.

MR WONG KWOK-HING (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion be amended.

Mr WONG Kwok-hing moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add 'given that' after 'That,'; to add ', such as setting a reasonable carer-to-resident manpower ratio for residential care homes' after 'care home support for them'; to delete 'and' after 'a year,'; and to add '; (r) to allocate a funding of \$3.3 million to maintain the operation of the small library in Yat Tung Estate, with a view to providing support for some 40 000 residents in this exceptionally remote and impoverished public housing estate, in particular support to children and young people in their learning and studies, so as to solve the problem of inter-generational poverty; (s) government departments to step up efforts to employ more permanent staff, make every effort to minimize the provision of manpower through employment agencies, and enhance the monitoring of employment terms and remuneration packages offered by the employment

agencies, so as to reduce in their best endeavours any exploitation by the intermediaries; and (t) to re-launch the Home Starter Loan Scheme and increase the amount for home loan interest deduction, so as to help sandwich class people who are 'snails without a shell' (in particular working young couples) to acquire their homes' immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Mr WONG Kwok-hing to Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion, be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Mr LEE Wing-tat to move his amendment to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment. Since Mr LEE Wing-tat is not in the Chamber, he cannot move his amendment.

(Mr LEE Wing-tat rushed into the Chamber)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LEE Wing-tat, please move your amendment to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment.

MR LEE WING-TAT (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment be amended.

Mr LEE Wing-tat moved the following amendment to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment: (Translation)

"To add "on condition that there is a sufficient supply of private residential housing," after "(t)"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Mr LEE Wing-tat to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment, be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment, as amended by Mr LEE Wing-tat, to Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): 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, who are present. I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Sing-chi, as the amendments by Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr LEE Wing-tat have been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment, as set out in the paper which has been circularized to Members. When you move your revised amendment, you may speak for up to three minutes to explain the revised terms in your amendment. You may now move your revised amendment.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion as amended by Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr LEE Wing-tat be further amended by my revised amendment. I have nothing special to add.

Mr WONG Sing-chi moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr LEE Wing-tat: (Translation)

"To add "; (u) to increase the number of subsidized places for the elderly and extend the opening hours of day care centres for the elderly; (v) in considering the provision of 'chronically ill dependant allowance' and 'allowance for private medical insurance contributions', the Government to concurrently study the impact of developing a private medical insurance system on the overall healthcare system, the regulation of private medical insurance systems in overseas countries, as well as the feasibility of implementing a central medical insurance system in Hong Kong in the long run; (w) to expeditiously implement a 'universal retirement protection scheme' whereby all citizens aged 60 or above are eligible for receiving an 'old age pension', so as to ensure that the elderly will be able to maintain a reasonable standard of living; and (x) targeting at the existing bus services, to implement sectional fares and interchange concessions" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr WONG Sing-chi's amendment to Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion as amended by Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr LEE Wing-tat, be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members have been informed that Mr Paul CHAN will withdraw his amendment if Mr WONG Sing-chi's amendment has been passed. As this is the case now, Mr Paul CHAN has therefore withdrawn his amendment. Ms Miriam LAU therefore may not move her amendment to Mr Paul CHAN's amendment.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr TAM Yiu-chung, you may now reply and you have four minutes 40 seconds.

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): The Secretary has explained the current services and policies of the Government in detail in his speech just now. We hope that the Government can do more, do better and explain more in future. The Financial Secretary will release the budget 21 days later, and we believe that it is now in the final stage of drafting. So, it is quite favourable for us to hold this debate today in terms of timing. I have raised 17 proposals, together with those put forth by six Members, there are some 20 proposals in total. However, the number is actually more than this because Members who have spoken have also made a lot of suggestions. I think all these suggestions and views are main points obtained from contacts with the public and the opinions collected from the

public. As such, I hope the Government can pay attention and attach importance to them.

Although Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said in his speech that we had performed "a show of bogus lobbying" and that we trumpeted our success in lobbying for something, it seemed that these two remarks were contradictory. I do not know what he is talking about. But simply put, his intention may be to object for the sake of objection. Ms Audrey EU said that this involved functional constituencies. Recently, no matter what she says, it is always related to functional constituencies, and she seems to be suggesting that grievances in society are caused by functional constituencies. However, from the results of various opinion polls, I think this does not appear to be the case. Today, Members returned by functional constituencies, on the contrary, have given their support to various opinions and suggestions. Functional constituencies have all along been a very stable force. Very often, I think the budget cannot be passed without their support. If that happens, there will be no appropriation of funding and I wonder what we can do then. By that time, perhaps all of us have to turn to LEE Cheuk-yan or Alan LEONG for a solution, as Alan LEONG said that he could solve the problem. However, I do not wish to start an argument today. I hope that we can have a more harmonious environment as no one has claimed any division just now.

Mrs Regina IP said that the Government should exercise prudent financial management. We subscribe to this point. I think this is also the wish of the public. However, apart from exercising financial prudence, there is a need to take some short-term measures of handing out money to let the public share the fruits of economic development. Moreover, without these measures, how can its services be improved? Some short-term measures of handing out money are quite successful. For example, double payments of the "fruit grant" and the CSSA have been distributed for several times. In fact, the elderly and the disadvantaged are very happy about this, as they think that they can also improve their living when the economy is picking up. I think these measures should be put in place. Certainly, I absolutely agree with Mrs Regina IP that there should be long-term measures. For this reason, the Chief Executive put forth a number of long-term measures in the last policy address. Inevitably, regarding some long-term measures, they may not be agreed to or considered adequate by everyone. However, the DAB considers that there should be such measures in place.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to those Members who have spoken today. No matter whether or not they intended to take advantage of this motion, I thank them for making their speeches. I hope the Government can attach importance to the opinions we have expressed today. Moreover, I hope that there will be good news on 24 February and in particular, some assistance can be provided for the disadvantaged. As such, this motion, which is entitled "Alleviating poverty and helping the disadvantaged with care and concern", signifies that we have to work collaboratively to enhance our care and concern especially for those households with difficulties, socially disadvantaged groups, low-income households, children and the elderly, hoping that their living can be improved.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr TAM Yiu-chung, as amended by Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr LEE Wing-tat and Mr WONG Sing-chi be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): 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, who are present. I declare the motion as amended passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third motion: Formulating a comprehensive youth policy.

Members who wish to speak in the debate on the motion will please press the "Request to speak" button.

I now call upon Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che to speak and move his motion.

FORMULATING A COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH POLICY

MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed. President, what problems are the youth facing? What do they need? Do our Government and officials have any idea? During the Question and Answer Session, the Chief Executive asserted and claimed that he would listen to the voices of young people. But will he really honour this public pledge? Even if he has heard their voices, will he genuinely conduct a self-reflection and review the flaws and deficiencies of the Government, just as has claimed?

Let me talk about the current social problems faced by the youth. There is a persistently high unemployment rate among the youth. The unemployment rate for the youth aged 15 to 19 stands at a high level of 20%, one which has remained at this level for 10 years. The unemployment rate for those aged 20 to 24 is over 10%. What efforts has the Government actually made to resolve the problem of high unemployment rate among the youth after the reunification?

There is another key issue, namely social mobility. With the popularization of education, social mobility should be higher than before. However, over the past decade, in the face of economic restructuring in Hong Kong, "graduation is tantamount to unemployment" has become the pet phrase in society. Even if those young university graduates managed to find a job, it is much more difficult for them to have promotion or a pay rise, or derive job satisfaction from their career than before. Furthermore, society is full of speculative opportunism to the extent that it seems speculation in properties and stocks has become the only key to success. Very often, youths aspiring to climb up the social ladder have to engage in "extraordinary businesses".

Despite the fact that Hong Kong is an international metropolis, the problem of disparity between the rich and the poor is becoming increasingly serious.

According to the analysis conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service last year, 1.23 million people in Hong Kong are living below the poverty line. Among the population living in poverty, the number of youth has increased by 22% within a period of 10 years, reaching the figure of 176 000. What is most worrying is that poverty is not just the problem of an individual, it will affect the next generation. The inability of a family to meet the costs of Internet access and extra-curricular activities of the children will stifle the room of development of the youth, which may result in the inter-generational poverty problem.

I believe all of us will understand that we cannot rely on the Government alone to resolve all the various problems. Such reliance is basically unrealistic. Nevertheless, the officials should ask themselves whether they have made every effort to address and ameliorate these problems, and whether they have listened to the voices of the young people and attempted to understand their wishes.

As a matter of fact, various sectors in the community had asked the Government to formulate a comprehensive youth policy before the reunification. However, this request is to no avail even after the reunification. At present, social policies related to the youth are under the purview of different departments. While the Education Bureau is in charge of education and continuing education, the Home Affairs Bureau is responsible for civic education and promoting development of the youth, and the Labour and Welfare Bureau is providing social welfare and employment services to the youth.

Unfortunately there is insufficient co-ordination among various departments. There is also an absence of interface among various policies. As the Government has failed to conduct a comprehensive consultation among different sectors of society, in particular, views from young people have not been solicited, biased policies have been formulated without considerations from a broader perspective, resulting in policies achieving half the result with twice the effort. Take the Associate Degree Programmes introduced years ago as an example. Since the Government had failed to formulate a complementary policy on employment, the recognition of the Programmes is much queried. Many employers do not recognize the relevant qualifications of the graduates. As a result, young graduates of the Programmes have wasted money as well as time. Moreover, when focused on resolving the youth unemployment problem, the

Government has overlooked the phenomena of underemployment and working poverty among the young people. This is the ill consequence of the segregation between the policies on employment and social welfare.

The existing Commission on Youth (COY) is an advisory body only. With neither authorities nor responsibilities, the COY is far from effective in consolidating youth policies. Moreover, as an advisory body, there are only three "post-80s" youngsters among its 28 members, undermining the say of the youth and reducing their opportunities of participating in public affairs. If the Government refuses to abandon the patriarchal philosophy of governance in handling youth affairs, how can it succeed in soliciting views closer to public sentiments?

Since the youth are the pillar of society in the future, governments all over the world attach great importance to youth policies. For instance, a national youth association tasked with the responsibilities of enforcing and co-ordinating youth affairs has been set up by the Government of Singapore. Members of the association comprise of representatives from government departments, youth organizations, educational institutions, and charities organizations. Youth development strategies have also been formulated in Australia to serve as guidelines on devising youth policies for various state governments.

Thus, I believe that it is necessary for the Government to reform the modes of operation adopted by various departments which are characterized by working behind closed doors. First of all, the status of the COY should be raised and led by the Chief Executive or a Secretary of Department, so that its status is higher than that of an ordinary bureau. The major direction of youth policy should be formulated by the COY, based on which government departments can devise details of their policies. Measures related to the youth should be submitted to the COY for discussion before they are introduced by the Policy Bureaux.

Regarding the composition of the COY, at least half of its members should be representatives of the youth, so that the latter's views will be accepted on a wide basis, while they are given opportunities of participation in social development. The COY has ceased to organize the annual Youth Summit over the past five years, leaving the youth forum organizing committees of various districts exist in name only. This has reduced the opportunities for the youth to express their views. Nevertheless, I still wish to ask the Government how many

young people have taken part in the youth forum organizing committees in various districts, and how their views have been handled by the Policy Bureaux.

We might as well draw reference from the formulation process of the White Paper on Youth promulgated by the European Union (EU) in 2001. Before the White Paper was introduced, various governments of the EU had collected over 440 recommendations submitted by thousands of young people. In the subsequent conference held in Paris, 31 countries and over 400 youth representatives reached a consensus on 80 of the recommendations. The way in which the White Paper had been formulated manifested one of the major points of the White Paper itself, and that was, to strengthen the understanding and apprehension of young people, which are most lacking in our Government.

I wish to emphasize that in introducing the views of young people, we should not only show respect for them, but should also listen and take on board their views in a serious manner. Since we have entered the era of information explosion, the youth of our society have come into contact with more social values and cultures of various kinds. In addition, an increasingly enhanced level of education has strengthened the independent thinking of the youth. Very often, the views put forward by them display a deeper concern for the people, and a stronger persistence for democracy and justice. Their views on social development are not slant to economy only, which complement those of the adults that tend to compromise with the reality.

Thus, apart from the COY, at least one seat should be allocated to the youth in other advisory bodies. This will enable the youth to understand the operations of the Government and society. Meanwhile, the youth representatives will be able to bring the views back to their own communities, which is conducive to broadening the room of discussion among young people.

At the district level, it is necessary for the Government to strengthen the existing youth forums held in the 18 districts. Officials should be present at the forums, so as to listen carefully to what the youth have got in mind. With respect to subjects related to the youth, consultation should be conducted among young people. It is also advisable to pay attention to views expressed by the youth in blogs and discussion forums, thereby gauging a wide range of community views.

Many people criticize that the quality of young people is getting worse and worse. But have we asked ourselves who built the society in which the young people are living, and who have instilled social values into them since childhood? All these were the adults' own making. What is most ridiculous is when a group of youth refusing to drift with the tide put up resistance to follow the values instilled by adults, the Government and those with vested interests responded promptly with counter-attacks, and even resorted to means of white terror in order to make these young people shut up. In doing so, the Government has made a grave mistake because it will only lead to greater and stronger resistance.

Secretary, you were young once. Have you forgotten the passion you had when you were young? Do you believe that you were wrong in taking part in the riots against the British colonial oppression all those years ago? Have you knocked down your goodself of yesterday once you have become a government official? I hope you will listen to the views expressed by colleagues in the following debate and consider seriously how a comprehensive youth policy can be formulated, thereby allowing our next generation to take up the baton, and providing Hong Kong with better and freer room for young people to bring their potentials and talents into play.

President, I so submit.

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, in the face of persistently high unemployment rate among the youth, shrinking opportunities for social mobility and the increasingly serious inter-generational poverty problem, coupled with the unclear objectives of the youth services provided by various government bureaux, in particular the lack of opportunity for the youth to participate in social development, this Council urges the Government to immediately consult the youth through various channels to formulate a comprehensive and forward-looking youth policy, and coordinate the work of the relevant bureaux and executive departments, so as to consolidate the existing youth services to meet their needs; in addition, the Government should provide a platform for the youth to participate in social affairs, respect and listen to the views and needs of the youth, so as to enable them to actively participate in social development and establish their goals in life."

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Six Members intend to move amendments to this motion. This Council will now proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the six amendments.

I will call upon Dr Joseph LEE to speak first, to be followed by Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai, Mr Ronny TONG, Mr CHAN Hak-kan and Mr Paul TSE; but no amendments are to be moved at this stage.

DR JOSEPH LEE (in Cantonese): President, the title of today's motion is about a youth policy. I remember that when drafting my amendment, I discussed with the staff of the Secretariat about adding the term "post-eighties". However, the Secretariat said that "post-eighties" seemed to be incorrect because they should be young people in their twenties, while the term "youth" generally referred to those aged 15 to 24. Subsequently I asked some academics, who told me in an authoritative manner that we should not only say "post-eighties", unless we were referring to this age group in particular. Otherwise, we should use the term "post-80s" (read as "post eight zero" in Cantonese). Thus, I have attempted to put forward the term "post-80s", not "post-eighties", in this amendment. The term "post-80s" generally refers to those who were born after the year 1980, including the young people. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said just now that they have many different views, and possibly many different opinions.

Now, what I have seen is that we are attempting to adopt the thinking of the "pre-80s" to look at our friends of the "post-80s". The "pre-80s" are saying that the "post-80s" do not see good prospects at all, and subsequently see their chances of upward mobility undermined. Equipped with high qualifications but rewarded with low salaries, they are facing a situation worse than the one faced by us back then. Some of them may be raised in single-parent families, leaving them deficient in love and care. As those from well-to-do or well-off background are free from any family burden or the duty to feed their families, they are constantly "causing troubles", using all sorts of radical methods and even unconventional means to express their views. This is how we, from the "pre-80s", look at the "post-80s".

However, it seems that we have forgotten one thing, and that is, this group of "post-80s" has actually been taught by us. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che made the point just now that some of their values and ways of doing things are instilled by us. The current trend is that, this group of us, the "pre-80s", has taught the "post-80s" to be good at expressing themselves and fully expressing their personal views. We have taught them to be critical in thinking, to get to the bottom of every issue, to trace a problem to its source, to adopt zero tolerance towards unfairness and injustice in society, and to ask for transparency in the Government and other organizations. However, we have made arrangements for them in every aspect of their lives. President, Secretary, and colleagues of this Council, I believe if there are members of your family who belong to the group of "post-80s", very often you will satisfy their demands by all means, including providing them with good computers, nice clothes, proper education; in fact, offering them the best of everything.

When we have forgotten the instructions we have given them, all of a sudden, this group of "post-80s" youth adopts these means to express themselves. Then we consider something is wrong with these means, something is wrong with the youth. We query why they have not followed our conventional practice. We believe they should not have done that, and they are wrong in doing so, because this is a sign of social resistance, a display of view different from that of society, and a challenge to the Government. This is flirtation and provocation, in short, incorrect and incompatible. As a matter of fact, we are really rather shameless. These "post-80s" youths are taught by us, now they have adopted the means taught by us to express themselves, and we accuse them of being wrong. Is there something wrong with us?

Regarding the policy or subject under discussion today, the point I wish most to bring out is whether, in devising the existing youth policy for the "post-80s", we have overlooked the method we used to teach them. When we formulated the policy, we had only relied on our own feelings, adopting the philosophy of the "pre-80s" and overlooking the elements we had taught the "post-80s" generation. This is exactly where the major problem lies. Subsequently some terms like "white terror", "suppression", and "neglect" emerge. In fact, this is not the problem of the "post-80s" youth. The existing youth policy is obviously I remember my father had talked to me about the generation gap. We have forgotten about the generation gap. While we adopted this method in teaching our next generation, we had forgotten everything about the generation gap and employed our conventional methods in policy

formulation; resulting in many unbalanced policies. Therefore, I agree with the title of the motion proposed by Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che today. The need of "formulating a comprehensive youth policy" is important to them.

When I was drafting the amendment, I asked a colleague who has just graduated from university to give me some ideas. As he belongs to the age group of 15 to 24 years, he is genuinely one of the "post-80s". I asked him if he were to participate in today's discussion on the motion, what views he would present regarding the existing youth policy formulated by the Government, including those on consultation and provision of platforms. The following is a passage written by him. I would like to read it out: "Based on its mentality of elitist rule, the existing Government is gripping all policies and governance in its own hands, refusing to release them to the public, particularly the youth. Policies are formulated before informing the youth. Take the school-based drug testing scheme as an example. Has it consulted us? It has not even mentioned it. But now the scheme is being implemented. In implementing the scheme, it has neither taken into account our feelings nor our way of doing things. As a result, the scheme is a complete mess. Moreover, many young people are interested in politics. But the Government has all along not opened up any channels for participation by the youth. As this is the case, the youth can only develop other channels to express their views. The incident of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link is a very good example. It has provided an opportunity for the youth to express their views to the Government. However, the Government considered our views incorrect and refused to accept them. If the Government continues to run its own show, and all consultation exercises come to an end rashly in the future, we will be increasingly forced to take to the streets."

Certainly, this is just the view of one member of the "post-80s" generation. Nevertheless, it has already reflected his values and ideologies which, as I said, were taught by us, the "pre-80s". But when we are on the receiving end of such treatment, we have forgotten what we have taught them, and consider that incorrect.

How can we improve on that? What I wish to highlight most in my amendment is the point that if we really try to formulate a more desirable and comprehensive youth policy in a serious manner, we should add the element of empowerment. To some people, the word "empowerment" seems to be rather

frightening. Won't it be very dangerous if they have power after such empowerment? In fact, this English word of "empowerment" is neutral. Basically it means a person can be upgraded in terms of participation, so that he can have the ability to exert control and influence over different aspects of his life. Empowerment requires equipping ourselves with abilities in terms of our skill, knowledge and authority, so that we will be able to care for the community and life. This is our relatively neutral view of the word "empowerment". It is hoped that the addition of this element of empowerment in the formulation of a comprehensive youth policy will help the youth to establish empowerment as a foundation, helping them to understand the value of their existence, and providing them with opportunities to participate in certain affairs of the community. This will enable them to develop a feeling of existence, identification, and an awareness of their own rights and obligations. They have not only rights, but also obligations, such as the responsibility of promoting a community of love and care. Meanwhile, empowerment will also allow the youth to become part of society, enabling them to understand that society is theirs. Society belongs not to the Government, nor is it a game of the adults. It is an important part.

Since the youth are taught by us, if we can make use of empowerment, we can also understand their ways of thinking with empathy. We should adopt a new philosophy, a new concept in doing so. We may not necessarily feel comfortable with their views, which may not be feasible and reasonable. But we can take their views as some sort of a basis for consideration; adopt an attitude of partnership in our formulation of youth policies which are closely related to the youth and offer relevant help to them. This is the kind of youth policy I wish to promote.

What kind of recommendations will achieve this effect? I heard this morning that the Director of Housing would use Facebook as a platform to communicate with friends of the "post-80s" generation. I believe colleagues have also learnt about this from newspapers. This marks a good beginning. The Government should not be complacent and conservative. I wonder if "Uncle Kai" of the Central Policy Unit will attempt to use Facebook or other social platforms to heed more widely the views of the youth through the Internet. Their views may be useful and helpful. As a matter of fact, this is rather interesting and paradoxical. On the one hand, we encourage the youth to be creative, but on the other, we use the conventional values to suppress and

evaluate them. We do not attach any importance to them, accusing them of being wrong. Caught in that plight, they are at a loss as to what to do. Apart from the Internet and Facebook, the school is also an important venue. The school is a vital base for social education. It will be a good phenomenon if the officials of our Government and others are willing to come to the school to engage in in-depth exchanges with the youth, and hold discussions with them in a sincere and open manner. Just as Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said, as members of the Commission on Youth (COY) come from the "pre-80s" generation, the characteristic of youth is absent in the existing COY. This should be changed. The introduction of more members of the "post-80s" generation will imbue the COY with more representativeness. We should also listen to more of the views of these members.

Meanwhile, we can engage in more dialogues with the youth at the district and other levels. More volunteers can be recruited by the Secretary, so that more opportunities of participation in social affairs will be provided to the youth, thereby enabling them to gain a better understanding of the operation of the Government and how society will be changed by their contribution of ideas. As the youth is the pillar of society, I hope we will be able to put them to good use.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): President, as the topic under discussion today may involve many aspects, I am surprised that only the Secretary for Home Affairs is present today for the discussion. Why have the Secretary for Education, and Secretary Matthew CHEUNG, who was present just now, left so promptly? Many of the topics colleagues and I will discuss later involve the youth policy, employment, and the participation of the youth in politics. That is why I feel surprised and a bit disappointed that the Government has only sent Secretary TSANG Tak-sing to attend this meeting.

As a Member from the labour sector, I will focus on discussing the youth employment problem. As for the problems in other aspects, I believe other colleagues will elaborate on them. The youth problem is very complicated, and in some measure, it is the microcosm or a reflection of some social policies in Hong Kong. How young people acquit themselves at work nowadays has often

been the topic of discussion over meals, or during conversations between friends, or in the complaints of some employers. They complain that the youth are deficient to work skill and dedication to their jobs. I have often carefully analysed and thought about these complaints. In fact, all of us were young once. I remember in the early 1980s, when I started to work after matriculation, I also heard similar complaints from the older generation about us, the young people of those days.

In fact, are young people really deficient in work skill and dedication to their jobs? What actually are the causes of this? In respect of dedication to jobs, I have always thought that this may be the result of adults not knowing how to guide them. During the course of growing up and their working life, it is very important for the youth to have an instructor or a mentor. Unfortunately, very often, they do not have the assistance of these people during their course of growth. With changes in our present living environment and subsequent changes in requirements at work, we may have different understandings of dedication to jobs. Some employers complain that with the six-day week implemented by the company, it is difficult to recruit staff. In fact, a migration to a new work pattern, such as five and a half days or alternative Saturday off, may attract more people to apply for jobs. I hope that we will no longer apply the work patterns or views of the old days to today's youth.

With the existing high unemployment rate among the youth, I have often pondered a question: What actually has gone wrong? This is particularly so after the implementation of the "3+3+4" academic structure. From both the objective and subjective perspectives, many young people believe that their whole life is determined by the result of one single examination. When they fail to be admitted to a university, what exit pathways are open to them? At present, it seems all members of the public, and even the Government, are hoping that cultural universities will provide the exit pathways. That is why we can see the Government promoting lifelong learning as a matter of policy all these years. It urges the youth to further their studies, starting from the Associate Degree Programme. It is hoped that the youth will engage themselves more in studying. However, have we ever thought about the fact that every individual has talents different from others? Under certain circumstances, we have to suit teaching to the ability of students. As we can see, many young people are still unable to secure employment after completing the Associate Degree Programme.

Secretary Matthew CHEUNG may say that we have the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme to provide training to graduates of the Associate Degree Programme. Nevertheless, what is the outcome of a series of training and further training? All we can see is the persistently high unemployment rate among the youth. The number of unemployed people aged 20 to 24 alone is over 40 000. Some young people are willing to risk being burdened with debts in order to complete the Associate Degree Programme. But eventually they are still unable to find jobs.

Recently, I have heard the story of a man in his thirties starting to work as an apprentice. On the other hand, employers are unable to find manpower to fill a number of positions, which are technical in nature, including positions in laboratories and work sites, and such trades as maintenance of air-conditioners and electrical appliances. There is a shortage of mid-level technical personnel. If young people are willing to learn a skill, they may find that it actually can bring them a steady income. But now, it seems that the Government has forgotten about this. In failing to keep pace with the changing circumstances and to update the so-called policy on apprenticeship so as to respond to the needs of the times, the Government has only attempted to provide another avenue for our youth. If we continue with this, that is, telling them to study in universities only and providing them with only one single avenue, instead of guiding the youth or parents to consider alternative avenues and providing an alternative ladder for them, thereby enabling them to embark on a path towards success, they will only be driven into a dead end.

Members may ask whether re-launching the apprenticeship system is an effort of restoring ancient ways. I believe it is not. I have drawn reference from the experiences of the United Kingdom and Germany. They are still promoting initiatives in this aspect and have achieved success. It is hoped that through the apprenticeship system, the youth will learn while he works. In this way, the youth will learn from work and, in the learning process, identify clearly the values expected of them in the future career.

Therefore, I hope the Government will take this into detailed and careful consideration. Although Secretary Matthew CHEUNG informed us in the debate that the Administration had introduced many training programmes, we

found that they are only short-term programmes. For instance, a youth can look for a job after taking a beauty care course for three months only. These young people are eligible for a nine-month subsidy. But during the nine-month period, how many people will follow up their cases? How many people will follow up their work situation to see whether they have put into practice what they have learned? In fact, nobody is responsible for that. As this is the case, we have to re-launch the apprenticeship system, or update the existing apprenticeship system, in order to meet the needs of the current economic situation, assess how the employability of the youth can be enhanced, and how their employment opportunities can be increased.

We hope that the duration of these training programmes can be extended, and the qualifications of the programmes given recognition, thereby providing an alternative ladder. Actually, there is a desirable platform on which we can launch this apprenticeship system, namely the Qualifications Framework implemented by the Education Bureau. Unfortunately, under this Qualifications Framework, the Education Bureau is still placing too much emphasis on academic qualifications, to the neglect of skills. I hope the Government will review this, so that the existing apprenticeship system can tie in with the Qualifications Framework, with a view to providing an alternative ladder to the youth.

I hope the Government will conduct a review of the existing policy on vocational training. The last thing I would wish to see is young people undergoing training and further training continuously, and yet finding themselves getting nowhere. Do they really stand no chances of making any choices at all? It is not our wish that they will keep on wasting their time. It is not our wish to hear that in several years' time, some young people in their late twenties have to become apprentices after undergoing training and further training. This is a waste of social resources and the time of many people. I demand the Government to conduct a review of the existing Apprenticeship Ordinance and update the system in the light of the needs of the times, bringing the Ordinance closer to the needs of our times, which will be conducive to enhancing the employability and employment opportunities of the youth.

Thank you, President.

MR KAM NAI-WAI (in Cantonese): President, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che has proposed today a timely motion on "Formulating a comprehensive youth policy" in good time. During the recent discussion on the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, many young people came to the Legislative Council. Today, some young friends have also come here to observe the meeting on the public gallery.

When we discuss a youth policy, it is inevitable that motion be made of the education policy implemented by the Government. At present, the Government provides 14 500 first-year-first-degree places per annum only. According to information, this figure has seen no growth for 20 years. I believe Members all know that among the 30 000-odd senior secondary students every year, five to six thousands of them will attain results that make them qualified for admission to universities, but they are not admitted by universities. In recent years, the Government has increased a large number of associate degree places. Nevertheless, over the past several years, there has still been a shortage of second-year articulation places in undergraduate programmes. As a result, over 1 000 associate degree students are unable to study in the second-year course. We can see that there are certain aspects in the education policy which fail to dovetail with each other. Meantime, the fresh switch of the education system to the "3+3+4" academic structure has given rise to many criticisms against the existing education system from students and their parents.

Members may recall, in the middle of last year, an unemployed young man in his twenties committed suicide due to financial difficulties and the arrears of over \$100,000 student loans. This incident is still vivid in our minds. Those young people may have borrowed loans when they were students. But the repayment of loans when they start to work exerts much pressure on them. In view of this, the Democratic Party has repeatedly put forward a number of proposals. First of all, the Government should increase places of undergraduate programmes. Secondly, the Government should review the grant and loan schemes for tertiary students. As only the Secretary for Home Affairs is present today, I hope the Secretary will convey this message to the Financial Secretary. The requests put forward by the Democratic Party are as follows. Firstly, the existing risk rate of the non-means-tested loan scheme should be removed. Secondly, the practice of calculating interests when the student is still pursuing studies should be abolished. Thirdly, the threshold for loan approval should be lowered, while the amounts of grants and loans should be increased. Fourthly, a full-scale relaxation of interest-free deferment period for tertiary students should

be implemented before the recovery of the local economy, so that students can be given a breathing spell when they have just started working, and even if they cannot secure employment after graduation. I hope that the Secretary will relay our requests to the Financial Secretary, who can respond by delivering some good news to students in the budget to be released soon.

Our amendment has also mentioned the youth development problem which has aroused much concern among us, namely the problem of drug abuse, and the invasion of Ketamine in school campuses, as well as the severity of drug abuse in schools. Members may recall that when the authorities first introduced the scheme on school drug testing, the arrangements were crude. As a result, many young people lacked confidence in the scheme. I do not have the latest figures regarding the number of youth who have participated in the scheme, but there are a lot of dissenting voices. In my opinion, it is imperative for the authorities to examine how best the pervasion of drugs in schools can be curbed. But it is also necessary to strengthen the support provided to families, communities, social service organizations and social workers, with a view to helping the youth alleviate pressure from their studies and pressure of living. It is imperative to provide more support to the youth. I also hope that the Government will consider increasing resources to advocate the value of life and moral education, and teach the youth to respect their own lives and those of other people, establish proper moral concepts and correct values, as well as striving for social justice and equality. I believe it will be more effective if these values can be instilled into the youth through classroom learning.

Recently, many people are talking about the "post-80s". At the beginning of my speech, I also mentioned the incident of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL). As a matter of fact, many young people are very concerned about the developments in connection with the XRL incident. During the several days when the Legislative Council was discussing the funding of XRL, I went past Ice House Street one day and met a group of young people in school uniforms. Although I did not know them, they came to talk to me, and encouraged us to work hard for our aim. My daughter is a Form Four student. She told me some classmates had actually gone to the Legislative Council Building and the Statue Square to find out what was going on. They may not have a clear idea of the whole incident, so they went to the venue in an attempt to understand more about it. The whole process has shown us that, despite the sense of helplessness among young people towards the present situation, they still wish to make some substantive input. The Government should study how more

consultative channels can be opened up through which these young people can be involved. This is also very important.

Yesterday, I raised an oral question related to the Commission on Youth (COY), and found that among the members of the COY, the majority are middle-aged people. Only a few are young people. So I even changed its name to the Commission on the Middle-aged instead of the Commission on Youth. I hope the Secretary will respond to this and tell us whether the Government will bring in more young people to the COY in the future. I remember the Secretary said yesterday that very often young people could not spare the time, and that they might not come even if they were invited. According to the Secretary, as young people have many other activities and like to surf on the Internet, they may not be interested in attending meetings in a serious manner. However, just as the Secretary said, the whole idea was not necessarily allocating seats to them in the COY. The most important thing is to attract more young people to participate in the COY, and provide a discussion platform for them, so that they will have opportunities to express their views. Our framework is not limited to just a few persons who attend the meetings of the COY.

Moreover, yesterday the Secretary also mentioned that the Government maintained a Central Personality Index in which young people could register their names. However, there is a lack of transparency in this mechanism. How can young people register their names in the Index? After registration, what criteria do they have to meet before they can be appointed to some consultative committees that serve as official channels for their expression of views? I hope that the Government will provide for a public and official self-nominating process in which youth representatives will be able to recommend themselves for appointment to advisory committees and statutory bodies in order to express views on social policies and other specific subjects. We think this is an important arrangement.

In respect of the means of communication with the youth, both Secretary Eva CHENG and the Director of Housing, as mentioned by colleagues just now, have said that they would set up Facebooks and Blogs. This is certainly important. However, according to some information and documents, the most important thing is not whether to open a Facebook or Blog account. It is not difficult to open such an account — I believe every young person present today knows how to open a Facebook account, which is easy — the most important

thing is to promptly respond to those who have put forward their ideas and absorb their views after setting up Facebook. Facebook is just a means, a medium. It is not difficult to have a Facebook account. But the most important thing is how to absorb views and make prompt responses in the process.

I would like to talk about one last point, which concerns the amendment proposed by Mr Paul TSE. He suggested that the Administration should consider creating in the Legislative Council a youth seat with sufficient representativeness. The Democratic Party has reservation about this amendment of Mr TSE. Although Mr TSE has not specified that the seat is a functional constituency (FC) seat — a colleague has just queried whether FC seats are really scourges — our conviction is that we do not wish to increase any FC seats in the Legislative Council. We believe that there should not be more FC seats returned by a small circle election. We wish to have full-scale universal suffrage. The Democratic Party opposes Mr TSE's suggestion of creating a FC seat only for the youth.

President, I so submit.

MR CHAN HAK-KAN (in Cantonese): President, recently when we discuss the young people, apart from using such synonyms as "post-80s" and "post-90s", sometimes we also use terms with negative connotations, such as "train man", "otaku", "himono onna", "frustrated young man", and "hermite youth". In fact, these terms demonstrate a negative perception of society about young people. I have noticed that in recent years, with downturns in the economic and political environment of Hong Kong, promoting economic development and tackling internal political disputes have become the key policy agenda of the Government. The needs of young people have been overlooked. As a result, young people have become a group of suppressed and overlooked people in the process of our social development.

Last month, in reply to my question raised at the Question and Answer Session, the Chief Executive admitted that the existing communication with the young people was inadequate, and undertook to formulate policies that better meet the needs of young people. The fact that the Chief Executive is willing to reflect upon this properly is a good beginning. But the most important point is, he has to reach out to the community of young people, listen to their views, and understand their problems and plights. President, "There is absolutely no such

thing in the world as love or hatred without reason or cause." There must be reasons behind for dissatisfaction of young people with society.

In my opinion, young people nowadays face the plight of "five difficulties", namely the difficulty in finding a job, the difficulty in getting promotion, the difficulty in realizing one's dreams, the difficulty in buying one's homes, and the difficulty in communication. Regarding the difficulty in finding a job, colleagues have mentioned the persistently high unemployment rate among young people. The unemployment rate among the youth aged 15 to 24 stands at 12%, with 40 000 of them waiting for employment. It is possible that graduation is tantamount to unemployment. Young people have met grave setbacks even before they start their career in society, resulting in many social problems.

The second difficulty is the difficulty in getting promotion. The young people of the "post-80s" have worked in society for almost 10 years, during which they have experienced the Asian financial turmoil, SARS, the financial tsunami, and "high academic qualifications rewarded by low incomes". With all these prominent problems, it is obvious that there is a lack of opportunities of upward movement for young people.

The third difficulty is the difficulty in realizing one's dreams. Over the past decade, the economic development of Hong Kong has been tilted to the financial services sector. For those young people who are unable to become professionals or work in the financial services sector, their exit pathways are very limited. Many young people who have good education, ideals and passion have found that "they are unable to fly away even if given wings".

The fourth difficulty is the difficulty in buying one's homes. Confucius said, "At thirty, I established myself." After working for 10 years, young people of the "post-80s" have plans to get married and buy their own homes. But they are in the plight of sinking wages and soaring property prices. They cannot afford buying private housing flats, and they are not eligible for public housing or the Home Ownership Scheme. It is difficult for them to establish themselves after turning thirty.

The fifth difficulty is the difficulty in communication. The "post-80s" generation has grown up in the era of an advanced network technology. Young people have creativity as well as capabilities in information technology. With a

communication mode different from that of the conventional, the voice of the young people is easily overlooked by the traditional society.

In their plight of the "five difficulties", a sense of helplessness has developed among young people towards society and the Government. Some of them have gone astray, some have started to take drugs or engage in compensated dating. Some have seized the occasion of controversial social issues to air their grievances through various means of expression, with a view to arousing public attention.

Recently, the Chief Executive, Secretaries of Departments and Bureau Directors have said that they would strengthen the initiatives of listening to the voices of young people expressed via the Internet, showing more concern for issues discussed in online discussion forums, setting up online discussion platforms; all of these are commendable moves. However, I think these initiatives are relatively passive. Instead of waiting for emails to be sent to the Government, why can the Government not be more proactive? President, last March, it had taken Premier WEN Jiabao two hours to answer questions raised by netizens on subjects such as the economy, disparity between the rich and the poor, and opposition against corruption. President Barrack OBAMA of the United States has also spoken to the public via the Internet and YouTube. The SAR Government should draw reference from these initiatives. I am aware that Secretary Eva CHENG will set up an online discussion forum on transport infrastructure this Saturday. I think this is a good beginning. However, I hope the Government will also draw reference from the initiative proposed in my amendment, and that is, to be more proactive in absorbing views expressed by young people in the Internet.

As a matter of fact, the voices of young people in the establishment are also very weak. In his reply to my question raised last week, Secretary TSANG said that among the 400 or so consultative bodies and statutory organizations in Hong Kong, only 25 of them have appointed non-official members under the age of 30, representing a proportion of 6.4% only. In fact, apart from the Commission on Youth, many committees closely related to young people do not have young representatives. For instance, one of the target groups of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) is the young people. Unfortunately young representatives are absent among the members of the VTC. Another example can be found in the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health (COSH). The youth smoking problem has become increasingly serious. But the members of the COSH are mainly doctors and professionals. Voices of young people are

again absent. All these have indicated that, insofar as the Government is concerned, there is still much room for improvement in this regard.

President, in my opinion, the difficulty in getting a job tops the list of the "five difficulties". It is also one of the roots of social problems. The acute unemployment situation among young people has become a structural problem. At present, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 19 is 20%, with 10 000 people seeking employment. The unemployment rate of those aged between 20 and 24 is 10.5%, with 30 000 people seeking employment. Although a number of employment assistance programmes have been introduced by the Government, they are measures that treat the symptoms without solving the problem. The crux of the problem lies in there being insufficient vacant positions in society. The Government should consolidate all the existing support programmes; devise schemes that complement the six major industries in which Hong Kong enjoys clear advantages; provide assistance and guidance to young people in joining emerging industries; and expand the avenues and channels for employment. Moreover, the Mainland is undergoing rapid economic development, which offers a large market and numerous opportunities. The Government should make good use of the Hong Kong offices on the Mainland, so as to assist young people who intend to work on the Mainland in seeking opportunities.

President, finally, I would like to revisit once again the Home Starter Loan Scheme which I have all along advocated. I also hope that the Government will resume the provision of a suitable quantity of Home Ownership Scheme flats, so as to reduce the number of young people in the category of "snails without shells". Many young people have to choose between buying their own homes and getting married. Some of them have to postpone their weddings because they cannot afford buying their own homes. There are people who defer the plan of bearing children. I can understand the concerns of the Government in introducing the Scheme. But it is obvious that the prevailing property prices are beyond the affordability of many young people who have dreams of home ownership. If the Government is worried about the Scheme resulting loan defaults, it can consider tightening the eligibility for application, or introducing restrictions on resale, which will prevent speculation; instead of rejecting the re-launching of the Scheme across the board.

President, I believe if only the Government's policy is correct, the positive energy of young people will be given full play. The original motion of Mr

CHEUNG Kwok-che, and the three respective amendments of Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai have attempted to analyse the youth problem from various angles, with the aim of fostering communication and interaction between the Government and the young people, and promoting solutions to various difficulties faced by the young people, to which the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) gives its support. As for Mr Paul TSE's amendment which urges the Government to actively consider creating in the Legislative Council a "youth seat", in view of a huge controversy in the community over whether seats of the traditional functional constituencies in the Legislative Council should be increased, we believe any deliberation on this subject now is not conducive to narrowing the differences in the discussion on constitutional reform. Therefore, DAB will abstain from voting on this amendment.

President, I so submit.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): President, the subject of today's motion is basically about problems faced by the youth and they cover three aspects: firstly consultation; secondly policy; and thirdly platforms. I heard many other colleagues talk about consultation, policy, and so on, just now. And I want to talk about platforms.

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che just now also mentioned that every government advisory body should have at least one dedicated seat for the youth. I do not know whether he meant also a seat in the Legislative Council. Regarding youth empowerment mentioned by Dr Joseph LEE, it is indeed a very powerful concept. In the context of Hong Kong, instead of empowering the youth in the advisory structure or legislative process, empowerment in the context of the Legislative Council is by far the most effective way. Hence, it is an issue worthy of our consideration.

Of course, Mr CHAN Hak-kan has a point when he asked just now whether it was the right time to discuss this suggestion given the many controversies surrounding the constitutional reform presently. However, notwithstanding the Government's preferred option, there is after all some possibilities so long as the

matter is not settled or finalized. Although the possibilities are slim, we can at least consider and discuss this suggestion.

Judging from these few examples, I think if this suggestion is not about this thing which many regard as the "lame" constituencies — of course, I totally disagree with this slogan or claim — if this obstacle is not there, it seems that Honourable colleagues do not mind giving the youth an opportunity of direct involvement, representation and empowerment in this context. The question now is that our discussion seems to have focused only on these slogans or conceptual issues, thus preventing us from taking the ultimate and final step that we really want taken for the youth.

President, many colleagues would of course say that it is dangerous to improve the functional constituencies (FCs) now because once they have become better, it would be more difficult to abolish them later on. This seems to be what they are saying. However, as the Chinese saying goes: "So long as one remains a monk, one goes on tolling the bell". So long as the FCs are not abolished, we should try our best to improve and fine-tune them, so that they can function and work better.

On the one hand, I can see that some Honourable colleagues, like Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, have been acquitting themselves as good examples, for he had fought so diligently and persistently for his profession yesterday. Although he knew very well that his motion on the "River Crab Incident" would unlikely be passed, he still fought for it so that there will be more discussion and support. This is a fine example of serving the profession. Dr Margaret NG, the representative from the legal profession sitting over there, has also fought incessantly for the legal profession's fees and charges in legal aid cases. She indeed spared no effort last time when she fought for the profession over the torture claim issue. These are all good examples.

The question remains whether we should simply give up on the FCs, let them sink to the bottom and do nothing about them just for the sake of preventing them from being improved some day. If that is the case, Mr CHEUNG and Dr NG should simply try doing nothing or even setting some bad examples so that the FCs would be despised more. But they are not like that, they still go on tolling the bell so long as they are one of the monks. I think that so long as a

date for abolishing the FCs has yet been set, we should still seriously consider whether options are available to improve the system.

In fact, I think the FCs can be improved, and immediately. In its present proposal, the Government has just resorted to an easy way out and evaded the issue by ceremoniously increasing the representativeness of the FCs. Instead of doing so, the Government should tackle head on the root cause of the most fundamental and critical criticisms drawn by the FCs. In this respect, I have already made suggestions to the Chief Executive and one of them is creating a FC seat for the youth immediately.

If we are talking about "one person, one vote" election by universal suffrage, I fail to see neither the logic nor rationale for allowing only those over 18 years of age to vote. Why a citizen aged 17 is not more eligible to vote than one aged 71? In terms of their thinking, social commitment and influence on future policies, I believe a group of youngsters aged 17 would definitely have more influence on social policies, greater concern for social progress and be more affected by future development than a group of citizens aged 71. Therefore, I really think that we can consider this.

I hope I can promote some so-called reverse thinking or self-reflection on the present motion. Before a decision is made, why can we not consider whether a seat should be given to the youth at this tier of the Legislative Council. As for questions such as how to achieve and define this and what exactly is the definition, these are all things that we can further consider. However, as a matter of direction, this is certainly a proposal that merits active consideration.

President, the most important element under a system of representative government is representativeness. What can be better than having direct representation in this Council? I do not know whether the students on the public gallery consider any Member in this Council to be representing their voices? Is that Mr CHAN Hak-kan, or Ms Starry LEE? Or any other Member? They would probably consider us all oldies, that no Member can truly represent and speak for them in the Council.

In sports, we have youth squads in football so that the young guns can have opportunities of performance and participation and it is invariably the quickest way for them to be promoted to first team squads or the starting line-ups. Let us not belittle these seats in the Legislative Council. What representatives have we

had over the years? We have Martin LEE, SZETO Wah and CHEUNG Man-kwong. They are the so-called star representatives in the current and previous incarnations of this Council and they all once became Legislative Council Members through the FCs. This has given them their debutes, just like entering the youth squad first and eventual graduation to direct elections. This is in fact a very good chance for the young people to test themselves.

There are others who consider that as we now have Facebook, Twitter, and so on, there are many channels and platforms to consult public views. So long as there is adequate public consultation, it is unnecessary to have so many Legislative Council Members returned from FCs in this Chamber. If consultation with the sectors suffice, then why do we need to give them a seat or a vote? That is because we value and care for them, and feel that there should be empowerment for them. That is why I think my suggestion is not just a castle in the air. Instead, it is the most direct and the best way to respond to the demand of the youth.

Moreover, we need to let the young people, irrespective of their political background or thinking, have the opportunity to speak, debate and fight for themselves with their own capabilities, ideals and visions, and not through some nepotism of political parties. In that case, a young elect must have some measure of representativeness, that is, direct representativeness for he has to be accountable to his peers. This is in fact a very good way for the young people to get focused immediately because they will no longer have to resort to such means as protest walk, carnivals, dancing or singing. Instead, they can come out to debate and stand in elections, campaigning and organizing elections. This is in fact a very good way for them to get focused, fight positively and make their voices heard. Instead of just "engaging in empty talk", speaking in events organized by the Government, clamouring in the City Forum, or throwing articles around like throwing a brasserie towards Mr CHAN Hak-kan, and so on, they can fight for some concrete actions to develop and build their ideal homes in the future. Those are all unnecessary actions just because they do not have a channel for their voices to be heard direct. That is why that one vote is also very important.

Therefore, when considering the constitutional reform, the Government should also do some reflection and be more creative. Apart from the five seats from the District Councils, is there any scope of change for other existing seats? For example, the Government can consider whether the tourism sector — it really

does not matter which sector — can be combined with the youth sector. Certainly, this is just an example. In fact, it can be any sector. All in all, we should try to figure out something to let the youth participate directly, rather than just audience for their views. That is what my suggestion is all about really.

Just now, Mr CHAN Hak-kan said that 6.4% was a very low percentage in the advisory structure. I hope this is not just empty talk but a *bona fide* wish to do something to empower the youth by giving them a seat. I believe this proposal can complement Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's suggestions. If it is not for the obstacle of FCs, I think he might agree to it. Why should we force ourselves to give up any original thinking just because of this so-called baseline? My main intention is to bring this matter up so that we can pluck up the courage to think about it. We do not have to take a path devoid of originality. Thank you, President.

MR RONNY TONG (in Cantonese): President, before I come to my main speech, I would like to propose my amendment.

President, my speech will contain three brief parts. First of all, I wish to review the current youth policy; second, I wish to discuss the opportunities for the "post-80s" to participate in social affairs within the establishment; and lastly, I wish to discuss the deep-rooted social problems.

President, as early as the 1970s, youngsters already started to show concern about social events, and they took part in social movements to fight for social justice. It was only because the British Hong Kong colonial administration introduced a youth policy in the 1980s aimed to burn the energy of young people through the provision of free recreational activities that they turned their attention from social participation to the activities organized by schools and youth centres. With the rise in civic awareness, youngsters gradually became concerned about social affairs again. They started to discuss social affairs and initiate peaceful social movements on current issues. Many colleagues also participated in such movements years ago. The social movements that saw young people's participation are far different from the riots in 1967. Hence, using the mindset of the 1960s to handle the youth problem today cannot possibly help solve the problem itself. Unfortunately, while young people face a lack of platforms to

voice their views, the Hong Kong Government is also very selective in listening to people's views, paying attention only to views useful to it but turning a deaf ear to opposite opinions. Such is the most miserable, the most saddening and the harshest reality now. There are nominal consultations on policies before their implementation, but the voices of young people are never heard in reality.

Honestly, at this juncture, I really wish to point out that while the Government fails to listen to the views of young people, it may not necessarily hear many other divergent views including those of Legislative Council Members either.

President, let me return to the youth problem. The problem has been compounded by the fact that the Government has rarely conducted any comprehensive review of the youth policy in recent years. It may occasionally handle problems not unique to the youth in isolation, such as drug abuse. Members are very familiar with the school drug test scheme. Even if consultation is conducted on the youth policy, it is conducted by means of a questionnaire issued only to uniformed organizations (such as the Scout and the Community Youth Club), schools, social welfare organizations, and so on. If the views put forth by these organizations are considered incorrect or undesirable by the Government, these organizations would even have to worry about whether their funding would be reduced; or if it is considered that their views may lead to discord in society, these organizations may be penalized by the Government. Moreover, most of the Government's consultations are not conducted in an open and community-wide manner. Even if open consultative forums are conducted, seats are invariably reserved for individual friendly organizations or their members beforehand. As a result, young people, especially those belonging to certain strata, are unable to express their views on these occasions. Hence, young people in general have no way to express their views directly to the Government. I am thus of the view that the pressing task of the Government is to immediately consult young people through different channels and formulate a comprehensive and forward-looking youth policy, so that they can be made aware that the Government attaches great importance to them and their views. In this way, they can establish a sense of responsibility and ultimately a sense of belonging to the Government.

President, I wish to discuss the opportunities for the "post-80s" to participate in social affairs within the establishment. According to the

announcement made by the Government on 27 January, only 25 out of some 400 advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs) in Hong Kong consist of non-official members aged 30 or below. This accounts for only 6.4% of the total. And, the ASBs with the highest number of non-official members aged 30 or below are the Dogs and Cats Classification Board — President, we have hardly heard of this Board before the announcement — and the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk. The average age of the non-official members on these ASBs is about 44. Even for ASBs with a higher number of non-official members, such as the Award Council of the Hong Kong Award for Young People and the Commission on Youth, the average age of their members is still as high as 47. Statistically, the chances for young people to participate in social affairs within the establishment are very slim indeed. If young people are unable to reflect their views in the establishment, their only option is to create a platform outside the establishment to voice their views, or they may simply suppress their views and discontent, and as their discontent accumulates, an outburst will result.

President, here, I also wish to talk about the deep-rooted social problems which have been exposed, and which Members are very familiar with. Besides the blind spot in the youth policy — the Government's failure to communicate with young people — social conflicts at different levels are also involved.

A series of unjust phenomena, such as the Government's caprice (For instance, the Government has suddenly abandoned its principle of prudent financial management and decided to spend almost \$70 billion on constructing a 26 km railway), its indifference to the plight of the ordinary people and its funnelling of benefits and resources to large corporations and tycoons, have enraged the righteous young people, and in turn aroused their protest against society. This also explains why we saw young people besiege the Legislative Council Building in the recent Express Rail Link incident.

I believe to reduce the causes of young people's protests, so as to resolve the superficial conflicts in society should not be our goal. At present, the unemployment rate of young people is 19.5%. Even if they can find a job, their wages are generally on the low side. A recent newspaper survey finds that their income is almost 50% less than the income of people of their age several decades ago, that is, the income level in our time. Thus they do not have to pay a high price when they protest against or stand up to social injustice. And when they empathize with victims of social injustice, they will stand up for them without

hesitation. If the Government can set a reasonable minimum wage level, and increase employment opportunities for young people, and if better treatment is coupled with more opportunities of participation in social movements, the radical protests of young people can be reduced because they would have to bear a higher price for their actions.

President, Premier of the State Council WEN Jiabao has twice requested Donald TSANG publicly to tackle the deep-rooted problems in Hong Kong. During Donald TSANG's first duty visit to Beijing in 2005, Premier WEN Jiabao pointed out in front of him that Hong Kong still had some unresolved deep-rooted problems. Recently, Premier WEN has urged Donald TSANG again to "deal with deeply rooted problems in its economy, improve research on its development strategy and make a comprehensive and long-term plan".

Since the reunification the democratic development in Hong Kong has made no progress. Instead it has regressed. Young people or people in Hong Kong who run into incidents of injustice have no way to seek redress or help in this Council through Members. Although it is stipulated in the Basic Law that the Chief Executive will be selected by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures, and all Members of the Legislative Council will ultimately be elected by universal suffrage, in the 10 years after the reunification the young, the middle-aged and the elderly have never seen any roadmap for achieving universal suffrage. As young people and the public have no way to participate in government, benefits are gradually transferred to consortiums, "parents-in-law" or the business sector. The public have no way to monitor such unjust incidents or stop them from happening. People even feel their rights infringed upon and their distrust of the Government are growing. In this way deep-rooted conflicts naturally surface. President, to tackle these problems at source, it is necessary to expeditiously increase the opportunities for young people to participate in social affairs, respect their existence and views and put in place channels for them to give play to their abilities. Only by so doing can we solve this serious social and governance problem we now face.

Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): President, the original motion and various amendments today show our concern for the young generation. The youth is our future hope and we care for their healthy development so that they can build a better future for Hong Kong.

Youth affairs cover a number of policy areas of the SAR Government. Although I am the only public officer here today, I have obtained input from various Policy Bureaux. In his policy address last October, the Chief Executive talked about a number aspects related to the young people such as the implementation of education reforms to help young students develop their potential to meet the varied needs of society; the provision of opportunities of continuing education for young workers so that they may better their career prospects and pursue their interests; the development of the cultural and creative industries to provide young people who are not interested in formal education with an alternative; and the co-ordination and promotion by the Family Council and the Commission on Youth to encourage the bonding and communication between parents and children so as to buttress youth determination and achievement.

Young people face all kinds of problems during their growth. In real life, there are all sorts of forces waiting to exert their influence, both positive and negative, on the young people. Recently, the Community Programme against Youth Drug Abuse was launched in all the 18 districts under the leadership of the Home Affairs Department to help youngsters resist the temptation of drugs and develop positive values in life. Thus, we have to always guard against those who want to lead our youngsters astray.

I do not agree with the following wording of the original motion: "the unclear objectives of the youth services provided by various government bureaux". In fact, various government departments have been working together according to their respective responsibilities so that co-ordinated measures are taken to ensure healthy mental and physical development of our young generation and to enable young people to meet the challenges ahead and try their best to become talents in different fields as required by the social development of Hong Kong. We are also highly committed to promoting national education among the young people so that the tradition of loving the Motherland and loving Hong

Kong will be carried forward, such that there will be no lack of successors to contribute to the cause of "one country, two systems".

President, I shall speak again to further respond to the viewpoints presented by Honourable Members after listening to their speeches.

MR ANDREW LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, the youths are the future masters of society. In the near future, they will have to take up the responsibility and become the pillars of society. The Economic Synergy and I attach great importance to providing training to the younger generation. Established only a few months ago, the Economic Synergy already held a programme called New Century Odyssey in mid-September last year to widen the horizons of young people; and we have also invited different corporate CEOs to share their experience with students of three universities and answer their questions tête-à-tête.

At present, there will be about 80 000 senior secondary graduates each year but there are only 14 500 publicly-funded places, so not all of them can get a chance to study at university. And the teaching mode of grammar schools is not necessarily suitable for all students, nor can it arouse their interest in learning. Even the new "3+3+4" academic structure that will come into force in the next school year has its blind spot. In order to bid for more subsidies, schools may encourage students not at all suitable for the education mode of grammar schools to continue their senior secondary studies in the same school after completing the three years of junior secondary curriculum. Whether this practice works for the best interest of students should warrant deep thoughts by the authorities and the education sector.

Young people need to see prospects and hope for their future development, and they also need more development channels and opportunities outside the mainstream education system. As Chairman of the Vocational Training Council (VTC), I wish to share with Members the development direction actively taken by the VTC in recent years in a bid to provide a valuable option for young people.

The VTC offers flexible programmes that suit young people with different levels of educational attainment. The programmes which emphasize both theory

and practice seek to arouse students' interest in learning, equip them with the trade knowledge and skills and foster their holistic development, with a view to preparing them for work or further studies. Each year, the VTC offers about 24 000 places to young people of different ages. Through these programmes, 90% of the students will find their pathway for further studies or career development. The programmes cover nine main subjects:

- (1) Qualified Form Seven and Form Five students can undertake Diploma or Higher Diploma programmes;
- (2) Form Five students with less satisfactory results can opt for Foundation Diploma programmes, Diploma programmes in vocational studies or Certificate programmes in vocational skills training for designated industries. When a good foundation has been laid, students who intend to pursue further studies can advance to higher level programmes or start their career if they so wish;
- (3) Form Three or Form Four students who cannot adapt to the conventional school curriculum can opt for Diploma programmes in vocational studies to equip themselves for further studies or work; and
- (4) Unemployed youths below Form Three level can undertake Vocation Development Programmes to identify their interests and future pathway before furthering their studies or developing their career.

Under this all-in-one professional education and training pathway, Form Three graduates can undertake two-year Certificate programmes in vocational studies, after which they can progress to higher-level studies. Upon completion of Foundation Diploma or Higher Diploma programmes, capable graduates can immediately, or some time after working in society, undertake local or overseas top-up Degree or Doctorate programmes. About 30% of the Higher Diploma graduates each year enroll in top-up Degree programmes.

Moreover, the Apprenticeship Scheme of the VTC provides systematic vocational training in different trades in a bid to cater for the varied aspirations and interests of young people and to help them enter different trades through on-the-job training placement. Such training includes day-to-day practical work

and relevant educational courses, so that apprentices can pursue studies while undergoing workplace attachment. Upon the completion of apprenticeship, most apprentices will continue to serve in the respective trades. Currently, the Scheme covers around 120 trades in an array of sectors including automobile, electrical machinery, construction and jewellery, with relevant posts such as mechanics, technicians, project assistants and designers.

Apart from the statutory Apprenticeship Scheme, the VTC has been providing in recent years a more flexible pilot programme called Modern Apprenticeship. The programme seeks to equip young people with training and practical experience in order to enhance their employability in the service industries. The industries covered by the programme include beauty care, hairdressing, tourism, retail and employment service. About 3 300 young people have joined the apprenticeship programme in the 2009-2010 school year.

The VTC also provides opportunities for working youths to further their studies and upgrade their knowledge and skills. By repositioning its Skills Centres of 12 different industries, the VTC help working youths to excel in their field by providing comprehensive training and professional career development services and assisting their career development at different stages.

As society develops, the economy also transforms. It is most imperative to help young people catch up with the latest trend in the labour market demand at their studying stage, to widen their horizons and perspectives and carve out new directions for their future development. To turn all of this into reality, it requires the views and inputs of young people, a supportive government policy and considerable resources, as well as the co-operation of society as a whole, all sectors, all industries and all strata. I hope the Government and all parties in society can establish more platforms for the public, including young people, to take part in social development.

President, I so submit.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): President, the youth problem has become another serious social problem in recent years next to inter-generational poverty, non-engaged youths, compensated dating and drug abuse and other youth problems which come into view one after another — I am sorry, I have just rushed back to the Chamber hurriedly — and recently, some young people took to

the streets for protests and demonstrations. The emergence of these problems is not accidental, and they have their own deep-rooted causes. Today, I would like to focus my analysis on the causes of grievances among young people.

Youth problems in Hong Kong often revolve around the young people being lost and finding themselves in a state of moral degradation. They are involved in problems like drug abuse, compensated dating and withdrawal and detachment from society. These are often closely related to family and poverty problems. However, a new kind of youth problem has emerged gradually in recent days, whose nature is very different from those conventional youth problems, and that is, a lack of opportunities for upward mobility among young people, resulting in a new kind of conflict in society.

Compared with conventional youth problems, these young people in fact do not belong to the lost generation; on the contrary, most of them want to work hard for their future. However, the lack of opportunities of upward social mobility has made them feel very frustrated, and over time a kind of social discontent is fermented.

I have been in the business sector for many years, and I have sensed the problem a long time ago, therefore some time ago I moved a motion in the Legislative Council to urge the Government to promote a new occupational culture campaign for work-life balance. One of the purposes was to promote a new occupational culture for the younger generation who lack opportunities of upward mobility, with a view to alleviating the pressure on them and mitigating their resentment towards society.

I consider that it is in fact a good thing for young people to actively participate in social affairs, because they will then gain a better understanding of social affairs through such participation, and they will gradually understand the need to consider each and every matter from different perspectives, so their way of doing things will gradually be more mature. In fact, looking back on the past, many young people who took part in social movements have become pillars of society nowadays. However, one thing which makes us worry is that, there are always some youths who are particularly impetuous in each era. They are susceptible to the influence of intense emotions, which will overshadow their rational discerning powers and lead to some extreme behaviour.

As I have previously mentioned, young people are susceptible to the influence of intense emotions, so people from all walks of life in society,

including the Administration and the media should send them the right messages and values, so that they can readily understand the truth of the matters concerned. In fact, we should ask ourselves honestly. Have we helped them understand the truth? I believe that this problem will transform into another deep-rooted conflict with far-reaching implications. Therefore, the Government should take prompt remedial measures to prevent this conflict from being intensified.

Today Members have proposed a lot of solutions to the problem, and the original motion even suggests that the Government should formulate a comprehensive youth policy which I sincerely agree. The emergence of the youth problem did not gain sufficient attention in society at an early stage, which has led to the deterioration of the problem. Our society has indeed spent too much time on political rows, and the result is that many livelihood problems of the people have been neglected.

In addition, I particularly agree that the Government should study and advocate the development opportunities of young people on the Mainland, such as by strengthening local students' Putonghua training and their knowledge in the national conditions of China, as well as the provision of opportunities for young people to study or participate in exchange programmes on the Mainland. The Hong Kong's economy has reached a mature stage, and this together with a change in the economic structure has significantly reduced the opportunities of upward mobility for young people when compared with that a dozen or so years ago, and this is also a fact that cannot be changed. If we are to explore room for development for the next generation, the most viable option for them is undoubtedly to find opportunities on the Mainland.

President, I so submit.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): President, as many Honourable colleagues have pointed out, in recent years, youth-related issues, no matter if they are problems concerning non-engaged youth, hermit youth, young drug addicts or teenage girls engaged in online compensated dating and so on, all of them have become heated topics in society. Especially after "the night of the express rail" when this group of "post-80s" youths took to the streets, the Government's sense of crisis has become stronger. I consider that the Government's work on the youth is really — President, I would like to seek your advice on the use of this idiom — should it be "差強人意" (barely satisfactory) or "強差人意" (far from satisfactory)?

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): It should be "強差人意" (far from satisfactory), the Chinese character "強" (*qiang*) should be put in front.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): "強差人意" (far from satisfactory), right? Thank you, President — there is much room for improvement. For example, in view of the recent performance of a number of Secretaries of Departments, it is doubtful whether they understand the community, especially young people's aspirations. Earlier, the Financial Secretary published an article and pointed out that the only concern of youths nowadays was whether there were clubhouses and swimming pools in the luxurious apartments they lived in. These young people do not know anything about worldly matters and what the outside world is really like. Perhaps the youth whom the Secretary contacted live in Shouson Hill just as he does.

The behaviour of another Secretary of Departments was even more absurd. When he held a press conference, to our surprise, he played the game of wine tasting with the reporters and invited them to guess the years in which different wines were made, and a reporter who guessed it right would be awarded a bottle of red wine. Did he really know that our reporters In fact, there is an abnormal phenomenon in Hong Kong, that is, despite the fact that the fourth right is so important, the wages of Hong Kong reporters are quite low, may I ask how many reporters can afford to taste wine regularly? This is really a big question; it also gives people the impression that the leaders of the SAR Government understand very little the actual mentality of young people and the youth phenomena.

On 13 January, the Chief Executive attended the Legislative Council Question and Answer Session. He showed some progress as he said he would try harder to understand young people, and he would strive to communicate with them. Then, I heard that the Secretary for Transport and Housing promised that she would open a Facebook account, which was even considered by the media as an anecdote. But, why has she waited so long to open a Facebook account? Are our SAR officials not human beings? Do they not feel the need to communicate with people from different walks of life in society? Secretary TSANG himself is in charge of youth work, and I would like to know if he has opened a Facebook account? Does he have a Twitter account or a LinkedIn account? What type of youths does he normally come into contact with? Are they all from well-off families, or are they just youths within the establishment?

These two days, a newspaper published a scholar's commentary on the recent appointment of members of the Central Policy Unit. I have no doubt about the quality of those experts recently appointed, they are all young and capable, but why do they give people an impression that they are just the offspring of famous people within the establishment? How does the Government carry out liaison work with young people? Recently, the Secretary of Departments and Directors of Bureaux took 250 students to the Mainland to find their roots and understand the national conditions, but how were the 250 students selected? How is the liaison work of the Youth Summit conducted on ordinary days? What about its network? In fact, to do youth work well, the most important thing is to contact some young people outside the establishment, especially those disadvantaged young people. I would also like to know whether the Secretary himself or other Directors of Bureaux have conducted any counselling work on university students. I do not wish to hear the Secretary say that he is too busy to do so because all of us are very busy. In fact, he will understand the mindset of young people better if he gets in touch with more young people outside the establishment.

In particular, after the phenomenon of the "post-80s" taking to the streets has emerged in recent days, I consider the Government should really find out what their complexes are, what are their values and what they are fighting for, why Mr WONG Sing-chi and these youths consider themselves "empowered" after the new social movement? Mr WONG uses the term "empowerment", but I think it can also be interpreted as they are "loaded with energy". Why do they consider themselves "loaded with energy"? What are they fighting for? In a press interview, some young people said they were pleased to have the power to say something for once. That is a very important point. Does it mean that nobody will listen to their voices had they not taken to the streets and resorted to more drastic actions? How will the Government contact these young people in the future who represent their own selves as they neither have any "big brothers" nor anyone to represent them?

I have also contacted one of the university students. Does the Secretary know that in the recent express rail incident, students from universities and tertiary institutions found an organization called "Dai Lik Choi (大力菜)"? This group of college students gave their utmost support to Choi Yuen Village, why did they do so? Some students told me that they just went there for observation purpose, and they had nothing to do with some demonstrators who

took excessively intense actions and they did not know them. However, why did young people do so to attract attention? I hope the Government will pay more attention to this. In addition to strengthening a number of measures, for example, as many Honourable colleagues have said, enhancing the employment policy, education on national conditions and national consciousness and so on, I also hope the Secretary will take note of the point that, today, two issues are closely related to our youths being so depressed. First, our education policy is indeed a failure. After 10 years of education reform, the Government has to fine-tune the mother-tongue teaching policy, and it has tacitly recognized the failure of this policy. Recently, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) announced that our seven-tiered pagoda rating system was recognized by the UCAS of the United Kingdom, in fact, it was an overseas assessment of the "1-5, 5*, 5**" seven-tiered pagoda scoring system of the HKEAA. Many newspapers reported that overseas accreditation bodies considered the academic standard of our new senior secondary schools to be lower than before. Are our youths getting anywhere? If the Government wants to solve the youth problems, it should understand them more and try its best to contact the disadvantaged young people outside the establishment and to break up the small circle. In addition, in the long run, the Government should improve its education and industrial policies. Thank you, President.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): President, the high-speed rail funding incident triggered the spontaneous organization of social movements by a large number of "post-80s" young people, thus the community surprisingly realized that we actually did not quite understand these young people, in particular, there is a deep chasm between the Government's governance and the aspirations of the youth. This more or less reflects that there is a big problem in the SAR Government's youth policy and it is time for a reform.

If our government officials believe that the new generation of young people are only concerned about what facilities their clubhouses have and how big the swimming pools are, they certainly have wrong mentality, because according to the findings of some surveys conducted long time ago in the community, young people were actually very much concerned about social affairs. Take a survey conducted by the Breakthrough in 2009 as an example, it was found that more than 70% of young people had tried to understand the Government's policies, 80% even had discussed with the others about social affairs. However, even

though they were concerned about current affairs in general, the survey found that they rarely participated in the establishment or express their views to the establishment or the authorities.

A similar survey conducted in 2008 by the above organization may perhaps give us an inspiration. The survey found that more than 70% (71.5%) of young respondents indicated that they did not know through what channels could they participate in politics. If they know nothing about the channel for participation, how can they express their opinions to the Government?

Take the Commission on Youth as an example, one of the duties of the Commission (the Commission) is to hold meetings to listen to the voices of young people. However, the Commission has stopped holding Youth Summits since 2006. This year, the Commission is prepared to organize another Submit, so, there is a blank period of more than three years in between.

As the saying goes, "listen to both sides and you will be enlightened", but as it turns out, the Government closed its own door in the past three years, and it had not even used this conventional channel for receiving views from young people; this amounted to turning a deaf ear and a blind eye. How can the Government grasp the views of young people and convey their voices inside the Government?

Instead of slackening off the handling of the matter, we consider the authorities should consistently listen to the views of young people. Therefore, we welcome the decision of the Commission to hold the Summit again this year. We also expect the Summit can really let young people speak their minds freely, instead of attempting to preempt young people's expression by specifying certain issues or topics, or to evade issues that are the focus of their concern.

In addition, we have also noticed that various advisory and statutory bodies lack the voices of young people at present. Government data showed that among about 390 advisory and statutory bodies in Hong Kong, only 6.4% (25 bodies) had appointed members aged 30 or below.

A newspaper has also studied the composition of 24 major committees and statutory bodies. It was found that the average age of the members of those organizations was close to 60, that is, the retirement age. One can see that these

organizations are really ageing, or it is difficult for them to understand the views of the younger generation. Therefore, it is imperative to study the introduction of more young members to various advisory and statutory bodies.

Take the Commission as an example, among its 28 members, only three are "post-80s" youths, so, the ratio is too small. We must make their voices louder within the Commission so as to facilitate discussions of issues related to the well-being of young people or issues of their concern.

Of course, I have also noticed that some government departments intended to take remedial measures by strengthening contacts with young people. For example, the Transport and Housing Bureau has plans to use the Facebook as a means to enhance online consultation. We strongly support the decision and I also hope that other government departments will follow suit and increase the channels for young people to participate in social affairs by making good use of these web-based platforms that young people frequently use.

However, I would like to point out that this task cannot simply be done by just setting up one or two online groups or uploading information on the Internet and asking young people to take a look themselves. The authorities must get rid of this conventional consultation mode of "I give you the information and you give me the response", instead, they should put themselves down and interact with young people with an open mind. Only then can they really understand young people's concerns.

President, as to the statement in Mr Ronny TONG's amendment about the Chief Executive's "nepotism" and "surveillance and suppressing the activities of youth dissidents", I believe that is an overstatement, and we think that it may not tally with the facts, therefore, it is difficult for the Liberal Party to support it.

As to Mr Paul TSE's proposal of creating in the Legislative Council a youth seat with sufficient representativeness, I have listened very carefully to his speech just now. He has his arguments, but I am afraid that if we further discuss his view in the future, it may lead to a controversy about a new functional constituency, thus, raising side issues, and it is something difficult to achieve.

As for the other amendments, in particular, Mr CHAN Hak-kan's proposals about vigorously assisting young people to seek jobs, setting up businesses, alleviating their difficulties in buying their own homes and alleviating

post-secondary students' loan repayment burden and so on, they are quite similar to the ideas of the Liberal Party, part of which were touched upon in the preceding motion, I therefore will not repeat my comments here. Hence, we will support this amendment.

In short, the Liberal Party supports the formulation of a comprehensive youth policy, so that young people can have channels to contribute to society and realize their ideals.

President, I so submit.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): Today's discussion is on the formulation of a comprehensive youth policy. What actually is the Government's youth policy? No one knows. But the Government's attitude is clear to all. Its policy is paternalistic in nature, and given such an attitude, the youth are treated only as a serious social problem, people to be helped out and targets of drug tests. A moment ago, the Secretary drew my attention to one more point, that is, the youth are also the targets of "love the country and love Hong Kong" indoctrination as well targets of consultation under manipulation. The entire Government approaches the youth issue from a top-down perspective. Anyway, they are expected to be obedient, and the Government will then pretend that it takes the youth seriously and wants to consult them.

However, the recent protests of the "post-80s" against government authority have suddenly waken up this paternalistic Government, as it turns out the youth nowadays have finally awoken. Basically, we should be happy to see the awakening of the youth and their willingness to take part in social affairs. I remember that in the past, we were often worried about the youth's indifference to current affairs and the Government, so we looked for various means to encourage their participation. Society as a whole, including the Government, expressed the hope that the youth could be more concerned about society. They have now shown their concern for society, and they have even demonstrated how they love Hong Kong and their land so very, very dearly. But the Government does not like their approach, dismissing it as too radical. We now realize that the Government even wants to impose restrictions on how people are concerned about society. If that is the case, the Government will only allow the youth to show their concern when they are subject to manipulation. The protagonists will never be the youth, and if the youth are not the protagonists, it will never be

possible to solve the problem of youth participation. The Government should respect the "post-80s" as the protagonists. It should respect their right to express their opinions in their own ways. It should respect the ways they request for dialogues with the Government and ask for it to listen to their voices. Unfortunately, the Government imposes restrictions very often, forbidding others to express their views in their own ways.

When the Government saw young people's opposition to the funding for the Express Rail Link (XRL) and the attack by the "post-80s", it sensed the crisis. As a result, it started to give glib talks about consultation and put up all sorts of pretence. Members all know that Eva CHENG has recently opened a Facebook account. She received the commendation of many colleagues just now but I think she is just putting up a show. If Eva CHENG has been at all sincere in listening to young people's views, she should have communicated with them before approving the funding, and she would not have to leave secretly by taking the Mass Transit Railway under the escort of others on the day the funding was approved. If she had communicated with them openly and honestly beforehand, would it have been necessary for her to slip away so furtively that day? She has now put up a show by opening a Facebook account, and all those invited — I saw who the guests were on Saturday — were not young people but people trusted by the Government. All this is again mere pretence.

Pretence aside, what is more horrifying is that while the Chief Executive talks about consultation, he has also resorted to white terror, arresting people at the same time. How can we believe the Chief Executive? Since he talks about consultation, he should listen to others' views carefully. But he refuses to do so, and when people attack the Government, he simply arrests them. The Government has behaved like this, showing a complete lack of sincerity. If it is at all sincere in listening to people's views, should it choose to do so in the safest circumstances where there are no protesters? If it is at all sincere, it should listen directly to people holding divergent views. It is a pity that the Government will never do so. This may not matter to it, for its remaining tenure is just about two years, and it may just want to drudge through it. I do not know whether it has such a "lame duck" attitude.

Another tactic of the Government is to set up a youth consultation framework on its own. Mrs Regina IP mentioned a moment ago that the Central Policy Unit recently turned to a group of so-called young elite. Another name for this group of people is actually "princelings", that is, the "nth" generation of

tycoons — I do not know which generation; maybe, rather than the second generation, they are the third generation of tycoons. The Government has turned to these "princelings", and they are the "post-80s" in its eyes. It is completely divorced from the social reality. I therefore think that if the Government really wants to solve the problem, it should start with tackling the deep-level contradiction. What is the deep-level contradiction? This involves four generations of people. What is the contradiction between the present generation, the Chief Executive's generation and the "post-80s"? The contradiction is connected with values. The Government talks about economic development all the time and never mentions justice and human rights. It only talks about the trickle-down economic theory — when food morsels drop from the gaps between tycoon's fingers, people may have food to eat, employment opportunities, welfare benefits and everything. But the Government does not talk about equal opportunities and the shattering of monopoly by consortia, nor does it mention how employees can enjoy collective bargaining, fair wages and reasonable working hours. It does not talk about all these things; it simply sits back, waiting for good luck and the trickle-down effect. There is a contradiction of values. The third contradiction of values is the clash between authoritarianism and freedom. All emphasis is put on authoritarianism and paternalism. Yet, what the "post-80s" want is freedom.

Finally, there is also the second major contradiction that is connected with the political system. I think Mr Paul TSE's assumption that young people want a seat in the Legislative Council is an insult to them. They are not asking for a seat in the Legislative Council. Rather, they simply want to abolish all the 30 functional constituency seats, so that all Hong Kong people can compete for the seats on a fair basis. All people, including young people, should have the right to elect and be elected. There should be equal electoral rights. This is the request of young people in respect of the political system. Thank you, President.

MS CYD HO (in Cantonese): President, these days, many people have tried to analyse the "post-80s", thus leading some of them to write essays to state clearly that they are tired of being analysed, especially being wrongly analysed.

From the Internet, we can notice that some young people who have participated in opposing the Express Rail Link (XRL) have personally made it very clear that they are not asking the Government to appoint them to any committees for embellishment purpose, to let them say just a few words and then

leave without bothering whether their opinions are accepted. What they want is an open political system with the full implementation of direct elections, one which allows people in different age groups to participate according to their own wishes.

However, following the attempts of the "post-80s" to drive opposition to XRL funding, the new generation has all of a sudden become a headache for government officials. The government officials concerned are only concerned about the thorny issues they are facing, not the new generation. So, they have asked some "post-50s" to conduct studies. One of them is LUI Tai-lok, who is aged between 50 and 60. At the very beginning, the Government even wanted to ask Uncle LAU Siu-kai to conduct a study on the "post-80s". We were all startled at hearing this. This precisely shows that the Government is not interested in listening to the new generation.

Many young academics nowadays were born in the 1980s. Some of them are famous political commentators. Others are newspaper columnists. And, yet some others took part in the opposition to XRL funding outside the Legislative Council Building. Some of them can even be absorbed and tolerated by the establishment. But when our government officials want to gain an understanding of these young people, they have surprisingly asked uncles and aunties aged 50 to 60 to conduct the study, rather than turning to those who are equally young. This is indeed ridiculous.

I once blamed CHAN King-fai for coining the very catchy term of "post-80s", which induces everybody to make generalizations about this new generation similar to horoscope reading. Actually, people of all generations, the "post-80s", "post-70s", "post-60s" and "post-50s" alike, may all have different inclinations and personalities. In every generation, there are bound to be people who are conservative, avant-garde, passionate and moderate. However, I think the people who have given government officials the biggest headache are the group of "post-80s" who have come forward to engineer various social movements. This group of "post-80s" have made it very clear that they do not intend to fight for a seat for themselves in the establishment. Honestly, my political party is not quite used to dealing with the "post-80s", and we need to adapt slowly because the "post-80s" are highly distrustful of the establishment. What they want is an equitable system, one which can openly monitor the executive authorities and the legislature. And, they also advocate the abolition

of all functional constituencies. I therefore urge Mr Paul TSE not to misunderstand them. These young people will definitely not ask for a functional constituency for the youth.

To be very sure, many other young people born in the 1980s will want to fight for a place in the establishment. I believe that there are bound to be such young people. But they must be young people who can be absorbed by the establishment through appeasement. Such young people may be princelings, that is, the children of high-ranking party cadres. But those "post-80s" outside who drove the opposition to XRL funding just could not care less.

Our Government claims that it wants to listen to young people's views. However, in the course of implementing the recent campus drug test programme, has it ever listened to the voices of young people? Has it ever occurred to it that mandatory drug tests will harm the self-esteem of youths? They insist on requiring young people to leave their classrooms during lessons to receive urine tests and drug tests. They even say that this is something very common in school campuses. They have completely ignored the embarrassment experienced by a student who is jeered at by his classmates after being summoned outside during class. Therefore, the Secretary's Facebook account and other efforts are nothing but mere embellishment, completely devoid of substance. For instance, her Facebook forum is restricted to a specified time period. She fails entirely to realize that the most important feature of on-line discussions is the absence of time constraints. Some may make a comment at 3 am. Some may do so at 8 pm. Then, all participants may reach a consensus after 24 hours. The Secretary claims that she wants to conduct discussions in a mode that fits the patterns of life of young people these days. But what she produced is just an empty shell without soul.

In every age, there are always some passionate young people who question the *status quo*. Such is the impetus we should treasure. Young people's questions are a good proof of their critical thinking. They are thus a progressive force in society. Back in 1967, some of those sitting in this Chamber now were also young and passionate. But they have all returned to the establishment, right? The most adorable features of youth are endless possibilities, innovative mindsets and freedom from any old burdens. For this reason, while it is true that this generation need our help to overcome their difficulties in securing employment and pursuing further education, I must state clearly that such

difficulties are not the reasons why the "post-80s" took to the streets. Besides the values of Central, what they are fighting for are alternative ways of life. What they are fighting for is a chance to carry on the Hong Kong story in their own language and ways.

Therefore, President, I hope that when all the "post-50s" here are discussing the new generation today, they can adopt the attitude of giving up their seats to the others and providing the new generation with hoes and tools. They should then give them a free hand to create their new world.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): This is not the first time that we discuss a youth policy. I remember that between 2000 and 2004 when I was a Legislative Council Member, we already discussed various issues relating to a youth policy. However, to tackle the youth issue, the Government, adults and those in the establishment must change their mindsets first. We must not think that, in our present roles, we must do this or that for young people. Others have not asked us to do anything. In the Express Rail Link (XRL) incident, many people precisely said that the construction of the XRL is meant for the "post-80s", to enable them to enjoy more favourable economic benefits and development in the future. Sorry, young people have told us that they do not need us to formulate any plans on future economic development for them. They only hope that we can sit down and listen to their opinions. But I notice that adults, the Government and many other people do not realize that they must do so and think about the whole matter. Instead, they accuse those young people of storming society and being radical and violent. In the past, some criticized young people, labelling them in various ways, for example, "angry youth"; "non-engaged youth", meaning young people not engaged in further education and not taking up jobs after graduation; and, "hidden youth", meaning young people who spend all their time on the computer at home (but many such people have become IT marvels as a result). These days, we have also been talking about "radical youth".

To be frank, in the earlier days, say, 1967, some young people also stood forward for certain ideals (It does not matter how we think about these ideals), and they were even more radical. The Secretary was also a young man back then. He too "enjoyed" being ostracized by society at that time. He is now the Secretary. But why have all the past experiences failed to have any influences

on his mindset, and those of other senior government officials present? Why have they not thought about their ideals in their youthful days? From 1966 to 1967, there were actually many riots and youth movements. In the 1970s, there were also similar movements. At that time, the District Office and other government departments interpreted the phenomenon as a manifestation of young people's being excessively energetic. As a result, they constructed many additional community centres and youth centres and organized many more balls and parties for young people, so as to keep these young people within limits and ensure that they could give vent to their excessive energy. It was hoped that this could achieve social tranquillity. However, in the 1980s, I wonder if Members still remember the taxi strike during this period. Back then, many taxis were parked in Mong Kok, which induced a group of young people to rush there. The situation on this occasion was even more intense, or we can even describe it as violent. Even shop windows were smashed, and there was also looting. There were also some youth problems at that time. I remember that on my way home on that day, I heard some young people talk about a taxi strike. They considered that great fun, and they wanted to rush there. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, there was a stampede in Lan Kwai Fong when young people celebrated the New Year there. There was also the "boat-dweller" case. Many of the young people who were arrested or clubbed on the head by the police in the "boat-dweller" scuffle back then may have become Legislative Council Members. Years ago, they stood forward for some "boat brides" Many such incidents occurred because some young people wanted to come forward to speak for social justice and progress.

What sorts of violent acts have this group of young people committed today? They tried to pull down mills barriers and sat around in circles, and their only hope was to deliver some messages and express their views. They hoped that the Government could listen to them. But they have been dismissed as radical and violent. In fact, I appreciate these young people very much. On that day, simply because of the sit-in they staged outside, several Members and government officials were stranded here and did not dare to go out to face them. Was it really such a big deal? I actually saw several Members walking out before a big crowd without any trouble. However, some Members were cornered by these young people, or they thought that they were cornered by them, so they did not dare go out to face these young people. It is just a question of mentality, and I hope the Government can change its mindset. We do not have the ability or lofty ideals to assist these young people in building their own

kingdom. This is not the case and we need not do so. Everybody only needs to calm down and listen to what these young people have to say, get to know their thinking, and understand their needs. In this way, we can draw on the collective wisdom and consider how their needs can be catered for, thus enabling them to participate in social affairs and realize their ideals in society.

President, speaking of the motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che today, apart from expressing our views on the youth, we also wish to raise a very significant issue, that is, the unemployment of young people. And, I would like to discuss this issue at some length here. The fact is that youth unemployment is still a very acute problem now. Admittedly, there has been a small drop in the youth unemployment rate, but this is only due to a slight improvement of the market situation arising from the massive recruitments in the construction and banking industries. The difficulties faced by the youth still exist. As mentioned by the Chief Executive sometime ago, he was worried that there might be a double-dip recession. This means that after reaching the bottom, though there may be a slight rise, the economy may simply start declining again. I am afraid that, in the absence of a sound economic basis, that is, without any new types of jobs and appropriate manpower training, it may be difficult to alleviate the problem of youth unemployment.

The Democratic Party therefore hopes that when formulating the Budget, the Government can give more thoughts to providing a greater variety of training programmes that can cater specifically for the needs of young people and social changes. Secretary Matthew CHEUNG likes to sell the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP) and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS), saying that they will be improved. But I hope that, apart from selling these programmes, he can make better efforts. It is a pity that he is not present today, and only Secretary TSANG Tak-sing is here. In fact, after-sales services are very important. Can the Government assist young people in actually securing employment after their completion of the YPTP and the YWETS, so that they can have long-term and promising prospects? I hope that rather than leaving this task to the Secretary and government departments for consideration, the Government can invite young people to take part in discussions, so as to give them an opportunity to participate and do something for their own ideals. Thank you, President.

DR MARGARET NG (in Cantonese): President, at the very beginning, I did not intend to speak on this motion topic. But Mr Paul TSE talked about my role in the Legislative Council a moment ago. I realize that he may not necessarily know what I have been trying to do in the Legislative Council. I therefore wish to make it very clear that I am a Legislative Council Member today because up to this very moment, a majority of the electors in the legal sector still consider that functional constituencies are not in line with fairness and must be abolished. They think that the person representing them must use his or her vote as a means of seeking the early abolition of functional constituencies, so as to discharge the duty entrusted by the public. President, it is not difficult to find people who want to run in functional constituency elections. But people who want to run in such elections with the main aim of abolishing functional constituencies are relatively hard to come by. Therefore, very unfortunately, I have been staying in the Legislative Council for one term after another.

President, in regard to Mr Paul TSE's proposal on establishing a functional constituency for young people, I must express my objection. I know that some may support such a proposal. It seems that certain bodies and organizations which claim to be representing the new generation of social elites are in support of functional constituencies. But, President, the "post-80s" that opposed the Express Rail Link (XRL), and defended the Queen's Pier and the old Star Ferry Pier do not belong to such a new generation of social elites. In the movement against the XRL, we got a very clear message that functional constituencies should be abolished. It was precisely due to the presence of functional constituencies that XRL funding was endorsed. Therefore, it will be very ironic to establish a functional constituency especially for them to show our appreciation of them.

I have listened to many views today, and I find that all of us are still influenced by the old mindset in varying degrees. I consequently think that Mr Ronny TONG's amendment, which advises against the adoption of a paternalistic approach and mindset, is the only proposal that can address the very crux of the problem.

On Sunday, I read an article in *Ming Pao* written by a representative of the "post-80s", CHAN King-fai (He has never called himself a representative, but the mere mentioning of the "post-80s" will immediately remind many people of him). In this article, he discusses how the old mindset should be shattered. The

implication of this is that the present Government, government officials and Members are still looking at the new generation's participation in public affairs within the framework of the old mindset. Honestly speaking, I very much admire the new generation who opposed the XRL. To begin with, I have observed that the new generation have a very strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong. They are quite unlike the young people in the past. When we were young, despite all our concern about the culture and future of Chinese people, we often wanted to leave Hong Kong as we thought that there were too many limitations in Hong Kong, and we wanted to study abroad. At that time, some young people returning from their studies overseas thought that there were not too many opportunities and not too much room for their development in Hong Kong. In contrast, the new generation have a very strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong. They also have a high native awareness, thinking that they must stay here. They do not cherish any great hope about Taiwan, and they also have strong reservations about the political authority of the Central Authorities. There are no problems with them, for their roots are mainly in Hong Kong. They think that they have the right to participation. And, they are committed to the future of Hong Kong, because what they support, such as the conservation policy and urban planning, cannot bear fruit overnight. They are not fighting for a swimming pool or an amount of funding. Rather, they hope that, with long-term planning, Hong Kong can become their ideal home over time.

I can therefore observe that they have taken similar actions and they want to express the idea that Hong Kong belongs to us all. I greatly admire their approach. First, their central theme is the adoption of peaceful and happy demonstrations. They believe that, in many cases, things can be fought for delightfully, rather than angrily. They have bypassed many limitations of the law. If they are not allowed to participate in politics, they will do so in their own ways. Can we stop them from participating? If they are not allowed to enter the Chamber, they simply broadcast the discussions in this Council to those outside, so that they can listen directly to Members' speeches in this Chamber. They can directly discuss and comment on the remarks made by each and every Member, and they are capable of transcending many limitations.

I therefore think that the approach of the new generation is very innovative and knowledge-based. They give well-informed opinions, and they do not put any questions to Members on the spur of the moment. They do plenty of

research and think deeply about matters. I think this group of young people are much wiser than us.

President, we do not intend to have a functional constituency to fight for the interests of a sector, that is, the youth sector. Young people want to participate in Hong Kong and all over the world. For this reason, in politics, we should aim at the mainstreaming of young people's ideas. I am much honoured to be a member of the Civic Party, for we are very receptive to the views of the youth, and they have also injected vigour into the Civic Party.

President, I support the Government's being more open in accepting young people but I oppose the establishment of such a functional constituency. Thank you.

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

MR ALBERT HO (in Cantonese): President, having listened to many Members' speeches, I must say that the debate today is rich and varied. What I am going to say may not be anything new but I will try to sum up the main ideas.

First, we naturally do not oppose — we even support — the Government's considering the formulation of a comprehensive youth policy, so that young people can be provided with more opportunities of development and growth. If we are to do this job well, we must have a clear grasp of issues at two levels. First, we must realize the objective social environment and circumstances faced currently by the youth. Second, we must understand the mindset and mentality of young people nowadays. On the social environment and circumstances, many Members have just commented that in respect of the economic environment, as the Government frequently says, there is a need for economic restructuring and an M-shaped society, there is a lack of social mobility and the difficulties faced by the children of poor and lower-middle families in climbing up the social ladder. All these circumstances account for the plight experienced by young people nowadays. In the case of those young people without any special family background, the unemployment rate is particularly indicative of their difficulties in securing employment. Besides, the greatest fault of the Government is that it has failed to foster a fair social environment, one in which

everybody can enjoy fully equal opportunities, thus, there is poverty and a disparity between the rich and the poor.

Second, as mentioned by many Members just now, when we try to tackle youth problems, we invariably adopt a paternalistic attitude. I have always held the view that the Commission on Youth and the Family Council have never been able to shake off the influence of a paternalistic attitude. Mr Ronny TONG already mentioned this point just now, and I strongly agree with him. Mrs Regina IP also made some very good points about operational matters. The examples cited by her can already explain everything, so I do not need to say anything else here. In many cases, when the Government handles this issue, it wants to play the leading role and achieve a certain degree of control. It does not want young people to step beyond the line and go out of control. When such an attitude is adopted to encourage young people's participation, how will the end-products be like? Simply put, young people will all be like canned food, in the sense that they will all be of the type the Government wants them to be. Is that something we want to see? I hope the Government can have some reflections.

The youth are whom we want to understand. Members with social work training will say that understanding young people must be based on the client-centred approach. In a free society, if we want to understand any person, we must first respect him or her as an individual having his or her own personality, ideas and values. This is important. One must never attempts to shape them or think that one has somehow grasped the truth. Less still must one ever think that people can be taught to love the country and Hong Kong. This is inadvisable. Actually, if people can be brought up in a wholesome and liberal environment, they will slowly have the moral values expected of individuals. They will have a sense of responsibility and proper moral values. I do not think authoritative teaching is necessary. All such values can actually be experienced and felt by every individual living in communities. They can also be cultivated through gradual and unnoticeable influences.

In any society, especially our present-day society, the presence of many unfair phenomena has made some young people extremely discontented with the *status quo*. They have their ideals. Since they want to rectify social unfairness and make their ideal society come true as quickly as possible, they hope that we can sympathize more with their ideals. They are dissatisfied with the *status quo*,

but they are not prepared to resign to and succumb to adversity. As a result, they want to fight for what they want in their own ways. This is only normal and healthy. If a society, a community or even a country is devoid of such a force, how can there be any social progress?

Very often, we may find more passionate actions that may impact the established order. But such actions can actually make us have reflections. You may think that it is an ideological revolution and a cultural uprising. But even if it is really a revolution and an uprising, what is the problem? By storming the *status quo*, they want to ask us to consider some issues again and to look for and set a new orientation. The proposals of the new generation may not necessarily be correct or immediately practicable. But they can make us think. I must confess that I have been engaged in Hong Kong politics for more than a decade, but it was not until just a few years ago that I started to learn from and reflect on the social movements of the youth. The traditional issues we discuss are often about transport, housing or poverty. And, we did not realize our lack of new perspectives until several years ago, when the movements to preserve the Star Ferry Pier and the Queen's Pier broke out, and when the movement of native awareness re-emerged. I can only say that I will hold fast to my position. I also hope that those who take part in politics and the Government can humbly go on having reflections and learning. Only then can we make progress and have innovations.

Thank you, President.

MS AUDREY EU (in Cantonese): President, first of all, on behalf of the Civic Party, I must state clearly our position on certain parts of Mr CHAN Hak-kan's motion. One of his proposals is re-launching the Home Starter Loan Scheme and resuming the provision of a suitable quantity of Home Ownership Scheme flats as a means of relieving the home purchase difficulties faced by the youth.

President, the Civic Party totally agrees to the construction of HOS flats. But as I already mentioned when I spoke on the previous motion debate, we think that prudent consideration and reviews are needed in respect of reinstating the Home Starter Loan Scheme. Following the implementation of the Home Starter Loan Scheme between 1998 and 2002, the Government found that there were many bad debts, amounting to as much as \$500 million, and the write-off rate was also as high as 3.2%. In addition, there were many cases of bankruptcy. That

being the case, it may not be wise to lightly re-launch the Home Starter Loan Scheme, especially when this is meant to help young people purchase their homes. We therefore have reservations about the proposal.

Many Members have discussed the problems faced by the youth today, and I strongly agree with them. I am one of the "post-50s", but there are three "post-80s" in my family. I have long since realized that it will be very difficult to get along with them if I continue to adopt a paternalistic attitude within a certain framework. We must respect their freedom, and very often, we must learn to analyse things from their perspectives. I think the most important thing is for us to lead or influence them by actions. In other words, "you have to lead by example". Many Members have mentioned the "post-80s" today, particularly their involvement in the Express Rail Link (XRL) incident. Regarding the XRL incident, I wish to particularly mention that the Chief Executive severely criticized those who opposed XRL. I think he was actually biased, and his words may produce opposite results.

Honestly, young people often have their own perceptions of how to get things done. We may not always agree to their approaches. But if we lash out at them and make severe criticisms, we may meet with even stronger reaction from them. Some have made criticisms because they think that those in power have done something wrong. However, rather than appropriately reviewing their own actions, those in power have criticized that others are wrong, saying that they oppose for the sake of opposing, that they have resorted to violence or they do not know enough about the issue, and that they do not realize that the XRL is meant for their benefits. This is actually the criticism that hurts most.

Many of the youth problems we have been discussing, especially their perceptions that society is full of grievances, that there is a wide wealth gap, and that society is unfair to them, can actually show that the Government needs to review and reflect on many aspects of its governance, its policies and the electoral system. I do not think that the Government's appointment of some people to those commissions or advisory committees on the youth can help solve the problem. President, I notice that, in the past one or two years, more and more people — not young people, but middle-aged and experienced people who have been doing things for the Government all these years — said that they did not want to work for the Government any more. They hoped that the Government would not appoint them to any advisory committees any more, because the Government might not necessarily accept their proposals and they might be

misunderstood by others. They considered that they were just used by the Government as some kind of embellishment. Therefore, the Government needs to review the entire consultative framework and mode of governance. If the Government adopts the same old approach and establishes advisory committees or appoints "political vases" to handle the "post-80s" issue, it will be going in the wrong direction.

There is something that worries me a lot. The Government now appears very trendy and has suddenly used Facebook and other means. Perhaps, as suggested by Mrs Regina IP, every Bureau Director may even open a social network account such as Facebook and Twitter. But can it communicate with young people by doing so? All these are nothing but mere gestures. The core issue remains whether the Government's behaviour can make people think that it is fair, and whether the various systems it implements can give equal opportunities to all.

When speaking on Mr TAM Yiu-chung's motion about the disparity in wealth just now, I already pointed out that when the Government's mindset is still confined to the trickle-down theory and allowing some groups of people to boost the economy, especially when the rich become ever richer while the poor feel more and more deeply that society is unfair to them, the Government's appointing more people to advisory committees or retaining functional constituency seats will only intensify the contradiction.

Therefore, President, we in the Civic Party support the original motion and the various amendments. Our only reservation is about Mr CHAN Hak-kan's proposal on reinstating the Home Starter Loan Scheme to help young people buy their own homes as we think that this issue should be handled carefully.

Thank you, President.

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

DR PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, the term "post-80s" has become very much a catchword in Hong Kong in recent years. Actually, it was a term coined on the Mainland. Its original meaning is related to the "one child" policy implemented by the Mainland following the launching of reform and

opening. An only child immersed in parental love and material affluence seldom faces any setbacks. Even the only child of a less well-off family may be paid attention to by six adults. Therefore, in the context of the Mainland, "post-80s" is a term describing the new generation that emphasizes individualism and personal freedom.

These days, this term has been repeatedly used in Hong Kong, and by now it has acquired a local meaning which is very different from its original meaning when it first appeared on the Mainland. But in both places, the term refers to young people who have just started working in society, and it also generically denotes a whole generation of people born in the 1980s.

No matter how "post-80s" is interpreted, the fact remains that it refers in general to young people aged between the early twenties and the early thirties, who are bound to be the pillars of societies in the future. But I think all the analyses of the "post-80s" in Hong Kong have gone to two extremes, and such analyses are sometimes one-sided. Many media professionals and academics describe the "post-80s" as a whole generation of disgruntled and wayward people who are against the establishment, the Government and those in authority. I do not think that such an interpretation is appropriate, nor do I think that it is fair.

Another argument is that the mobilization power of the "post-80s" is especially great due to the emergence of the Internet. It is said that many instances, such as their besieging of the Legislative Council Building to oppose the Express Rail Link (XRL), can be quoted to prove this viewpoint. And, their forms of protests are very radical, showing that this whole generation of young people are full of grievances and want to change the realities through various means.

I am of the view that all people, all "post-whatevers", must go through their twenties and thirties, and even the period of adolescent ideals after 17. I think young people in such age groups are mostly idealists or even perfectionists. We can observe that some of the young people concerned are also perfectionists. That is why they will not compromise. Maybe, this is a characteristic of people in this age group.

I remember that, in the 1970s, after a soccer match in the Government Stadium, some young people aged 17 or 18 (I still have a vivid memory of this) started burning newspapers and the whole street was in flames. Actually, they

were trying to give vent to their dissatisfaction with certain things, and their rage was "ignited" by a soccer match. In the end, the Government had to work out ways to deal with these young people.

I therefore think that we should look squarely at the "post-80s" issue. Actually, as in the case of the "post-70s" and "post-60s", some "post-80s" are also inclined to be part of the mainstream. They are willing to abide by the rules of the game in mainstream society. They want to engage in commerce, in literary work, politics, teaching or other occupations. Some are flippant, passionate and idealistic. Maybe, some are not down to earth, and may not change even when they reach the age of 40, 50 or 60.

There are such people in every age, and this group of "post-80s" may have chosen some novel methods, such as trekking. I think trekking is the newest method as hunger strikes and other methods can be found in all ages. We should look at these young people with an ordinary state of mind, recognizing that they are representative of a group of people in that age. They may be dissatisfied with the realities, or they may have difficulties in securing employment. As they are anxious, they have come together to voice their views in these ways.

There are two "post-90s" in my family, and I frequently discuss this issue with them. They once even told me, "Mom, we 'post-90s' are not like the 'post-80s'." I was initially puzzled, but I later found out that they frequently discussed such issues at school. Teachers will hold discussions with them, and they said to me, "'Post-90s' look at China and Hong Kong in a different way." So, I told them in return, "Your private tutor is also one of the 'post-80s'."

Actually, "post-80s" is not all about a certain form of behaviour. Some "post-80s" are Administrative Officers or Executive Officers. And, there are many more young people. We must be very clear about this. We are their predecessors, or, at least, we are no longer in our twenties and thirties. So, we should look seriously at how they tackle their problems.

Just now, I heard Ms Audrey EU say that the appointment of young people or their absorption by the establishment may not be very effective or desirable. But I hold the opposite view. If we want to tackle this new problem, we must know their ways of communication, and we must also find out how we can make these young people identify with us. I think that giving their representatives

opportunities to voice their views in the establishment is certainly better than not doing so.

My two "post-90s" once told me that they used to like Visual Arts, but that they had now changed. Recently, some youngsters in Form One and Form Two in two schools have also told me that Visual Arts is the subject they hate most because their schools require them to learn by rote. As a result, they said, half of the class cannot get a passing grade in the subject, and even the ones best at drawing cannot do so. Our government officials responsible for curriculum design must consider this seriously. In view of their development, we actually should review whether we are already lagging behind the times, and whether the ways they express their opinions should be considered normal. I do not think that we can immediately think of any solutions. But when it comes to this problem, I know that some "post-80s" teachers have recently led their "post-90s" students to participate in demonstrations. I have learnt this from the "post-90s".

We must therefore look squarely at how the entire system can absorb their generation. We must at least listen to the problems pointed out by the "post-80s". For this reason, I think it is very important for us to give them some sort of recognition in the establishment or through other channels.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, you may speak on the six amendments now. You have up to five minutes.

MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I wish to thank the six Members for moving amendments to my motion. This shows Members' concern about the all-round development of young people and their expectations about young people as the future pillars of our society.

Dr Joseph LEE's amendment mentions the need for youth empowerment; Mr IP Wai-ming proposes to provide vocational training as an alternative to

mainstream education; Mr KAM Nai-wai says that the youth must establish proper values, and he also proposes to establish a self-nominating process to enable youth representatives to recommend themselves for joining advisory committees and statutory bodies; Mr Ronny TONG adds many points to make the original motion more thorough; Mr CHAN Hak-kan proposes various concrete measures; and, Mr Paul TSE proposes to establish a "youth seat" in the Legislative Council.

Among all these amendments, I have reservation about Mr CHAN Hak-kan's proposal on re-launching the Home Starter Loan Scheme to enable young people to purchase their own homes. Given the current property prices, young people with their present salary levels may not be able to pay up their home mortgages even after working throughout their lives. And, in this way, the choices they can have in their lives will be greatly reduced. Life is not only about home ownership. I conversely think that more public housing units should be constructed, or the threshold for public housing application should be lowered, so as to give young people comfortable homes, so as to enable them to work hard in society and make contributions to it.

Mr Paul TSE thinks that young people should be enabled to voice their views in the Legislative Council. I agree entirely to this idea, and I also think that, as adults, we should be broadminded enough to accommodate and respect others' views. I believe Mr TSE also knows that I am against the existence of functional constituencies. I therefore cannot agree to the creation of a "youth seat" in the Legislative Council. I believe that if the Government can appoint young people to the various advisory committees and public organizations, they will be able to express their views and influence the Government's administration. After amassing experience, they may then stand in the direct elections of District Councils and the Legislative Council. Youth representation in the representative assemblies can then be enhanced.

Mr KAM Nai-wai proposes to set up a self-nomination process to enable young people to join the governmental establishment and offer their views. This is an innovative idea and a very good proposal. The reason is that young people who nominate themselves must be very confident and convinced of their own abilities. And, such young people must also be actively concerned about society. President, I think that if possible, the proposed self-nomination process should be extended to different age groups, because the Government's acceptance

of self-nominations from different age groups can show that it is broadminded enough to accommodate and accept both supportive and opposite opinions. This will have a very desirable impact on the Government's overall governance.

Since the coverage of a youth policy is so broad and deep, I have chosen to word my motion in the direction of providing a conceptual framework. The six Members' amendments will add to and perfect my motion, making it richer and more comprehensive. I express my gratitude to them here. President, I so submit.

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): President, I want to thank all Members who have spoken on the motion and the amendments today. I will respond further to a few points.

Under the SAR Government, various policy bureaux and their departments formulate appropriate policies and measures under their respective portfolios to serve young people with different needs or help resolve their problems. This is the appropriate thing to do. Of course, I concur with the importance of maintaining communication and co-ordination among various policy bureaux and departments. Take, for example, the Commission on Youth (COY). While the Home Affairs Bureau is responsible for providing secretariat support for the COY, the COY also has representatives from the Education Bureau, the Security Bureau as well as the Labour and Welfare Bureau as ex-officio members who are directly involved in the discussions of relevant youth topics.

There are clear targets of youth services provided by various bureaux and departments under different policy portfolios. The youth work undertaken by the Home Affairs Bureau is focussed on youth development which includes promoting positive values among young people, fostering their sense of belonging to the country and Hong Kong, broadening their international perspective, encouraging them to give full play to their cultural and artistic creativity as well as physical potential, developing their leadership skills and guiding them to participate in community affairs. The Education Bureau is responsible for formulating education policies and legislation so that young people can receive good education and develop their potentials. The Social Welfare Department operates integrated children and youth services centres, school social work services and outreach social work services through subvented non-governmental organizations with a view to providing young

people with a variety of preventive, developmental and supportive welfare services. The Hong Kong Police Force (the police) have in place various programmes to prevent young people from falling prey to the undesirable elements of society. For example, the police organize the Junior Police Call which seeks to enhance communication between the police and young people. The police also implement the Police School Liaison Programme which provides a platform of liaison among the police, teachers, school social workers and the community.

Many Members have said that the Government must listen, receive and respect the voices of young people. I totally agree with them. The SAR Government will strengthen contact with youngsters through different channels so as to understand their expectations about society and the Government. We will also strive to appoint more young people to various advisory bodies including the COY. However, I certainly do not agree with the saying that the COY is a "Commission on the Middle-aged". Just like the case today, even though there is no Legislative Council Member under the age of 30, we can still actively discuss youth issues.

Various government advisory and statutory bodies (ABSs) will strive to appoint the most suitable candidates as members so as to meet their needs. In the process of identifying suitable candidates, the ABSs can approach the Home Affairs Bureau to obtain personal information stored under the Central Personality Index for reference. Any individuals, including youngsters, who are interested in becoming members of the ABSs can submit their personal data to the Home Affairs Bureau and recommend themselves. The Government will gladly consider any suitable young persons for appointment to the ABSs under the principle of appointing individuals on their merits.

The SAR Government also works with many partners in carrying out youth work. There are many organizations and groups in Hong Kong dedicated to youth services. In recent years, different community organizations have set up youth committees and youth groups. With the joint efforts made by the COY, the Home Affairs Bureau has been rolling out various youth development programmes annually with the co-operation of different non-governmental organizations so as to nurture the versatile development of young people for promoting their physical and mental health, as well as building up their positive values.

As mentioned by Dr Joseph LEE, the COY has been encouraging young people's participation in meaningful volunteer service recently so as to promote their civic awareness and responsibility. Moreover, young people can also receive training on leadership and communication skills, as well as learn about understanding the needs of others.

In respect of school education, the Education Bureau has provided schools with a comprehensive curriculum covering knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that helps nurture all-rounded development of students. The Education Bureau encourages schools to adopt diversified learning models that help broaden the horizon of students and develop their generic skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and study so that they can cope with social changes and future manpower requirements. On one hand, the course content concentrates on teaching students the importance of upholding justice, developing a healthy life pattern and staying away from undue enticements. On the other hand, it also stresses the importance of cultivating positive values such as fair play, solidarity and friendship among students through practice.

Both Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr Andrew LEUNG spoke about the problems of youth vocational training and employment. To tie in with different aspirations and interests of young people, the Government has implemented the Apprenticeship Scheme to encourage young people to undertake formal on-the-job training so that they can gain access to different career development paths. Under the Apprenticeship Scheme implemented by the Vocational Training Council (the VTC), apprentices in different trades can receive systematic on-the-job training which includes day-to-day practical work and relevant educational courses. Currently, the Apprenticeship Scheme covers around 120 trades in an array of sectors including automobile, electrical machinery, construction and jewellery, and the relevant posts include mechanics, technicians, engineering assistants and designers. Apart from the Apprenticeship Scheme, the VTC has been providing a more flexible Modern Apprenticeship programme on a pilot basis in recent years. The programme aims to equip the youths through training and practical experience in order to enhance their employability for the service industries. In the 2009-2010 school year, about 3 300 apprentices receive training under the Apprenticeship Scheme and the Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Moreover, the Employees Retraining Board (the ERB) has implemented the Manpower Development Scheme (the MDS) which aims at providing training courses to local residents aged 15 or above with education level at sub-degree or below. Young people are one of the target groups of the MDS. In response to the special need of non-engaged youth aged 15 to 20, the ERB has collaborated with the VTC since 2008-2009 to organize courses under the pilot Youth Training Programme (the YTP). The YTP, offering 2 000 places each year, provides vocational training and foundation skills training while cultivating among the trainees a positive attitude to life and self-confidence. Upon completion of the courses, training bodies are required to provide trainees with job placement support services for six to nine months to assist them to secure employment or refer them for further study.

Regarding the views from some Members about the financial assistance provided to undergraduate students and the loan repayment arrangements, the Government's policy on student financial assistance is to ensure that no students will be denied access to education because of lack of means. Currently, the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) administers the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme to provide grants or low interest loans to eligible students. The grant is to cover tuition fees and academic expenses while the loan is for living expenses. Students who are unable or unwilling to go through the income and asset tests as well as those undertaking part-time publicly-funded programmes can also apply for non-means-tested loan schemes to cover tuition fees.

The Government appreciates that individual loan borrowers may encounter difficulties in repaying their loans and the SFAA has in place a mechanism to handle such problems. If borrowers are unable to repay their loans on grounds of financial hardship, further studies or serious illness, the SFAA will, on the basis of individual merits, approve deferment of loan repayment or temporary adjustment of the quarterly repayment amount so as to help the borrowers tide over the difficult times. To alleviate the financial burden of graduates in repaying student loans, the Financial Secretary announced in May 2009 the one-off relief measure on loan deferment to extend the total loan repayment period for a maximum of two years. Borrowers who apply for deferment during the period from 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2011 and whose applications are

subsequently approved, will be eligible for deferment from the repayment quarter following the date of application without interest charged during the approved deferment period.

President, in order to allow young people to achieve good and balanced development, the Government, non-governmental organizations, families, schools, voluntary groups, youth organizations, members of the community as well as the young people themselves must be actively involved in youth development work. The Government will continue to co-operate with all parties concerned so as to listen more to the views of young people, remain concerned about youth problems and carry out youth development work well.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Dr Joseph LEE to move his amendment to the motion.

DR JOSEPH LEE (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion be amended.

Dr Joseph LEE moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add "as the recent spate of social incidents have aroused public concern about the 'post-eighties' generation, and" after "That,"; and to add ", and promote youth empowerment so that their aspirations and dynamics can be transformed positively and properly into a driving force for social development" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Dr Joseph LEE to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion, be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr IP Wai-ming, as Dr Joseph LEE's amendment has been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment, as set out in the paper which has been circularized to Members. When you move your revised amendment, you may speak for up to three minutes to explain the revised terms in your amendment. You may now move your revised amendment.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE be further amended by my revised amendment.

Mr IP Wai-ming moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE: (Translation)

"To add ", and formulate integrated policies on vocational training and employment, so as to consolidate various existing measures which assist the youth in seeking jobs, and update the apprenticeship system to tie in with the transformation of economic structure, so as to provide the youth with another avenue to vocational training apart from mainstream education" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr IP Wai-ming's amendment to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr KAM Nai-wai, as the amendments by Dr Joseph LEE and Mr IP Wai-ming have been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment, as set out in the paper which has been circularized to Members. You may now move your revised amendment.

MR KAM NAI-WAI (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE and Mr IP Wai-ming be further amended by my revised amendment.

Mr KAM Nai-wai moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE and Mr IP Wai-ming: (Translation)

"To add ", and provide for a self-nominating process to enable youth representatives to recommend themselves for joining advisory committees and statutory bodies, and in formulating youth policy, it must encompass different areas such as subsidizing university education, and enhancing social services and leisure and cultural measures, so as to enable the youth

to utilize their creativity and vitality, develop an international outlook, establish proper values, strive for social justice and equality, and stay away from gambling, drugs and compensated dating, etc." immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr KAM Nai-wai's amendment to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE and Mr IP Wai-ming be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Ronny TONG, as the amendments by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai have been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment, as set out in the paper which has been circularized to Members. You may now move your revised amendment.

MR RONNY TONG (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai be further amended by my revised amendment.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you

MR RONNY TONG (in Cantonese): President, I thought you would allow me to speak.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): That is right. You may explain the terms in your revised amendment.

MR RONNY TONG (in Cantonese): President, in principle, I certainly agree with the original motion proposed by Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che and the other amendments. That said, as Honourable Members may realize, Dr Joseph LEE's amendment is only concerned about the "post-80s" and the issue of empowerment while Mr IP Wai-ming has merely expressed concern for employment. Mr KAM Nai-wai has highlighted the fact that the development potential of young people is subject to many constraints. Having summarized all these views, I hold that the main issue to be addressed is actually about the Government's attitude towards young people, as well as whether it is willing to take on board and respect their views, that is, abandoning its patriarchal governance philosophy. For these reasons, I hope that I could amend their amendments.

Mr Ronny TONG moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai: (Translation)

"To add ", and face up to the political and social aspirations of the youth, abandon the patriarchal governance philosophy, abandon nepotism in administration, commence a dialogue with the youth in various policy areas, including constitutional reform, infrastructural planning, conservation, poverty alleviation, economic development, educational reform, etc., actively review the deficiencies in the existing governance system and administration, and stop keeping under surveillance and suppressing the activities of youth dissidents" immediately before the full stop"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr Ronny TONG's amendment to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(Members raised their hands)

Mr IP Kwok-him rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr IP Kwok-him 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:

Dr Margaret NG, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Dr Joseph LEE and Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che voted for the amendment.

Dr Raymond HO, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Ms Miriam LAU, Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Dr LAM Tai-fai, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr IP Kwok-him, Dr PAN Pey-chyou and Dr Samson TAM voted against the amendment.

Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr Paul TSE abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Mr Andrew CHENG, Ms Audrey EU, Mr LEE Wing-tat, Mr Ronny TONG, Mr KAM Nai-wai, Ms Cyd HO and Mr WONG Sing-chi voted for the amendment.

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Ms Starry LEE, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Dr Priscilla LEUNG, Mr WONG Kwok-kin and Mrs Regina IP voted against the amendment.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 18 were present, four were in favour of the amendment, 12 against it and two abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 20 were present, 11 were in favour of the amendment and eight against it. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was negatived.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): President, I move that in the event of further divisions being claimed in respect of the motion on "Formulating a comprehensive youth policy" or any amendments thereto, this Council do proceed to each of such divisions immediately after the division bell has been rung for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Ms Miriam LAU be passed.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

I order that in the event of further divisions being claimed in respect of the motion on "Formulating a comprehensive youth policy" or any amendments thereto, this Council do proceed to each of such divisions immediately after the division bell has been rung for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Hak-kan, as the amendments by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai have been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment. Will you please move your revised amendment now.

MR CHAN HAK-KAN (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai be further amended by my revised amendment.

President, my amendment contains a point that has aroused the concern of Honourable Members from various political parties and groups. It is about

launching the Home Starter Loan Scheme for young people. I certainly understand that other Honourable Members worry a bit about this proposal, but I remember an occasion on which I had discussions with some young members of the Civic Party

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN, you may only explain the revised terms in your amendment now.

MR CHAN HAK-KAN (in Cantonese): President, I know that. What I wish to say is that many young people, including members of the Civic Party, also agree that efforts should be made to help young people strive for first-time home ownership. For this reason, I opine that Honourable Members, when voting, need to take into account the needs of our young people and the difficulties we encounter in our daily lives.

Thank you, President.

Mr CHAN Hak-kan moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai: (Translation)

"To add "; and in response to the above aspirations, this Council urges the Government to consider implementing concrete measures, including: (a) various principal government officials and bureaux to take the initiative to collect views on the Internet and maintain regular exchanges with the youth on the Internet, so as to understand their views on the Government's administration; (b) to designate a Youth Participation Week each year to organize youth activities or forums etc., so as to increase their opportunities to participate in social affairs; (c) government advisory bodies should include more youth representatives; (d) to strengthen moral education and education on national identity, and assist the youth in achieving comprehensive development in various aspects such as values, attitudes towards life, psychological qualities, leadership and cultural skills, etc.; (e) to alleviate post-secondary students' loan repayment burden by lowering the annual interest rate for student loans, and to make changes to the effect that the interest under the loan schemes will be calculated after a student has secured employment; (f) to make good use of the Hong Kong offices on the Mainland to actively collect information

of the Mainland on employment situation and legislation and regulations, etc., and to launch a Mainland internship programme for the youth, so as to assist young people who intend to work on the Mainland in seeking jobs or setting up businesses there; and (g) to alleviate the difficulties encountered by the youth in buying their own homes through re-launching the Home Starter Loan Scheme and resuming the provision of a suitable quantity of Home Ownership Scheme flats" immediately before the full stop"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr CHAN Hak-kan's amendment to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr KAM Nai-wai be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(Members raised their hands)

Ms Cyd HO rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Cyd HO has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for one minute.

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

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

Functional Constituencies:

Dr Raymond HO, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Ms Miriam LAU, Mr Abraham SHEK, Ms LI Fung-ying, Dr Joseph LEE, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Dr LAM Tai-fai, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr IP Kwok-him, Dr PAN Pey-chyou and Dr Samson TAM voted for the amendment.

Dr Margaret NG voted against the amendment.

Mr Paul TSE abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr LEE Wing-tat, Mr KAM Nai-wai, Ms Starry LEE, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Dr Priscilla LEUNG, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Mr WONG Kwok-kin voted for the amendment.

Ms Audrey EU, Mr Ronny TONG, Ms Cyd HO and Mrs Regina IP voted against the amendment.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 18 were present, 16 were in favour of the amendment, one against it and one abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 20 were present, 15 were in favour of the amendment and four against it. Since the question was agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Paul TSE, as the amendments by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr CHAN Hak-kan have been passed, I have given leave for you to revise the terms of your amendment. Will you please move your revised amendment now.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): In my view, there is no patent for the thoughts of "post-80s" youths. The main intention of my amendment is to call upon Honourable Members to boldly consider

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Paul TSE, you have to move your revised amendment first.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): Alright. I move that Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr CHAN Hak-kan be further amended by my revised amendment. As I said just now, since Honourable colleagues have basically advanced various views on this issue, I only hope to broaden further the possible scope of consideration, so as to make room for more creativity and bolder ideas. Certainly, what decision will eventually be made by Honourable Members is another thing, but I hold that, in a democratic and tolerant society, although the views of various parties may not sound pleasing to the ears, Honourable Members should be tolerant and listen. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's original motion wants to do a lot

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Paul TSE, you may only explain the revised terms in your amendment now.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): Alright. If I am to give an explanation, I actually do not need to speak for three minutes. Hence, I do not understand the reason for allowing me to speak for three minutes. I only strive by all means to say a few words more. (*Laughter*) Thank you, President.

Mr Paul TSE moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr CHAN Hak-kan: (Translation)

"To add "; and (i) actively consider creating in the Legislative Council a 'youth seat' with sufficient representativeness" immediately before the full stop"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr Paul TSE's amendment to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's motion as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr CHAN Hak-kan be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(Members raised their hands)

Mr Ronny TONG rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Ronny TONG has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for one minute.

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

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

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Paul CHAN voted for the amendment.

Dr Margaret NG, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Ms LI Fung-ying, Dr Joseph LEE, Dr LAM Tai-fai and Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che voted against the amendment.

Dr Raymond HO, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr IP Kwok-him, Dr PAN Pey-chyou and Dr Samson TAM abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Mr Andrew CHENG, Ms Audrey EU, Mr LEE Wing-tat, Mr Ronny TONG, Mr KAM Nai-wai, Ms Cyd HO, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Mrs Regina IP voted against the amendment.

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Ms Starry LEE, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Dr Priscilla LEUNG and Mr WONG Kwok-kin abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 17 were present, one was in favour of the amendment, six against it and 10 abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 20 were present, 12 were against the amendment and seven abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was negated.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, you may now reply and you have two minutes 48 seconds.

MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE (in Cantonese): President, this meeting spanning two days has already been held for 21 hours now and Honourable Members have had a hard time. Although my motion is scheduled to be dealt with the last, 17 Honourable Members have spoken on it and, I have to thank them.

There is one point that I actually wish to put across the most. We have had discussions for a long time, hoping that a youth policy can be put in place, so that young people, who are the future pillars of society, may regard the present as a starting point. Today, Honourable Members have referred to the "post-80s" a number of times, but what about the "post-90s" and the post-millennium generation? Or, what about those children still studying at kindergartens at present? The Government really has to formulate a youth policy to nurture them. I certainly understand that various policy bureaux have their respective goals, but as I said when moving the motion, every policy bureau has its distinct and particular areas of concern. That said, how does Hong Kong society as a whole and even young people view themselves as members of society? How does society nurture them? We actually need to have an overall policy, so that there is a general principle and objective for other policy bureaux to comply with in determining the measures to be adopted. A number of Honourable colleagues have proposed various ways to get into contact with young people. In my view, the means are not important, what matters is the attitude adopted by us when we do so. Today, many Honourable colleagues have also spoken on the attitude that should be adopted.

I hold that we, as Members of the Legislative Council, should care about young people holistically as they are the future pillars of society. At present, the number of young people in Hong Kong is decreasing because of the current one-child policy — it is not a policy but the existence of single-child families — make it more imperative for us to think about the roles to be played by these future pillars of society. What do we want our society to become in the future? We need to start working now. For these reasons, I hope that the Government will take on board the voices of the whole Council today and, consider thoroughly how a comprehensive youth policy can be formulated. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, as amended by Dr Joseph LEE, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr CHAN Hak-kan, be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): 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, who are present. I declare the motion as amended passed.

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Over the past two days, Honourable Members have raised a number of suggestions for the well-being of the general public. I believe that in the coming two weeks, Honourable Members will convey to Hong Kong people their best wishes for the Lunar New Year. That said, whether or not the suggestions and wishes would be realized is dependent on the meeting to be held after the Spring Festival.

I now adjourn the Council until 11.00 am on Wednesday, 24 February 2010, which is the 11th day of the first lunar month of the year Gengyin.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Six o'clock.