

\$600m spent so far to stabilise slopes

By LOUIS LIU 13-2

More than \$600 million has been spent since 1976 to stabilise more than 380 potentially dangerous slopes and retaining walls.

Under the Landslip Preventive Measures Programme, expenditure is continuing at a rate of about \$65 million a year, in addition to an annual Government budget of \$40 million on slope maintenance.

Stabilisation works, at a cost of several hundred million dollars per year, are also carried out in both the public and private sectors in association with capital projects.

The main aim of the preventive measures programme is to reinforce rectified slopes and retaining walls which are not up to the desired safety standards.

The principal Government geotechnical engineer, Dr Edward Brand, said last month that the administration exercises strict control on the designs of new slopes. He added that there is an ongoing programme to rectify all unstable slopes.

The Geotechnical Control Office also carries out stabilisation works on man-filled and cut slopes which pose potential danger to nearby squatter areas but do not necessitate large-scale clearances, he said.

"It must be emphasised,

however, that these efforts cannot totally prevent landslips from occurring in densely populated squatter areas which do not lend themselves to adequate stabilisation measures," he said.

There are about 50,000 squatters living on potentially dangerous slopes.

Dr Brand said potential risk is increased by indiscriminate slope-cutting by the squatters and the lack of proper drainage in their areas.

He said it must be clear to anyone that the unstable areas are predominantly located on the steeper natural slopes,

where landslips have regularly occurred.

"These locations are generally obvious even to laymen and are common knowledge in long-established squatter communities."

Dr Brand noted that another cause of casualties on dangerous slopes is flimsy structures built by the squatters.

He said extensive preventive works are necessary to keep inhabited but suspect slopes safe during heavy rain.

"This scale of works, however, is not feasible as squat-

ters have to be cleared. But once clearance has been effected, there is generally no need for the preventive works to be undertaken.

"It is for this reason that the Geotechnical Control Office recommends to the Housing Department that squatters be cleared from such slopes, but these clearances can obviously only be undertaken within the capacity of the housing programme.

"Priority is only given to squatters occupying slopes which pose immediate danger to life and limb."