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## \$6.6 billion needed to spruce up rural areas

By DAPHNE CHENG

THE Government needs to spend \$6.6 billion — \$2.6 billion over budget — to improve the quality of life in the rural areas of the New Territories in the next ten years.

So says the outgoing Regional Secretary for the New Territories, Mr Michael Suen.

Mr Suen, who will soon take up his new post of Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, said the figure would be put in a report being prepared by a working committee chaired by the Secretary for Lands and Works. The report will be submitted to the Government in April.

Mr Suen admitted the Government had not spent enough in rural areas, but denied they had been overlooked.

"It is a matter of priority. The Government has focused on the new towns in the past because of limited resources and manpower and difficulties in resuming land. But now we have reached a stage where we can afford to pause and consider where to go from here," he said.

"That's why the Government appointed the working committee and is looking to branch out to areas outside the new towns.

"We hope in the 10 years ahead, we will be able to spend \$6.6 billion in improving the quality of life with the construction of infrastructures, the building of sewerage and drainage systems and the implementation of flood control measures."

Mr Suen leaves the City and New Territories Administrative Branch on Thursday, after being at the helm for slightly more than a year.

In his new job he will be taking on the work of the Deputy Chief Secretary, Mr John Chan, who will become the Secretary for Trade and Industries.

Commenting on his new appointment, Mr Suen said: "I will continue the work of Mr Chan and deal with the political development in Hongkong. It is a new challenge for me."

# Funding boost for technical training

By ANDY HO

FINANCIAL Secretary Piers Jacobs is set to boost Government funding for technical and industrial training by a significant 23 per cent for the next financial year.

Mr Jacobs will unveil a package in excess of \$600 million for the Technical Education and Industrial Training Department on March 1 when he delivers his 1989-90 Budget to the Legislative Council.

The amount will add up to \$703 million if funds for non-recurrent capital items such as installation of new equipment are included.

The bulk of the \$600 million recurrent fund for the department is earmarked as subvention for the Vocation Training Council (VTC), a statutory body with the task of running the territory's technical institutes and industrial training centres.

The council, founded in 1982, is chaired by industrialist Legislative Councillor Stephen Cheong Kam-chuen.

Part of the increased subvention will be spent on the existing courses offered by the VTC's eight technical institutes and 16 training centres.

The bigger budget share for the council will also enable it to introduce a new training scheme for the training centres.

Excluding non-recurrent capital funds, Mr Jacobs only allotted \$487 million to the department in his last Budget for the current financial year which ends on March 31.

Of which, 95 per cent was set aside to cover the

operation costs of the VTC.

In 1988-89, the total amount for the Technical Education and Industrial Training Department was \$535 million.

The Government spent \$403 million to run the VTC in the 1987-88 financial year.

The last budgetary increase for the VTC stood at less than 15 per cent.

The VTC currently keeps its finances on an annual basis, but there has been a call for budgeting over a longer period to make the council more flexible in meeting the changing needs of the economy.

At present, the VTC technical institutes are providing 12,600 full-time, 21,400 part-time day release, and another 32,000 part-time evening places.

Its 16 training centres, on the other hand, are offering 19,000 off-the-job places. About one in three of such places are for pre-employment students.

The programs on offer range from construction and hotel catering to design and chemical technology.

The courses are divided into the post-Form Three craft and post-Form Five technician levels.

While the technician places are generally fully subscribed, the council is finding it difficult to attract students to join the courses at the lower craft level.

Council officials observed that an increasingly bigger portion of the Form Three leavers have been moving on to formal Form Four education over the past few years.