

立法會  
*Legislative Council*

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From : Clerk to the House Committee  
To : Members of the House Committee

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**Remarks made by Director of Environmental Protection  
during a Radio Programme Interview**

Further to LC Paper No. CB(2) 1560/99-00 dated 3 April 2000, I attach the Chinese translation of the transcript of Director of Environmental Protection's interview on "Hong Kong Today" on 29 March 2000 (Appendix I).

2. Members are invited to note that motion debates on subjects relating to the problem of air pollution were also held at the following Council meetings -

<u>Date of Council meeting</u>	<u>Subject</u>
19 November 1997	Concern for environmental problems in Hong Kong
21 January 1998	Liquefied Petroleum Gas Taxi Scheme
25 November 1998	Improving air quality
13 October 1999	Protecting the environment

Copies of the Officials Record of Proceedings of these motion debates are attached (Appendices II to V).

(Mrs Justina LAM)  
Clerk to the House Committee

Encl.

環境保護署署長於 2000 年 3 月 29 日(星期三)  
在"Hong Kong Today"電台節目中接受訪問的逐字紀錄本  
**Transcript of Director of Environment Protection's Interview on  
"Hong Kong Today" on Wednesday, 29 March 2000**

***Programme host :***

Well, to discuss the worsening air pollution, we are joined on the line by the Director of Environmental Protection, Robert LAW. Mr. LAW, good morning to you.

***Mr Robert LAW :***

Good morning.

***Programme host :***

Thanks for joining us this morning. Do you think it's time now for some introduction of emergency measures.

***Mr Robert LAW :***

Well, I was listening to what Selina had to say before and I couldn't agree more that this sort of air pollution that we are suffering is going to give Hong Kong a bad name from the tourists' point of view. The problem that we are facing, as I said to you yesterday morning, is that there is really very little that can be done to speed up the cleaning of the air quality problem. The problem is far more complex, I think, than some people think. And really there are no simple quick magic solutions to make it alright.

***Programme host :***

No quick simple magic solutions, but we seem or appear to have been putting up with this worsening air pollution problem for a long time now, and very little actions seems to have been taken.

***Mr Robert LAW :***

Well, I myself, I think, is probably more frustrated than you are about this, because we put before the Legislative Council about 5 or 6 years ago the problem and predicted it was going to get worse. At that stage, we proposed that we should change the diesel taxis and minibuses over to using petrol, using unleaded petrol and catalytic converters which could have certainly dealt with about 25% of the problem that we've got now. Unfortunately, we weren't successful in getting their support and the trade wouldn't support it either. What we have been doing since then is desperately trying to find other solutions that would be politically and also economically acceptable to the

trade. I think most people are probably aware that we're trying to get the taxis and minibuses now to change over to LPG gas as quick as possible, but there are practical difficulties with that. As I mentioned yesterday.....

**Programme host :**

Yes, but people who phoned us often said that why can't the LPG stations be built. What's the problem with building these stations ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, the simple problem is that when you have compressed LPG gas, you have a potentially hazardous situation. You can't just put them in any old place because if there is an accident at one of these stations through the filling operations, then it could be potentially, extremely serious.

**Programme host :**

So, we're not going to build these stations?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

We are building these stations, we are building them as fast as we can. They take time to build as well.

**Programme host :**

Why do you have to get the support of the industry or the taxi industry ? Why can't the Government just tell them they are going to have to change ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, I would love to do that. Last time we tried that and we didn't get the support of the Legislative Council for the legislation.

**Programme host :**

So, the legislators were letting you down ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, certainly the last time. We have their support this time, but I am afraid that the technology that we are having to use takes time. We have to bring in special LPG vehicles, we have to get filling stations, etc, as I have mentioned before.

**Programme host :**

Is it reluctant support from the legislators ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

I don't think it is reluctance this time. I think, probably, the difficulty was that the last time when we were warning them of the difficulties we were going to have with the air pollution problems, they were not so self-evident. This time it is there for everyone to see with the haze, and everyone is noticing at the moment. But I would like to make one other comment. We are able to deal with the situation on our own doorsteps through these measures. But if you travel between here and Guangzhou today, we will find that it is just as hazy all the way to Guangzhou. There is a quite a serious regional air pollution problem that has now developed, and we need to work with our counterparts in Guangdong to help resolve that as well.

**Programme host :**

It seems there is plenty of exchanges between you and your counterparts but very little action.

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, again, I am afraid there is no quite magic fix to this. Economic development tends to mean a lot more vehicles on the road, a lot more factories and that means a lot more pollution. Just the same as it is in Hong Kong, as our economy has grown, we are producing more waste. They are experiencing exactly the same problems.

**Programme host :**

And producing more children who have suffered from breathing difficulties, elderly people having to put up with this pollution, and therefore the resultant strain on medical and health services.

**Mr Robert LAW :**

That's right. But on other point I would like to make, and this might be surprising to you. Whilst we have got some quite obvious significant air pollution problems here, there are many different types of air pollutants and the ones that we suffer from here most often have to be quite visible. But many other major cities in the world, including London and New York, have got higher levels of certain air pollutants than we have. It's just that those forms of air pollution are not so visible.

**Programme host :**

But we are a pretty small place, something like seven million people, it would not be too difficult perhaps to prevent cars from coming into the busy areas, for example, by not allowing any cars with odd numbers at the end of their license plates to enter on certain days of the week, something like that.

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, that have certainly been done in some cities in the world when the air pollution level gets to the danger level. We haven't actually that position yet.

**Programme host :**

Why don't we stop it before it gets to that level ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

Well, that's certainly something for our transport colleagues to think about. But, as I say, we certainly haven't got anywhere near to the danger level yet.

**Programme host :**

Do you press your transport colleagues to perhaps re-think this whole thing ?

**Mr Robert LAW :**

We are working with our transport colleagues on a number of initiatives, including the pedestrianization scheme that the Chief Executive announced late last year, and they are pressing ahead with those as quickly as they can get them in place.

**Programme host :**

Mr LAW, thank you very much indeed.

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**CONCERN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN HONG KONG**

**DR TSO WONG MAN-YIN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move the motion on the concern for environmental problems in Hong Kong, which has been printed on the Agenda.

Environmental problems in Hong Kong are deteriorating every day. We are faced with many difficulties and problems in terms of the air, water, noise and waste. Since the publication of the 1989 White Paper "*Pollution in Hong Kong — A Time to Act*", government policies on protecting the environment have however still left much to be desired. There is indeed a need for the Government to probe deeply into the problem so as to draw up a package of effective and comprehensive policies on environmental protection to create a comfortable and healthy home for ourselves and our next generation.

First of all, I think that the most pressing task of the Government now is to take effective measures to ensure that the various environmental protection initiatives will not be delayed, in order to prevent further deterioration of the pollution problem in Hong Kong and to safeguard public health. For years, the Government has only kept calling upon the public to take prompt action against pollution but failing to honour many of its own pledges on protecting the environment. The Progress Report of 1997 shows that out of the 46 pledges made, nine are behind schedule. With a slippage rate as high as 19.5%, it is very disappointing.

The Administration argues in defence that the delays are due to "unforeseen problems" but this is only an excuse for shirking its responsibility. In fact, that delays happen year after year is a reflection that the plans have not been well thought out and there is a lack of consultation. The Administration should conduct a comprehensive review on the existing planning procedures as soon as possible to ensure that its environmental protection efforts satisfy the technical, legal as well as public demands, so that there will no more be delays caused by "unforeseen problems". Moreover, the Government should also give the public a detailed account of the delays to enhance its accountability and transparency rather than running it through hastily in the work report with a few lines.

The success of environmental protection efforts hinges on public support, without which the effectiveness of the work will be compromised. Therefore, to enhance the education on the public on environmental protection is crucial to achieving the goals. If the Government fails to obtain the public's support, it will of course be hard to encourage the people to participate in protecting the environment, and when there are voices of opposition in the community, it will be even harder to get things done. Hence, I urge the Government to allocate more resources to step up education on environmental protection and at the same time review the existing public education work on environmental protection to ensure the effective use of resources.

Madam President, to protect the environment effectively, it takes more than the Government's efforts alone. It also requires the co-operative efforts of the community at large. To enhance public awareness of environmental protection is indeed a subject of environmental protection education. But how to give the industrial and commercial sector the incentive to contribute their efforts is also another question that warrants our consideration.

Hong Kong is a capitalist society and to make profits is the fundamentals of industrial and commercial operations. Therefore the Government should draw up a suitable mechanism that offers incentives to motivate the industrial and commercial sector to take part in the environmental protection work. The Waste Reduction Plan and the trial scheme for the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) taxi will be the highlights of our environmental work, which will have a decisive effect on the success or otherwise of our management of exhaust emission and waste. However, it seems that there are insufficient incentives in these two schemes.

Let me talk about the Waste Reduction Plan first. To alleviate the waste problem in Hong Kong, in addition to reducing the generation of waste, the most important task is to recycle the waste and the support of the waste recycling industry is therefore indispensable. I think that the Government should assist the recycling industry in three aspects:

First, as the biggest consumer in Hong Kong, the Government should take the lead to buy recycled products in order to create favourable market conditions for the recycling industry;

Second, the Government should render technological support by bringing in new machinery and sell it or let it to the recycling business at low costs, and it should also give

suitable technical support to upgrade the quality of recycled products; and

Third, the Government should extend necessary financial assistance such as tax concessions to the industry.

Without market demands, modern technology and the injection of capitals, there is no way that the recycling industry can develop. Then, Hong Kong may possess many good recovery systems but the waste recovered would still have to be shipped to the landfills.

In addition, concerning the LPG taxi scheme, as far as I understand it, the scheme is basically well-received by the trade. But they are worried that the Government would take this opportunity to raise the fuel tax on LPG and require the trade to use the vehicles made by the original manufacturer. They fear that it will increase the costs of using LPG as fuel and some of them may flinch at this scheme. Therefore, we ask the Government to exempt LPG fuel from tax and establish a fund to extend low-interest or interest-free loans to the trade for making the switch.

I have said this with the hope to expedite the work in the coming years. In the long run, the Government should devise a comprehensive mechanism whereby incentives are offered for development and introduction of cost-effective environmental protection technologies.

Madam President, to improve Hong Kong's environment, we should start from the long-term planning and policies, putting our emphasis on sustainable development of the environment. Piecemeal policies on environmental protection are already out-of-date! The Chief Executive has said in the policy address that he will ensure that consideration of how to sustain and enhance the environment is built into strategic planning and policy-making. However, in drawing up new policies, the Government has been seen to have maintained the imbalanced situation of "putting the economy on top of the environment", for while the policy address can be said as all-embracing in terms of economic policies, it is devoid of constructive initiatives in environmental protection.

I have no intention to deny the importance of economic development, but I am worried that the sluggish environmental protection effort cannot catch up with the rapid economic growth. The massive housing construction scheme is in full swing now but the

conservation policy announced in 1996 and the consultancy study on sustainable development in the 21st century have been put off. We will not get an account of the former until 1998 while the latter is delayed until this year and it is expected that specific policies will not be drawn up until 2000. We can see that our environmental protection efforts are ever playing a catch-up game with the rapidly developing economy.

I am worried that in order to build the target number of housing units, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government will accelerate the decay of our environment. Although the Government has pledged to take remedial measures, we have to understand that prevention is better than cure. It is far better to protect the ecosystems beforehand than to remedy the damages made afterwards. Besides, some ecological resources are irreplaceable; once they are damaged, they will never recover. Even from the economic perspective, environmental protection is not a luxury but a long-term investment. It pays far more to make investment in protection beforehand than to remedy the damages afterwards. It is not hard to image that had the Government paid due attention to the maintenance of the landfills over a decade ago, there is no need for it to spend over \$300 million to maintain them now.

If we continue to disrupt the ecosystems in the course of economic development, Hong Kong may ultimately degenerate into a first-class economy with an abysmal environment. Today, we have entered into a new historic era; Hong Kong is no longer a borrowed place, a borrowed space. The SAR Government is capable of formulating forward-looking strategies on economic construction, welfare, education and so on; by the same token but in the environment context, it should also see the need and be capable of drawing up long-term, concrete and progressive environmental protection strategies to make sure that economic development and environmental protection can go hand in hand to the benefit of each other.

Madam President, to improve the quality of our environment, our efforts of course play a very important role but environmental protection transcends physical boundaries. To some extent, it also takes the co-operation of our neighbouring regions, especially the Pearl River Delta area, to improve our environment.

The Hong Kong-Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group was set up in 1989 to handle pollution problems on both sides of the border. Looking back on all these years, the work of the Group has indeed remained on the liaison level. Other than the exchange of data, experience and visits, little have they done on substantive matters. Most of the time, they have only studied and monitored the pollution problems, with little effort in the way of tackling specific cross-border pollution problems that require immediate action.

In recent years, polluted air has been carried here by the wind, the water quality of Dong Jiang keeps worsening, and the polluted water from the Pearl River Delta continues to flow into our waters, threatening the ecology in Mai Po Nature Reserve and the sheer survival of the Chinese White Dolphins. The co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong has completely failed to address these environmental problems. There is a genuine need to review the mechanism and mode of their co-operation now.

From the organizational perspective, the ranks of officials on the Liaison Group are too low to have sufficient authority to have the final say in environmental work, resulting in repeated delays and hindrances. Therefore, the Liaison Group should be upgraded with officials of a higher rank at the helm to make the final decisions for the co-operative programmes of the two places. Besides, "working teams" should be set up in the Liaison Group to specially execute resolutions passed by the Liaison Group, so that the co-operation between the two sides will not just stop at the study and monitoring level.

Moreover to deal with the specific pressing tasks, the Guangdong and Hong Kong Governments should strengthen their ties by enhancing the frequency of meetings, setting up standing committees. At the same time, they should further publicize the information on the co-operation between the two governments and enhance the transparency of their work so that scholars, experts, the industrial and commercial sector and also the community at large can all participate in the work for the benefit of collective wisdom. Madam President, although the "one country, two systems" policy is implemented as regards the politics of China and Hong Kong, we have to keep in mind that there is no "one country,

two regions" in pollution.

With these remarks, I beg to move.

**Dr TSO WONG Man-yin moved the following motion:**

"That, as the environmental pollution problems in Hong Kong have become increasingly serious in recent years, this Council urges the Government to:

- (a) adopt effective measures to ensure that the various environmental protection programmes will not be delayed, so as to safeguard public health;
- (b) set up an incentive mechanism to facilitate the development and introduction of cost-effective environmental protection technologies;
- (c) extensively consult the public and expeditiously formulate long-term, concrete and progressive environmental protection strategies, so as to ensure that a balance is struck between economic development and environmental protection; and
- (d) enhance the function and transparency of the Hong Kong-Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group and promote co-operation with the Mainland in cross-region environmental protection programmes relating to waste disposal, water and air quality, and so on."

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That, as the environmental pollution problems in Hong Kong have become increasingly serious in recent years, this Council urges the Government to:

- (a) adopt effective measures to ensure that the various environmental protection programmes will not be delayed, so as to safeguard public health;
- (b) set up an incentive mechanism to facilitate the development and introduction of cost-effective environmental protection technologies;
- (c) extensively consult the public and expeditiously formulate long-term,

concrete and progressive environmental protection strategies, so as to ensure that a balance is struck between economic development and environmental protection; and

- (d) enhance the function and transparency of the Hong Kong-Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group and promote co-operation with the Mainland in cross-region environmental protection programmes relating to waste disposal, water and air quality, and so on.

Does any Member wish to speak? Dr Raymond HO.

**DR RAYMOND HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, as our economy continues to develop, Hong Kong people are becoming more and more environmentally conscious. The Government has reacted positively to this increasing awareness of environmental protection. In his recent policy address, the Chief Executive, Mr TUNG Chee-hwa also mentioned our environmental protection programmes.

In fact, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) was upgraded to a full department recently with an expansion in its staff establishment. As the EPD actively conducts the work of environmental protection, the people of Hong Kong become more and more aware of the need for a better environment and are generally more knowledgeable about the work of environmental protection. However, it appears at the same time that the EPD is only concentrating its efforts on environmental protection without heeding the needs of our economic development. The EPD has tried to introduce into Hong Kong environmental standards which even advanced countries would have difficulties in compliance. Since these standards are too high that there are often difficulties in their implementation.

Environmental protection work generally gives people two impressions. First, that environmental protection and economic developments are in conflict, but this may not necessarily be true. Environmental protection has to be backed up by sufficient resources, and economic backwardness should not be used as an excuse for lack of environmental awareness. We can see from the examples of some developing countries that economic backwardness would seriously hinder the development of environmental protection; while on the contrary, more advanced industrial countries are invariably those which emphasize environmental protection. This phenomenon is not a coincidence, mainly because the successful implementation of environmental protection requires two prerequisites: the

people's awareness of environmental protection and the injection of government resources. In fact, a lot of resources are needed to cultivate people's awareness, for example, by way of education and publicity.

Therefore, we must formulate an enterprising environmental protection strategy transparent to economic development. Environmental protection policies in Hong Kong should be formulated in accordance with our local economic condition, instead of just applying the standards of advanced countries to Hong Kong. Once environmental policies are formulated, they should be actively pursued and backed up by sufficient resources.

The other impression environmental protection gives people is that, it will bring about better quality of living for people, but again this may not necessarily be true. For example, the erection of noise insulation walls or barriers on flyovers will undoubtedly reduce noise disturbances to residents living on both sides of the flyover, but they also create new problems at the same time. First of all, the noise barriers will block the view and air circulation of neighbourhood residences. Moreover, those barriers will amplify the noise disturbances for upper storeys, and thus the problem is only transferred to some other people. Therefore, in conducting environmental protection work, we have to consider all factors objectively and take into account the interests of all affected parties. On another level, we have to be aware of a very important fact, and that is, we cannot deal with the environmental protection work alone. Due to our geographical location, Hong Kong is closely linked with the Mainland in respect of our land, our waters and air space. Thus, we need to work with the Mainland in protecting our environment. I had mentioned earlier that economic progress is closely related to awareness of environmental protection, and since the Mainland has a different pace of economic development from Hong Kong, we may have different considerations in environmental protection. Only through close co-operation and frequent communication between Guangdong and Hong Kong, on the basis of mutual benefit, could the work of cross-border environmental protection be conducted smoothly, and the environment of both places improved.

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

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Choi-hi.

**MR CHAN CHOI-HI** (in Cantonese): Thank you, Madam President. I think the pollution problem in Hong Kong is in such a very dangerous state that we need to address it

again. Originally, our landfills can be used for over 10 years, but it takes only seven or eight years now to fill it up quickly.

For the atmosphere, our air quality index showed a record of over 100 for a couple of days a few months before. The potable Dong Jiang water is also polluted. Certainly, we may say that Dong Jiang water is not our problem and China should take control of it. However, we must understand that many of the major polluters of Dong Jiang water are factories set up by Hong Kong people in China. For our Chinese White Dolphins, the number left is very small, but still many of them are killed innocently by the propeller blades of ships plying between Hong Kong and China, and I have personally witnessed the whole process.

In fact, I wish to discuss Mr TUNG Chee-hwa's policy address. In the policy address of early October under the heading of "The Environment", he has mentioned only six points in relation to environmental protection. His main ideas can be seen in the following address, "let me put it bluntly, unless Hong Kong provides an environment that is good to live in, how are we going to attract or retain the talented and creative people that our businesses and economy need in order to grow?" From these words, I find that the so-called environmental protection concept of our Government or Mr TUNG Chee-hwa stresses much on the economy. Many Honourable Members have just mentioned that the Government is overly concerned with the economic aspect so much so that it is out of proportion. Moreover, I worry much about the condition of Mai Po. Last week, we have discussed the problem of protecting the so-called wetlands, and I have cast a vote against it. I am worried that whether our housing construction programme will affect the wetlands? Will it affect our Mai Po? Recently, there are rumours about further expansion of the Mai Po buffer zone. Is it a signal for direct conflicts between our future economic and housing development and the work of environmental protection?

Reviewing the work report, I find the performance of the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen LEUNG, is the worst among the many Secretaries. According to his Progress Report, he has failed to meet the targets for many initiatives. Is he too busy? Or does he have more important tasks to do? I do not understand why his performance is so poor. Nevertheless, with the establishment of the Special Administrative Region, I think we should apply a new way of thinking to the environmental protection problem. This new thinking should include, firstly, to inform Members of the objectives and the process of achieving the objectives; secondly, the schedule for implementation of the programmes; thirdly, the standards applied. Does it mean that these three elements are all we need for success? I think it may not be the case. The question

of how to enhance the citizens' awareness and how can the public participate in the cause is most important. Will the Government hold environmental protection summit meetings and invite environmentalists in Hong Kong and China, representatives of the Hong Kong commercial and industrial sector, scholars and citizens to take part?

How should the work of environmental protection proceed a step further at the present stage? Have we done enough already? I feel that we need long-term planning. Nowadays, our home country has formed a concept of "sustainable development", and it has been made part of state policy. Environmental protection is one of the many factors in sustainable development. To put it simply, it is about how best to prevent our offsprings from suffering from our devastation of the environment. This is the simplest definition. However, the Government may need 30 months to define exactly what "sustainable development" means. It seems that it is now trying to find consultants to conduct a study; how absurd that it has to find consultants even for a definition, and to conduct the study for as long as 30 months. In fact, it is not necessary to spend such a long time on this. Instead, we can just check with the many departments or experts in China and they can tell us the definition of "sustainable development". There are a lot of related documents in China for the Hong Kong Government's reference and I believe the reference is very important.

Why do I talk about China? Several of our Honourable colleagues have just said clearly that the work of environmental protection does not concern Hong Kong alone. Though we can take this view before 1 July 1997, the environmental protection effort in Hong Kong must take the whole region into consideration after 1 July 1997. We must take into account Hong Kong, China, and the development of China as a whole. We must not consider ourselves only. We cannot carry out the sewage disposal scheme from our side only and turn our back to the sewage disposed. It will only transfer the problem to China and it does not work at all. I hope that the co-operation between Hong Kong and China on environmental protection can be improved and upgraded to a higher level. Not only Mr LAW, the Director of Environmental Protection should attend the related meetings, but even several of the officials sitting here including Mr LEUNG should also attend the meetings. Moreover, I hope that Hong Kong and China can expand the brief of the Liaison Group and set up a relatively systematic working committee to discuss environmental pollution problems of common concern to China and Hong Kong in order to find a long-term solution.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Siu-yee.

**MR WONG SIU-YEE** (in Cantonese): Madam President, it is perhaps because the costs of environmental pollution are too difficult to assess, or environmental protection is considered insignificant that the government decision-makers or economists tend to neglect the prices we have to pay for damages done by environmental pollution. However, I am glad to see Mr TUNG Chee-hwa, the Chief Executive to have said in his first policy address, "to achieve all that we hope for our business and industry, we need to put one thought at the heart of all our planning, the quality of our environment." The Chief Executive also said, "improving the quality of the environment is as vital as economic growth to improving our quality of life."

It is not difficult to see that the "so-called" environmental protection programmes previously introduced by the Hong Kong Government are totally founded on the principle of "putting the economy on top of the environment", as Dr TSO WONG Man-yin has just mentioned. Though Mr TUNG Chee-hwa has emphasized that economic development is the most important item on his agenda, he also thinks that environmental protection and other aspects will have long-term development only if we start with the economic aspect to ensure that Hong Kong can maintain its economic competitiveness. Obviously, when compared to the former Government, the present Government has improved in terms of its concern for the environmental protection problem.

However, environmental protection has taken up only a small part in the policy address which fails to make long-term planning for the environmental protection problem. Even though it has mentioned environmental protection, the goal is nothing more than attracting talents to stay in Hong Kong for development or for dwelling. It is clear that the SAR Government has not taken environmental protection as an urgent task, but only an aid to economic development. I am disappointed with this.

Madam President, none in Hong Kong will refute the importance of economic development. However, if economic development continually brings damages to the ecosystems, Hong Kong will end up as a superb economy with lowly environmental standards. Therefore, we must strike a balance between economic development and environmental protection. We need to understand that economic growth has a price tag that includes pollution and environmental deterioration; so while we try to solve the traffic

congestion problem by building bridges and roads, we should not focus on this alone and neglect the effects of air pollution to the residents nearby. Besides, we must be determined to improve the large-scale transportation system and urban planning. The most inexpensive and quickest way to increase supply of land is absolutely not by reclamation, but by speeding up redevelopment and reviewing the container terminal development programmes. Take Singapore as an example. In every housing development, they will reserve a piece of green area as well. I understand that Hong Kong is a small place with a lot of people, it is too difficult for Hong Kong to follow this example. However, in the long run, the Government should take environmental protection and greening the environment seriously when it carries out large-scale planning.

In order to maintain the continued prosperity of Hong Kong into the next century, the quality of our environment must cope with the demand from both Hong Kong citizens who are enterprising and well-educated, and the numerous tourists coming from different places of the world.

Our economy is placing increasing emphasis on the service industry which if developed further, must count on knowledge and wisdom. Those people who possess knowledge as their basic skill are highly mobile, thus, when the environment of Hong Kong deteriorates seriously, they may leave Hong Kong with their family and live in a place they consider to be more comfortable.

Besides, some foreign businessmen may decide not to do business in Hong Kong. Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in the Hong Kong economy. Although it is now experiencing a downturn, but it will probably backtrack on an upturn within a short time and grow vigorously till the next century. However, the poor quality of the environment will reduce the tourists' interest in visiting Hong Kong.

Environment protection is not an expenditure, but a long-term investment with high returns like education and technological development. As "prevention is better than cure", it is better to protect the ecological environment before damage than to take remedial actions after damage is done. In the financial perspective, it is not difficult to imagine that the cost of investing on environmental protection is far less than that of taking remedial measures after the environment is damaged. If we have noticed the maintenance problem of landfills more than 10 years ago, we would not have to spend more than \$300 million on maintenance and repairs now. It is wise and cost-effective to prepare for the worst. Environmental protection should also be like that.

Madam President, I do not agree with the Honourable CHAN Choi-hi's criticism against Mr Bowen LEUNG of his poor performance, but I agree with him that we must have innovative ideas and an enterprising spirit. The Hong Kong Progressive Alliance expects that our Government will stride forward with this goal.

With these remarks, I support Dr TSO WONG Man-yin's motion. Thank you.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mrs Sophie LEUNG.

**MRS SOPHIE LEUNG:** Madam Chairman, we are all concerned that Hong Kong's poor environmental condition has become increasingly serious. Some even blame the slump of the tourism industry on the environmental condition of Hong Kong. They say tourists do not appreciate being left in the carcinogenic dust of emissions from our heavy traffic. But, remember, the losses of dollars are only from tourists who must temporarily inhale Hong Kong air. Locals who permanently reside in Hong Kong must suffocate in the same air 365 days a year, resulting in preventable respiratory diseases of all kinds that cost billions of health care dollars. In fact, we have figures to show that respiratory diseases have increased recently both in types and case numbers. In addition, the amount of solid waste and sewage we produce has increased in direct proportion to our wealth. We are, in fact, throwing money away with our garbages.

As we all know, Hong Kong has three world-class, high-tech and extremely expensive landfills. Despite their sizes and capacities, they will be completely filled to the brim earlier than expected. Idealistically, we wish to have Hong Kong living up to his name, the "fragrant harbour of the East", where the air is as clean as the sky can be, and the ocean is as clean, so that we can all enjoy a comfortable and environmentally friendly home and lifestyle.

How do we go about trying to achieve just that? The Environmental Protection Department has done as much as they could under the limited circumstances they face. However, I believe we should further examine what is down-to-earth, what is achievable, and most importantly, what each and everyone of us can do. We should produce less waste, so that our landfills may survive longer. We should boycott environmentally unfriendly products and we should recycle as much as possible, such as pulp cans, glass jars and paper, and the list goes on. But mostly, we should begin with creating a better

awareness in Hong Kong of environmental issues and awareness of the effects of environmental conditions on health, lifestyle and the future, and awareness on the importance of maintaining the food chain and its relation to the ecological system, the earth at large and our own survival. We must educate the young to be innovative, responsible for their environment, and ultimately, their own future. We must teach the housewives practical ways of living a life that is environmentally sensible and money-saving. About money-saving, we must demonstrate to the elderly that environmentally friendly habits can save money. We must immediately change the Hong Kong frame of mind and take responsibility of our own home and our own environment.

Let us envision whatever it is that we hope for in the future of Hong Kong environment, because whatever it is, it is achievable, achievable because of Hong Kong's own vitality, our own innovation and our own ingenuity. Let the Government tap into this energy vigorously, so that it can lead Hong Kong into the 21st century as the green city we all dream for.

With these comments, Madam President, I support Dr TSO's motion. Thank you.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr IP Kwok-him.

**MR IP KWOK-HIM** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I believe when we get up and switch on the television every day, we are concerned with the social issues as well as the air quality index of the day. When we go to work, we may possibly see some garbage trucks on the street hauling rubbish to the landfills. We may have to cover our noses and hold our breath against the emissions from vehicles. Riding a ferry, we can see rubbish and greasy dirt floating on the sea. At night, when we are back home, we may be annoyed by noises from transport. All these problems subject Hong Kong citizens to different kinds of environmental pollution. Under these circumstances, how can we enjoy a quality living?

Madam President, it is undeniable that the Government has in recent years paid more attention to the environmental protection effort than in the past, and thrown in more resources to it. *The White Paper: Pollution in Hong Kong — A time to act* published in 1989 has introduced various policies and measures, many of which are being carried out, but a few have been delayed because of the progress of the projects, or the projects themselves having been rejected by the community as a result of technical or policy problems. Undeniably, it is necessary to formulate measures to remedy or prevent the recurrence of the same incidents. However, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of

Hong Kong (DAB) thinks that it is more important to look into the present environmental policy which treats the symptoms but not the disease. Take the central incinerator project which has been debated for years as an example. The Government originally suggested that only medical waste would be handled. However, when the relevant document was introduced in the Legislative Council, it was rejected by the Finance Committee at the time on the grounds of lack of cost effectiveness. If we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on the construction of incinerators only for handling medical waste, we would have failed to take into account the domestic waste problems. Moreover, we would have failed to explore deeply the role of incinerators in handling waste in the future. This government policy which is rash and lacks foresight only brings a temporary solution but not permanent measures.

In the face of development into the 21st century, the Government needs to adjust its overall policies. Nowadays, many developed countries have applied the concept of "sustainable development" in their planning for the future with a view to maintaining a balance in all aspects. It is a pity that the Government only began to study this concept early this year, and to realize development in this direction not until 2000 or after. During this period, I believe responsible officials within the Government will have this concept of "sustainable development" blank in their mind in making policies. Therefore, the question of whether the Government will take suitable measures in respect of the issue in order to dovetail with the future development of Hong Kong is an important subject for consideration.

Madam President, the present environmental policies in Hong Kong are far too passive as it is always the case that mitigation measures are made specific to each pollution problem or works project, ever lacking the initiative to improve the quality of the environment. The DAB thinks that the Government should try to expand the green areas, to make good use of the leisure areas and to put various kinds of green plants on the sides of roads. In major protection zones in the suburban areas such as Mai Po and Hau Hoi Wan, the Government should throw in more resources in order to honour its promise of protecting the wetlands. Of the various environmental protection initiatives, education and promotion among the public must be the most important. As environmental education is only conducted by local environmentalist groups with some financial support from the Government, it has not been quite successful over the years. The DAB thinks that the Government should formulate a series of policies on environmental education, such as to make environmental education part of the school curriculum; to promote environmental protection to the public through media; and at the same time, to encourage the commercial and industrial sector to use environment-friendly technologies more. This encouragement

includes preferences provided for the commercial and industrial sector like extra tax reduction to encourage them to use and accept environmental protection technologies. We should aim to promote and to improve awareness of environmental protection in all directions, and at different levels and classes.

In addition to doing its duties, the Government should also pay attention to the impacts of environment pollution to nearby regions, and it must co-operate with the Guangdong Government. Under the rule of Britain in the past, Hong Kong may not fully co-operate with the Guangdong Government, resulting in independent administration and inefficiency. Hong Kong is now a Special Administrative Region, and the Hong Kong Government should break through its previous geographical concept and handle the environmental problem with the mainland authorities together. The existing "Guangdong and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Liaison Group" acts only as a channel for exchange of information and opinions, grossly insufficient to tackle the environmental problems commonly faced by both places. Therefore, the DAB opines that senior officials from both Governments must co-operate on environmental policies, and jointly formulate policies on common concerns, such as conducting consolidated and in-depth studies on issues like protection of the wetlands, quality of Dong Jiang water and air pollution. Environmental protection is indeed a very long project, but I wish that we can join our efforts together.

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

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr MOK Ying-fan.

**MR MOK YING-FAN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I speak on behalf of the Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (HKADPL) in support of Dr TSO WONG Man-yin's motion.

A concept widely known among environmentalists is, "our existing living space and resources are borrowed from the future". A person with a conscience will take good care of the things he borrowed to ensure that he can return them intact. It will be even more so when we borrow these from our future generations. The Chinese always think that continuity and prosperity of a national group is important, so they do not mind the future generations will profit from the labour of the previous generations. However, it is a pity that we are "killing the hen to get the eggs".

I wish to discuss only two areas in Dr TSO WONG Man-yin's motion, that is, to give incentives to encourage development and introduction of cost-effective environmental protection business; and to strengthen the functions of the Guangdong and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Liaison Group.

Idle theorizing is of no use to solve the environmental protection problems in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a commercial city where people are commercial minded. To solve the environmental protection problem, if there is a commercial incentive everyone will initiate in doing it. Only when the Hong Kong people know that there is a chance to make a profit, and they know how to do it, somebody will do it naturally. In fact, environmental protection is an industry with the greatest potentials in the world now. According to statistics, there will be US\$ 200 billion sales before 2000. It is estimated that there will be US\$ 20 billion sales in the Asian alone. The European Union has specially set up an Asia-EcoBest Fund to help European companies gain a foothold in the Asian industrial market. We can see from this how important the Hong Kong or Asian markets are.

I wish to discuss here the environmental protection industry in Hong Kong. The environmental protection industry in Hong Kong is now only in its infancy. For example, we have only more than 200 resources collection companies in Hong Kong. The gross export value in 1996 was only HK\$ 8.6 billion. In addition, as the capital outlay for recycling industries is high, we have only one recycle paper company and one industrial oil collection and re-extraction company. Others are merely small-scale plastics and solvent collection undertakings.

If we were to develop environmental protection industries in Hong Kong, we must have two conditions, firstly, technology, and secondly, capital. Both of them need the Government's assistance and support. Article 119 of the Basic Law states that in formulating policies to co-ordinate development of various trades the Special Administrative Region should pay regard to the protection of the environment. This reflects that people from China and Hong Kong have high regard to environmental protection.

The HKADPL thinks that if Hong Kong introduces policies on environmental protection industries, it should do the following:

1. *Increase Resource Allocation*

The allocation for environmental protection in the 1997-98 expenditure Estimates is only 3.3% of the total expenditure, that is, only \$1.08 billion. This is a very small amount, and the Government should increase its allocation of resources to environmental protection, especially in the areas of enforcement of legislations, development of environmental protection technology and development of green products, which all need a substantial increase in resources to meet the demands of society.

2. *Provide Technical Support*

The Government should assist local organizations and companies in meeting international standards so as to break into the international market. It requires government co-ordination of resources in different areas, such as the universities, scientific research institutions, the Productivity Council and other official organizations. We should centralize our efforts to "tackle key problems", to solve issue, to research on new products in order to get twice the result with half the effort.

3. *Provide Direct Assistance to Hong Kong Enterprises to Develop Environmental Protection Industries*

For example, Hong Kong uses foam rubber at a surprising rate now. In fact, Beijing, Hangzhou and Guangzhou have already passed legislations to prohibit the production, sale and use of disposable foam rubber tableware that cannot be dissolved. Though the Guangzhou city has passed the *Provisions of prohibiting the use of disposable indissoluble foam rubber tableware in Guangzhou* on 1 September, it cannot be implemented until 1 January because of technical problems. However, in Hong Kong, this policy still remains at idle theorizing, not to mention legislation.

The Hong Kong Productivity Council held a seminar on "Environmental Protection Ordinance: Using Foam Rubber as Package Materials" to study this issue in the Hong Kong context. There are two solutions, firstly, by making substitutes, such as "paper mould" bowls and plates, and secondly, by collecting and recycling materials.

It will need only US\$ 800 000 to establish one such factory in Hong Kong. The Government can introduce related technologies to support the industry and it can well afford to offer special loans, tax concessions and product promotion assistance. Therefore, there is every reason for the Government to implement this.

Lastly, I would like to respond to the second point, that is, the work of the

Guangdong and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Liaison Group.

To strengthen the work of the Guangdong and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Liaison Group: as Shenzhen and Hong Kong share a common lot, when one place is polluted, the other cannot attend to its own house alone any more. Hong Kong people think that Hong Kong will not be polluted if the polluting industries are moved to the Pearl River Delta, but in fact, the sewage still flows back to Hong Kong, and it is us who are going to suffer.

Though the Guangdong and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Liaison Group was established in 1990, the Group holds meetings only once a year. The number of meetings and level of contact is therefore insufficient. The HKADPL suggests that the Group should be expanded to a co-ordination committee, like the China and Hong Kong Infrastructure Co-ordination Committee, to co-ordinate efforts in issues like environmental protection, cross-border pollution, difference in environmental standards and legislations between the two places, in particular, the issue of water pollution in the Pearl River Delta.

Such a committee should study the following problems:

1. to co-ordinate environmental protection legislation between the two places to facilitate enforcement;
2. to co-operate and co-ordinate environmental protection requirements for large-scale infrastructure developments;
3. to exchange information for joint monitoring of the environment; and
4. to encourage and arrange non-official and academic exchanges.

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

THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, DR LEONG CHE-HUNG, took the Chair.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr MOK, your time is up. Miss CHOY So-yuk.

**MISS CHOY SO-YUK** (in Cantonese): Madam President, Hong Kong has promoted education on environmental protection for quite some time, awareness of environmental protection is gradually rooted in the citizens' mind as they become well-aware of the meaning of environmental protection and its significance to human-beings. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to a certain degree to put the policies of environmental protection into practice. In order to allow the citizens' awareness of environmental protection to come into full play, the Government must introduce some incentives to get twice the result with half the effort.

Regarding the environmental protection problem, it is most appropriate if the Government and citizens can co-operate voluntarily. The Government must give financial and administrative support. For example, the waste collection rate in residential areas now is around 40% less than the collection rate in industrial and commercial areas. It is because there are various types of domestic wastes, but there are no garbage classification points nearby. Therefore, we cannot collect many of the recyclable wastes. In fact, if only the Government could make a little effort in this matter, we could have achieved good results. For example, the Government can set up garbage classification points in large housing estates, for the convenience of the citizens, to collect and dispose of the garbages.

At the same time, as Dr TSO WONG Man-yin has put it, in view of the fact that the development of waste recycling industry has been hindered as a result of difficulties in finding places to set up their factories, the Government should consider making land grants to the waste recycling industry for construction of factories in order to encourage the development of this industry.

On the other hand, although information technology is quite well-developed in Hong Kong now, environmental protection technology is somehow in a backward state. It is not surprising when people said, "the economy of Hong Kong is First World, but environmental protection is just Third World". Therefore, I agree that the Government should endeavour to introduce environmental protection technologies into Hong Kong. For example, it is a very good attempt to introduce the liquefied petroleum gas taxi trial scheme with a view to reducing air pollution in Hong Kong. I personally think that if the Government really wishes to switch to liquefied petroleum gas taxis later, it should not charge "fuel tax" because it will increase the operating costs of taxis. It should take this a practical support for environmental protection initiatives.

Moreover, many European and American countries have used solar energy for power generation, for example, Greece has built the largest solar energy station in the world.

However, Hong Kong has not even started in this area. Even China has successfully introduced "hydrocarbon" (the liquefied petroleum gas) refrigerators, but Hong Kong is still using fridges with HFC freezing agent which will lead to "greenhouse effect". We can see how backward Hong Kong is in terms of environmental protection technology.

With these remarks, Mr Deputy, I support Dr TSO WONG Man-yin's motion.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Prof NG Ching-fai.

**PROF NG CHING-FAI** (in Cantonese): Thank you, Mr Deputy. Firstly, I wish to thank Dr TSO WONG Man-yin for moving the motion today as I think that it is most appropriate to do so. We have repeatedly said that Hong Kong has entered into a new era. Mr TUNG Chee-hwa, the Chief Executive, has described with considerable details the directions of housing, education, elderly welfare, industries and so on in his first policy address. Environmental protection, however, has indeed been accorded meagre attention as it takes up only six out of the 156 paragraphs. Certainly, we can be regarded as "to value quantity rather than quality". But for "quality", it is indeed not exciting at all. I have mentioned this aspect in my speech on the policy address at the Provisional Legislative Council meeting on October 23.

Mr Deputy, we may say that the earth which we live in has fixed resources from land and sea. We all know that the resources can be regenerated, but its speed cannot catch up with the growth of population and the increasing economic activities of human beings. Therefore, the whole world is now discussing the concept of "sustainable development" to which some of our colleagues have just referred. Many colleagues have mentioned the importance of environmental protection education. I think that we must make the concept of "sustainable development" a very important component of environmental protection education.

The so-called "awareness of environmental protection" is in fact in dichotomy to "extravagance mentality" in the broad sense. Mr Deputy, we have an abundance of materials living in Hong Kong today, but we should never forget that extravagance is not a virtue. Therefore, I hope that in addition to "greenness", we should start with an awareness of refusal to extravagance. In fact, the Government has started some work,

but it can develop more in depth.

Some Honourable colleagues have just mentioned that the sky or earth which we live in are there for all to share. Therefore, environmental protection does not have any division between regions and countries. I find that Hong Kong can do more in this area. Firstly, we should strengthen the ties between Hong Kong and Guangdong, and turn exchange of information into a powerful and influential mechanism.

Regarding sewage disposal projects, I remember that there was a public outcry when our sewage is disposed of at the estuary of the Pearl River. I certainly do not wish this situation to happen again.

Cross-region co-operation is certainly an essential part of environmental protection, but I think that we should make commitment to the international environmental protection cause as Hong Kong always claims itself as an "international city". Hong Kong should have representatives to speak on behalf of us in related international conferences and to join in the discussion on progress of environmental protection work for the whole world.

Lastly, I would like to discuss environmental protection from a relatively micro perspective. Environmental protection work in Hong Kong relates to several aspects. Regarding the environmental protection industry, the tertiary education sector has in fact initiated the setting up an organization several years ago to develop the future technologies and industries of Hong Kong in four directions: microelectronics, information technology, materials science and environment-friendly industry. In fact, environmental protection industry itself is also a commercial act, therefore, it is an incentive. Promotion of the environmental protection industry will not only benefit us, but also give an impetus to the export industry and benefit society. I wish that in the development of future technologies and industries, environmental protection industry can feature in the considerations of this organization.

Another micro aspect relates to the many consultancy studies commissioned by government departments, especially the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). I have made criticisms against this on different occasions. I think that the consultancy studies, in particular, those at the initial stage can be undertaken by some of the departments themselves. If the departments are not confident enough, they can solicit assistance from local tertiary education institutions. For example, we have discussed not long ago the issue of incinerators. I have said that if it is only a simple assessment of what

the latest technology is, it is not necessary to spend over a million dollars to commission external consultants. I believe that the EPD staff can handle it. If we do not have experts in this aspect, the EPD should recruit qualified staff. If there is a shortage of manpower for the time, it can co-operate with the tertiary institutions. Certainly, I understand that some of the work requires foreign consultants on contract terms and it is very common to do so. In any case, if the departments are bold enough to commit themselves and actively carry out preliminary consultative work, we will avoid delay on the one hand and save some of taxpayers' money on the other.

Mr Deputy, I find that the problem of environmental protection has penetrated every corner of society, so we genuinely need to enhance the awareness of environmental protection of society as a whole. Here, I wish that the Government can do more on environmental protection. We do not always take a critical attitude only for we will show appreciation if the Government has done well. With these remarks, I support Dr TSO WONG Man-yin's motion.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr Paul CHENG.

**MR PAUL CHENG:** Mr Deputy, whilst I feel the motion is a bit on the wordy side, I have no hesitation in supporting the spirit of urging the Government to maintain its resolve to tackle our environmental issues.

To be fair and to be objective, we should credit the Government on some of the achievements made to address our environmental problems as our community become increasingly affluent. These included:

- the introduction in 1990 of regulations to restrict the sulphur content of industrial fuel throughout Hong Kong to less than 0.5%;
- the broadening of the Environmental Protection Department's involvement in the town planning process. For example, there is now a special chapter in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines which sets down minimum environmental standards that must be achieved when planning new developments;
- the normalization of the new Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance;

- the programme which provided noise insulation for badly affected classrooms, imposing strict controls over noise from construction activities;
- enactment of the Ozone Layer Protection Ordinance;
- establishing extremely tough vehicle emissions standards for petrol engined vehicles, bringing lead emissions from motor vehicles down from 200 tonnes per year to almost zero;
- livestock waste problem has largely been brought under control; and finally,
- the establishment of an Environment and Conservation Fund to support community awareness activities.

Now that I have given due recognition to the Government, I must also say that there are examples which I feel the Government could have acted earlier and far more decisively. Many initiatives in addressing our deteriorating air pollution and waste management can no longer be left to flounder in the bureaucratic pool. Take the trial on LPG taxis — Japan already has over 20 years experience — why then do we need a one-year trial? Testing the 30 vehicles for say, two months, should give us all the answers. After the trial I am sure the Government will say it takes time to make the necessary conversion on the logistical infrastructure to support the switch — that will take another two or three years — by the time we implement the programme, it will be four or five years from now. By then the hybrid car using combination of fuel and electricity technology may well be the next generation of technological advancement. We will forever be trying to catch up on technological progress if we continue to vacillate, not to mention wasting taxpayers' money.

We need Government's resolve, both in terms of officials' determination to attack our pollution problems, and the Government's backing to this resolve with adequate financial commitment. The private sector, on the other hand, should support the Polluter Pays principle so long as this is administered fairly.

Now that we have completed the major study on waste reduction strategy with consultants proposing an integrated strategy incorporating measures aimed at waste avoidance, minimization and recycling, we need to take action. Please — no more studies, speed up on trials. Let us follow the famous NIKE slogan — let us "Just Do It."

With these words, I support the motion.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr CHOY Kan-pui

**MR CHOY KAN-PUI** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, the rapid economic development and growth in population have influenced the protection of our environment. Environmental protection programmes such as controlling air quality, reducing noise pollution, cutting down waste, waste disposal, sewage disposal and improving water quality are certainly issues of concern to the people. Therefore, it is a matter of great urgency that effective measures be adopted to ensure that these programmes will not be delayed so as to safeguard public health.

*1. Controlling Air Pollution*

The dense population, large number of vehicles and industrial pollution in Hong Kong are all factors contributing to the turbid air we breathe. Improvement has been seen in the industrial pollution produced by factories as most of the factories have moved northwards and the Government has enacted legislation on control of air pollution in recent years. However, the most obvious and serious air pollution comes from vehicle exhausts. While different vehicles emit different exhausts due to the different fuels they use, the suspended particulates emitted by diesel vehicles are particularly serious. Lately, the government encouragement on taxis to try the more environment-friendly liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in place of diesel is a measure "better late than never". I hope that this plan can be carried out smoothly and be expanded to other vehicles. In this plan, it is important to have sufficient LPG stations and to ensure the safe operation of taxis. I urge the Government to regularly review the latest development of vehicle fuel technology and to formulate a more innovative and effective policy.

*2. Reducing noise pollution*

The Government has prohibited step by step the use of diesel hammer and steam engine for driving piles in densely populated areas as they make a great deal of noise. On the other hand, it has also promoted the use of the less noisy hydraulic hammer and, as a result, the noise pollution problem has been improved to a certain extent. However, since the Special Administrative Region Government is speeding up its housing projects, the noise pollution caused by construction will definitely deteriorate. Therefore, the

Government has to strike a balance between these two extremes and handle the problem properly.

3. *Sewage Treatment*

The drainage and sewage treatment systems in Hong Kong have failed to cope with the rapid increase in population and new development areas. For a long time, the sewage of the territory has been discharged into the neighbouring waters without treatment, whereas 80% of the sewage collected from the public foul drainage system have only been treated with the simplest grit screen before they are discharged into the sea. As a result, the water quality of Hong Kong has been deteriorating day by day, adversely affecting public health and marine ecology. In view of this, the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme proposed by the Government merits our support. According to this Scheme, the Stage I is to set up a sewerage and sewage disposal system in which the sewage from Kowloon between Tsuen Wan and Tseung Kwan O as well as from northeast Hong Kong between Chai Wan and Shau Kei Wan will be collected, transported to Stonecutters Island through a deeply embedded tunnel system and then put through primary chemical treatment before eventually being discharged to the west of Victoria Harbour through interim discharge pipes. However, due to the delay in the construction of the deeply embedded sewage tunnels, this plan which was scheduled to commence by the middle of this year cannot start operating until the end of 1998 at the earliest. The delay of this project has a direct bearing on the seriousness of pollution in the Harbour and the local water quality is further worsened. In the Stage II of the Scheme, discharge pipe systems will be built to discharge the sewage treated in Stonecutters to the sea south of Hong Kong. Since this is an enormous project with far-reaching impact, the Government should earnestly carry out environmental impact assessments and consult with the mainland authorities concerned so as to formulate an appropriate policy and implement the plan as soon as possible.

4. *Waste disposal*

The disposal of waste in a safe, efficient and environment friendly way is indeed a problem. Hong Kong produces tens of thousands tons of industrial and domestic waste every day and this quantity keeps on soaring. If we do not take action to suppress the growth of waste, the landfills will have been filled up by 2012. Furthermore, with a limited supply of land in Hong Kong, it is relatively difficult to open up new landfills. The present method of waste disposal is to transport the waste to refuse transfer station for treatment and compression before moving them to landfills. However, this is not the most effective or the cleanest way of waste disposal and there are many sequelae. I think a

better way would be the use of energy recovery incinerators which can incinerate 80% of municipal waste in intense heat and cut the quantity of waste by as much as 90% before they are transported to landfills. By so doing, the volume of waste can be reduced greatly so that the service life of landfills can be prolonged as much as possible. This kind of high technology will meet the strictest requirements of exhaust emission. I hope that the Government can finish the feasibility study of this method as soon as possible and have it implemented.

Clinical waste disposal should not be overlooked either. At present, the incinerators used by the Hospital Authority hospitals are still substandard old-fashioned clinical waste incinerators. Being environmentally conscious, the Government tends to use the incinerators at Tsing Yi Chemical Waste Treatment Plant to handle all the clinical waste in Hong Kong. The feasibility of this measure has to be studied carefully because the plant was originally not designed for the treatment of clinical waste. So while we need to study in detail whether the Plant can cope with such a use technically, we also need to consider the environmental impact on nearby dwellings and the risks in transit.

With these remarks, Mr Deputy, I support the motion.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr LAU Kong-wah.

**MR LAU KONG-WAH** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, I support the motion moved by Dr TSO WONG Man-yin today, in particular the first part which urges the Government to adopt effective measures to ensure that the various environmental protection programmes will not be delayed so as to safeguard public health. I think this is very important.

I joined the Panel on Environmental Affairs after I had become a Member of the Provisional Legislative Council. After several meetings, I have come to concern about the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the executive arm of the Government in environmental affairs, and I pay particular attention to whether its present work is effective, and whether it plays an active role in undertaking the relevant works. In these two aspects, I find certain problems should be brought up for discussion.

To the public, environmental protection statistics mean nothing to them. What

they are concerned with is whether their health is protected after these data are obtained and the environmental protection programmes carried out. This is the most important thing to them. In the Report of the Director of Audit (the Report), 55 pages are dedicated to the monitoring and control of air pollution, published right on time to respond to our motion today. The Report made a marvellous monitoring review of the EPD, in which it is clearly explained how the present level of air pollution is, whether the Government is able to deal with such a level of air pollution, and whether the Air Pollution Index (API) announced daily is accurate. These 55 pages of the Report disclose all of the above problems.

The Report clearly states that the Government has spent \$160 million on the study of air pollution but the result is disappointing, this is the conclusion of the Audit Department. Several points are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, the API employed by Hong Kong at present is not the same as that of the World Health Organization (WHO). If the API of Hong Kong is compared with the world standard, the degree of air pollution in Hong Kong is very serious. I would like to quote a paragraph from page 254 of the Report, "Comparison with other countries showed that Hong Kong had the worst respirable suspended particulates problem amongst cities like Singapore, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. Hong Kong's nitrogen dioxide problem was worse than that of Singapore and had exceeded the health-based air quality standards of the WHO and the United Kingdom. Polluted air puts the population's health at risk." This is the first question the authority has to answer, that is, why does the Government spend so much money without upgrading the air quality so that it conforms to the world standard? The allegedly good air quality shown in the API of Hong Kong's EPD turns out to be bad according to international standards. How can the Government tell the people that the public money spend is worthwhile?

Secondly, the Audit Department also discovers that the present Air Pollution Index and Forecast System (APIFS) is in fact inaccurate. The air test conducted by the EPD daily stops at 2.30 pm, so the API the public obtains from the EPD each day is actually the index of the previous day before 2.30 pm. This is problematic. Besides, the Audit Department further points out that the API announced on Monday or public holidays by the EPD is only 55% accurate, for in the following holidays, no EPD staff will conduct air tests. Is this an effective method? I can tell the public that they can only believe half of the air pollution prediction they are told of every Monday, because the accuracy of the prediction is only 50%.

Thirdly, I am also gravely concerned about the exhaust from vehicles. A survey in the Report states that although smoky vehicles have to undergo inspection every year, there

are many loopholes in the law which vehicle owners can easily make use of. They may alter certain parts of the vehicle and after they have passed the inspection dark smoke is emitted again. A table shows that 23% of the vehicles were repeatedly reported to the authorities in 1992, the figure has not declined by 1996 but even increased to 26.8%. In this connection, I think the EPD has to tell us what active measures they are taking to tackle the problem.

The last point which I believe everyone is concerned about is the problem of reporting violations. There are over 1 000 spotters in Hong Kong which is satisfactorily sufficient, but their performance does not seem to be very profitable. Those who can only spot one case per year account for up to 40%. Today I have quoted so many figures or data from the Report because I hope that there will be enough evidences to show whether the relevant executive arms of the Government have made sufficient effort in their work. Otherwise, the public may think that the things promulgated by the Government are inaccurate and the health of the citizens cannot be protected after all. I believe that the Secretary has to respond in this aspect.

Moreover, the Panel on Environmental Affairs has held several meetings and looked into the initiative of the EPD. I think that the EPD is too conservative in issues such as waste disposal, wetlands and acoustic shield, and it also lacks comprehensive planning. Through today's motion, I would like to arouse the Secretary's attention to two points; first, practical effect, second, initiative.

Finally, I call on the Secretary to answer my question concerning the water quality of Dong Jiang which I mentioned in my speech during the policy address debate. Has the Hong Kong Government consulted directly with the relevant departments in the Mainland in order to ensure the hygiene of Hong Kong people's potable water? I think that the Secretary must answer this question.

Mr Deputy, I support the motion. Thank you.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr LO Suk-ching.

**MR LO SUK-CHING** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, while we have a thriving economy in Hong Kong, we also have deteriorating environmental problems such as air pollution, water

pollution, noise pollution and waste disposal. They do not only deteriorate our living environment, but also harm our next generation. While many private environmental protection organizations have been endeavouring for years to promote the importance of environmental protection and to look for solutions, the Government has been paying attention only to economic development and livelihood issues such as housing, elderly welfare and education, with little support for the environmental protection effort. As a result, many environmental protection programmes, for example, the building of a central incinerator, sewage collection plan, landfill charges scheme and so on cannot be realized earlier. I think that the Government should adopt a more proactive approach in putting in more resources to solve the problems of environmental pollution, and it should create a clean and comfortable environment for Hong Kong people which is a long-term investment in public health.

Among the many environmental pollution problems, those of waste disposal and sewage are relatively more serious and have more far-reaching influences. At present, waste in Hong Kong is generally dumped in landfills. In view of the increase in waste quantity, the present three landfills in Hong Kong will all be full by 2012. We have to think of a remedy to solve the problem as soon as possible. In the long run, disposing of waste in landfills will give rise to a lot of sequelae. As for the treatment of clinical waste, although some Hospital Authority hospitals have their own incinerators, they are outdated and cannot effectively handle clinical waste. Actually, at present there is not a single incinerator that can meet the requirements stipulated in the Air Pollution Control Ordinance.

Since Hong Kong is an economics-oriented society, environmental protection programmes implemented without benefits to the public usually met with a lot of obstacles and some even failed. The natural death of the Sewage Services Trading Fund and the landfill charges scheme are good examples. Furthermore, Hong Kong people are in general weak in their awareness of environmental protection and care only about their own convenience. As a result, waste production has been incessantly on the increase and it has become more and more difficult to implement an environmental protection plan among the community as a whole. As the old saying goes, "prevention is better than cure", we should begin with measures of minimizing waste, avoiding the production of waste and

recycling waste. Coupled by a mechanism that offers incentives, we should encourage private organizations and the public to carry out cost-effective environmental protection work.

In order to reduce waste, first of all, we have to try our best to minimize the use of disposable commodities. Secondly, we should cultivate among people a sense of civic responsibility that "everybody is responsible for environmental protection"; and they should be made to understand that the principle of "polluter pays" is not a punishment but a gesture of being responsible. People should also be educated that they bear the responsibility for waste production and they should find solution for disposal of the waste they produce.

Hong Kong is a very small place with extremely limited living space, it is very difficult to find enough room for collection and classification of waste. Moreover, all kinds of domestic wastes are mixed together and they have already been polluted before reclamation, so the domestic waste reclamation rate is as low as 8%. In view of this, the Government may consider setting up waste classification stations in low-density residential areas and require that new residential buildings to have their own waste classification stations in the hope that waste can be separated for reclamation. The Government should also assist the waste reclamation and recycling industries by, for example, granting low-interest loans to the relevant companies, introducing new waste recycling technologies and facilities from foreign countries, handling flexibly the licensing procedures of recycling companies so as to render these undertakings profitable, and encouraging private investors to develop such industries. In the meantime, the Government should amend the existing legislation with a view to plugging the loopholes in the present laws and to effectively control the import, export and transit of waste, in order that Hong Kong will not become a collecting and distributing centre for waste from the West, thus avoiding the recurrence of recent incidents in which poisonous computer waste from Australia and domestic waste from the United States are stranded in Hong Kong.

Although land reclamation and large-scale infrastructure development have increased land supply and fostered economic development, the waters in Hong Kong are incorrigibly polluted and the marine ecology damaged. As a result, the local fishing industry is adversely affected and both the quantity and quality of catches in Hong Kong waters have deteriorated. Therefore, fishermen have to go far away for catches, the cost

thus rises and the public have to pay much more for fish or they even have to eat polluted marine products to the detriment of their health. The Government should face squarely the conservation of marine ecology in the territory's waters, improve the water quality and save the coastal fishing and pisciculture of Hong Kong.

Pollution knows no boundary. With the increasingly active economic activities across the Hong Kong-Guangdong borders, cross-region pollution is getting more and more serious. At present, although there is a Hong Kong-Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group, its work is unfortunately only limited to "liaison" up to now. It has not done any co-operative work with regard to monitoring and improving cross-region pollution. The most urgent task now is the treatment of the Deep Bay foul water and improvement of the Dong Jiang water quality, in particular the latter one. We have been drinking the water from Dong Jiang for over 30 years. With the growing population and the agricultural and industrial pollution along the Dong Jiang shores, the water quality of the river much worse than before. The Special Administrative Region Government must consult with the Guangdong Provincial Government immediately and try to find out ways of solving and improving the pollution of Dong Jiang. To protect the water quality of Dong Jiang, laws of protecting the river must be enforced stringently and environmental education must be enhanced.

For the Government, investing in environmental protection programmes may not be a profitable business, but improving public health and their living quality is definitely a beneficial long-term investment.

With these remarks, Mr Deputy, I support the motion.

**PRESIDENT DEPUTY** (in Cantonese): Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands.

**SECRETARY FOR PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND LANDS** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, first of all, I would like to thank Dr the Honourable TSO WONG Man-yin for moving the motion on the environment of Hong Kong and for Members' contribution to the debate. From what Members have said, today's debate is not a debate. Why? Because most of Members' comments and even the wording in the original motion, are indeed what we have been hoping to achieve and part of the Government's policy. Members did not argue for anything either. They just voiced their opinions, most of which are targets which the Government seeks to achieve. Some of these have even become part of the

Government's policy objectives. Strictly speaking, the Government agrees entirely with the four points in (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the motion. The Government actually thinks that these points are acceptable and should be supported. I am glad that we have had a green discussion or debate in this Council today. I note in particular the colour of Dr TSO's clothes suits today's topic.

I do hope this Council can conduct more discussions and debates of this kind. I can deduce that the opinions and indeed the spirit of Members' comments are in support of the Government's effort in environmental protection. This will be conducive to our achievement in future. I am glad to see that more Provisional Legislative Council Members are attending the Environmental Affairs Panel meetings than before when it was the Legislative Council. I am also glad to note that Members have shown concern and voiced their opinions. The Government will surely take their opinions into consideration and will try our best in the furtherance of protecting our environment.

The Chief Executive said in the policy address, as some Members did, "improving the quality of our environment is as vital as economic growth to improving our quality of life". But I have one question about the motion. The preamble of the motion says "environmental pollution problems in Hong Kong have become increasingly serious in recent years". I am afraid I cannot agree to this. Some Members must have forgotten what the Government has done in the past eight to ten years.

Our start with the environmental protection effort dates back to 1989 when the White Paper on Environmental Pollution was publicized. I do not think Members could still remember what the situation was like in 1989. We have made some improvements already, and all of us have taken these for granted as part of our work. We only need to look at the situation in 1989 and take some data to compare with the present situation to arrive at an objective conclusion that the Government has indeed done a lot to improve the environment.

Just now, Mr Paul CHENG has briefly mentioned some of our work but I do not expect he can remember everything. At least, we are not caught in a situation where there is only a White Paper but we have done no work and countenance a deteriorating environment. There are indeed an abundance of data and facts bearing out the achievements of the Government. Of course, the White Paper has listed a number of work items. If Members can compare the details, they will find that over 98% of the targets and programmes set out then have already been met. In other words, we have completed most of the work ahead of schedule.

Public expectation and demand for a clean environment have soared in recent years. For the Government, this is a good sign because the more concerned is the public, the greater number of people who will participate in the effort, and the more involved they will become. With this foundation, we hope to receive more support from the public and Members of this Council for our environment-related measures and legislation in the future. After all, the public participation is always the most important thing.

Just now, Members asked why environmental protection work fell behind among all policy commitments. It is only a matter of proportion. I hope Members can view this with an objective position. I have given an explanation on this before and I do not intend to repeat it here. I would like to point out clearly one point: let us examine closely those items we have failed to achieve on schedule. Some of the more important items are, for instance, firstly the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme, which was delayed by the works contractor. Secondly we had hoped to set up a low radioactivity storage, but we did not receive any tender other than an excessively expensive one. Thirdly, charges proposals related to environmental protection were voted down by the Legislative Council. Fourthly, the Government had hoped to build a central incinerator but the proposal was withdrawn for re-consideration due to objections from future users who need to pay or from other groups with vested interest. Finally, we did have some legislations for environmental protection but we missed the deadline for submission for we had to further consult the relevant parties or trade. In the circumstances, I do not think it is fair to blame the Government for not having achieved the targets on time. So, I hope Members can consider this carefully. While I am in office for environmental work, I do want to keep all the promises and I do want to be able to "just do it" or "what I should" as Mr CHENG has quoted from an advertisement. To be able to keep our promises, we need the unconditional support from the public and Members. I hope I can have support from Members so that I can be free of considerations about politics and vested interests in carrying out my environmental protection work.

For example, over the years the Government has been trying to relocate polluting trades and provide new sites for their continued operation. We will relocate the airport to improve the quality of life of those living under the flight path. We have closed the incinerators. We have introduced improvements on petrol for cars and the sulphur content of diesel fuel. We have also introduced a trial scheme for Liquefied Petroleum Gas powered taxis, which is still on a trial run now. All these projects we could complete on time for improving the environment.

In respect of setting up an incentive mechanism to facilitate the development and

introduction of cost-effective environmental protection technologies, as proposed in the motion, we support the employment of effective economic measures to achieve environmental goals. It has always been the intention of the Administration to come up with policies that combine the advantages of both regulatory and economic effects.

For example, a building energy code for statutory control of overall thermal transfer value of new commercial and hotel buildings has been implemented for more than a year while draft codes on the designs of lighting and air conditioning installations are being developed for implementation in 1998. We will be extending our energy label scheme to more electrical appliances. In addition, we have requested the two power companies to adopt demand-side management programmes to promote the reduction of electricity consumption. Our policies seek to promote energy conservation without impeding economic growth or frustrating the public's expectation for improvements to our living standards.

Just now some Members mentioned the issue of waste. In fact, it is the Government that first put forward the subject of waste minimization, recovery and recycling. I am grateful for the opinions raised by some of the Members, which actually echo many of the proposals of the Government. I hope to be able to gain full support from Members in future when I put forward work plans for waste minimization. Individual companies and companies participating in the relevant programmes we intend to field in the future will be encouraged to adopt measures to avoid producing waste in order to meet specific reduction targets. We will also consider measures introducing a series of measures to facilitate the provision of land and space in new buildings to encourage waste recycling activities, provide technical assistance to manufacturers and importers participating in a producer responsibility scheme to manage the waste they generate, and set up task forces within various sectors of the community to co-ordinate waste reduction activities.

There was mention of assistance provided by the Government in merchandising and even technology to encourage waste recovery or recycling. There are some practical problems here. First, under the principle of international free trade, it would be difficult for the Government to specify what goods to buy, give permission for which goods to import or grant assistance to a certain trade or industry without breaching any agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although it is good to encourage waste recovery or recycling, but what goods can we produce out of the waste recovered or recycled? I have visited some waste recovery companies abroad. They could find no outlet for the recovered paper, cans or glass. So, they have made a huge storage of waste. Therefore, the lack of an eventual outlet for any materials recovered is a major obstacle for the

recycling effort. At present, Hong Kong does not have a huge market for such materials. Recovery rate for domestic waste is about 8% in Hong Kong, while the rate for industrial waste, especially in the commercial sector, is nearly 50%. Many of the recyclable waste materials are shipped to overseas countries for processing. This is an authorized industry for waste recycling. If this industry is to be operated in Hong Kong, we need to consider to what use the products can be put. Otherwise, what we have will be a large storage for waste paper, used cans or unwanted glass.

We have also launched and planned different kinds of charging schemes for the use of various waste treatment and disposal facilities. Such schemes for environment-oriented waste disposal services are in operation or under preparation. These schemes and charges are examples of ways in which the "polluter pays" principle may be applied. We are conducting a progress review on the 1989 White Paper biennially. In the forthcoming Fourth Review of Progress of the White Paper, we would review the use of financial means that work through the charging schemes to create incentives to reduce pollution or conserve depletable resources. We hope that these means will encourage commitment on polluters' part to environmental protection, create incentives for sustainable environment-friendly behaviours, ensure the fair sharing of resources through the market mechanism, and provide incentives for manufacturers to lower the pollutant emission level for economic benefits as well as a positive impact on technological development in the long run. The Fourth Review will also provide a basis for the formulation and review of our strategic environmental protection policy options for the 21st century. We shall consult major stakeholders before its publication next year.

Just now, Members mentioned the need for sustainable development and questioned the Government's study on the same subject. I would like to know how many of Honourable Members present understand the meaning of sustainable development. What does it mean in the Hong Kong context? A Member asked whether we could follow completely the example of China which has already embarked on this course. I would also like to know how many people have seen China's policy on sustainable development or its "Agenda 21". How many of these agenda items can be applied in Hong Kong? At the moment, every country is trying to find out an "Agenda 21" that suits them and the guiding principles in sustainable development. The situation in Hong Kong is different from the Mainland and a total duplication of China's example is not possible. We all clearly understand that we need to decide our future direction according to the future needs of Hong Kong and its mode of development. That is why we need to set up a mechanism and formulate targets by way of the study, to evaluate whether we can chart the sustainable development course, how a policy of sustainable development can be shaped in Hong Kong

and how to make such a policy fit our initiatives in transport, social welfare, housing and so on.

A Member questioned why we have only focused on economic development so that a large proportion of the policy address was devoted to that area. Indeed, if economic development could carry the idea of sustainable development, the chapter on the environment can be omitted as each policy will have its own measurable environmental protection index on sustainable development.

So, the Government is very much on its own in formulating the policy. Although I said we should "just do it", the support and participation of 6.5 million people are needed in launching our plans. Therefore, when we plan our work we must, as the motion says, extensively consult the public. We expect to conduct a large scale public consultation exercise on sustainable development and initial mode of action. Furthermore, when the respective formulation work nears completion, we will conduct a more comprehensive public consultation on the final proposal.

Members also mentioned we should enhance the representativeness and work of the Hong Kong Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group. In the Group, I am the Hong Kong representative while the Director of the Environmental Protection Bureau of Guangdong Province represents Guangdong. We are the highest level representatives of the two regions. Some Members thought the Director of the Environmental Protection Department was the Hong Kong representative. That is not correct. Joint efforts are required to raise the level of work or to increase the agenda items or set up decision-making mechanisms. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region alone cannot make a decision unilaterally. Both Governments are now involved. We can only listen to Members' opinions. Indeed we hope to be able to expedite our work, to enhance our power to make decisions but we need agreements from both Governments. We hope to bring up this issue for discussion in the future. However, some Members said we have remained at the liaison stage throughout the years. This is not correct. We have indeed made some rather long-term decisions. But it would take some time for achievements to be made as both Governments are involved now. For example, we have decided to designate Deep Bay as the highest priority key area requiring protective conservation efforts. This has limited the scope of activities both Governments and other organizations can carry out in the area. We have also decided to conduct an environmental protection study in Mirs Bay, set up a study group on the conservation and protection of China White Dolphins, form a study group to exchange information and findings of previous studies on air quality in the Pearl River Delta Region, and enhance the exchange of

information and supervision on cross-border movement of waste.

I agree with Members' views that environmental protection knows no boundaries. We hope in future to have more opportunities of co-operation and to strengthen the same at higher levels with the Mainland to achieve the common goal of protecting the region's environment. We hope to complete the development of the action plans to protect Deep Bay and Mirs Bay and put them to implementation soon. On both the areas of water and air pollution, we have strengthened our assistance to the Mainland in their environmental protection work. We have decided to let Hong Kong assist the Mainland side in the Infrastructure Co-ordinating Committee to set up a task force to follow up on Strategic Sewage Disposal. Moreover, we will maintain close and regular contact on the cross-boundary movements of hazardous and contaminated waste. We will also monitor the matter.

Members have also talked about transparency of the Group. There will be more transparency for the Group. Beginning with last year, we have been reporting to the Environmental Affairs Panel on its achievements and deliberations for each meeting. We have been issuing a press release after each meeting to inform the public of the outcome. We will continue doing both. We will continue to submit reports to the Provisional Legislative Council and would like to receive response from Members so that we can progress further in our work.

Mr Deputy, I beg your indulgence for a very long reply. Since there were several points raised by Members, I would like to respond briefly to them. Members said there should be public education in environmental protection. I have to make some clarifications in response to this, to avoid misunderstandings. In other words, I want to do some education work here.

Why did we spend several hundred million dollars to improve the landfills? We were reluctant to spend the money, but the technology and facilities of our present landfills all started operation 20 or 30 years ago. At that time, we did not have the technology to avoid environmental problems after our landfills were put to use. Even if we did, they were primitive technologies. So, we need to spend money to tidy up the aftermath. The life expectancy of our three new strategic landfills has been reduced to seven or eight years not from ten years or so but from 30 years. Due to a combination of circumstances, it has been reduced to 15 or 16 years. So the figures quoted by Members were not accurate.

Mr CHAN Choy-hi said from a boat he was on he could see a dolphin killed by injuries inflicted by propeller blades. I hope he was not on a boat with a propeller to

watch dolphins because a number of people get on boats with propellers to sea to watch dolphins resulting in dolphin casualties.

Members also asked why we could not restrict the use of "foam rubber" in Hong Kong. First, Hong Kong does not manufacture "foam rubber". All "foam rubber" is imported. If the Government made laws to ban the import of "foam rubber", we would have to consider whether this is against the WTO agreements. Second, research on substitutes is still not completed. It is being tested in the Mainland and people there admit they are not sure of the effectiveness of the substitute, which costs more than "foam rubber". If lunch boxes, for example, were made from the substitute, it cost one third to one quarter more. Should people consider cost of production? The overall effect is uncertain in the Mainland and they do not know yet whether they should make it mandatory to use substitutes. If Hong Kong makes it mandatory to do so without having any manufacturers to supply other types of containers, what should we do? So, if we want to unilaterally restrict the use of "foam rubber" we must first learn from the experience of other people.

There were also Members who would want research on the environment or preliminary research to be done by institutes of higher education. We have been having this lingering in our minds. If such institutes wish to take part in our consultancy and research work, they have to submit tenders. We cannot appoint a certain institute to do the job. Some institutes have been doing consultancy work for the Government. Sometimes the prices they quote on their tenders are even higher than those quoted by commercial organizations. For the sake of fairness, we cannot award the contracts to some institutes.

Finally, I must thank Mr LAU Kong-wah, who read out part of the report of the Director of Audit in his speech. He reminded us that the report has been published today. There are several points I need to respond to. First, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) started reviewing its work several years ago and has been brewing up the proposals mentioned by the Director. The Director's report just put these proposals down as his proposals. The EPD was not satisfied with the present system and therefore started the said review. As everyone knows, as the social environment changes we must up our work and raise the objectives of air quality. As regards the issue of respirable suspended particulates, the Government has never hid anything from the public. It has been telling people time and again in the Provisional Legislative Council and on public occasions that respirable suspended particulates is posing a serious problem. While it has been an issue of grave concern to us, finding a solution is another matter.

How should we measure objectives of air quality? Why are we using backward standards? Well, it is only recently that the World Health Organization has reviewed and raised the standards. The EPD knew about this two years ago and set up a working group tasked to review the objectives of air quality in Hong Kong. But the working group was criticized before it could produce any report.

Let me talk about the accuracy of projected figures for air pollution. Most of the projections are accurate. But projections are projections and most of the time problems arise because projections cannot be 100% correct, considering the discrepancy between data loaded into the computer and the variations in the atmosphere on a particular day. This same situation also true in other countries. The report of the Director of Audit did not mention the experience in other countries. The EPD is aware of the problem and has made special arrangements for a review every morning of projected figures made on the previous day. If there are changes, the figures will be corrected on the day of review.

Mr Deputy, I am sorry I have taken up so much time for my reply. I only wish to reiterate that I am grateful to Members for their opinions. I support points (a), (b), (c), and (d) in the motion. I hope this will form a basis on which Members will lend their support when in future the Government submits proposals on its effort to protect the environment. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Dr TSO WONG Man-yin, you may now reply and you have two minutes 35 seconds out of your original 15 minutes.

**DR TSO WONG MAN-YIN** (in Cantonese): Thank you, Madam President. First of all, I would like to extend my thanks to the 12 Honourable Members who have spoken in support of my motion. I believe their speeches will definitely be conducive to improving Hong Kong's quality of environment, and they will also demonstrate this Council's concern for the environmental problems. I am happy to learn from the Secretary's detailed reply that the motion I move is exactly the goal the relevant government departments are working

towards. Just now the Secretary has compared our present quality of environment with that in 1989, I believe most Members would feel that the improvement in our environment lags behind our economic development. Many Honourable colleagues have actually mentioned this point, that is, the balance between our environmental problems and our economic development is questionable.

As for the commitment to environmental protection, the Secretary explained earlier that the increase in costs and the delay in completion are due to procrastination in construction and exorbitant tender prices. That such problems have occurred is a reflection of a lack of elaborate planning and substandard consultancy studies.

The Secretary has also talked about the market for recycled products. This kind of market may not be very popular now in Hong Kong and many other communities, but I do hope that the Government can play a leading role. For example, since government departments use so much paper, can they try their best to use recycled paper? This also involves the promotion of and education in environmental protection.

I do not have much time left for my reply. I very much hope that the Government can respond actively to the first three proposals in my motion, and I also hope that it will strengthen the Hong Kong-Guangdong co-ordination and co-operation in environmental protection as soon as possible. Basing on the principle of mutual benefits, I hope that they can soon draw up a co-operative plan which will make commitment to protect the environment of the whole Pearl River Delta, so that our reputation of the "Pearl of the Orient" can be retained in the blue sea and sky as well as the green mountain and water, and the Pearl River Delta can really embark on the thoroughfare of sustainable development.

Thank you, Madam President.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Dr TSO WONG Man-yin be approved. Will those in favour of the motion please say "aye"?

(Members responded)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Those against please say "no".

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(No Member responded)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I think the "ayes" have it. The "ayes" have it.

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 PROVISIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL — 21 January 1998
 

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First motion: Liquefied Petroleum Gas Taxi Scheme. Mr Allen LEE.

### **LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM GAS TAXI SCHEME**

**MR ALLEN LEE** (in Cantonese): Madam president, I move that the motion as set out under my name on the Agenda be approved.

Environmental Protection has been an area of long-standing concern for the Liberal Party. We have always maintained that the Government must draw up a long-term environmental protection policy, and that it must, in the meantime, take immediate measures to step up its control over air pollution. The density measurements of suspended particulates conducted by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) in Tsuen Wan over the past two years have indicated that the yearly average RSP density there has exceeded the United States standards by 150%. So, it can be said that air pollution has reached an intolerable extent. At present, the biggest problem relating to the air quality in Hong Kong is the incessant increase in respirable suspended particulates (RSPs). RSPs are harmful substances which will cause respiratory diseases. And, as the density of RSPs increases, the incidence of diseases and death will also increase. RSPs can cause many kinds of chronic ailments; and more and more evidence has been obtained which can confirm that lung cancer is related to contacts with the RSPs of diesel, and the main source of RSPs in Hong Kong is the exhaust fumes of diesel-powered vehicles.

At present, about 20% to 30% of all the vehicles in Hong Kong are diesel-powered, but these vehicles alone already represent 60% to 70% of the total vehicular traffic volume in Hong Kong. There are about 18 000 diesel-powered taxis and 7 000 mini buses in Hong Kong. If all these vehicles can give up diesel and use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as fuel, the RSPs in our air will be reduced by half.

The Liberal Party has been following with concern the LPG taxi scheme introduced by the Government in November last year. We are pleased to learn that the scheme has been operating smoothly so far, and that members of the taxi trade participating in the scheme are tentatively satisfied with the performance of LPG taxis. The Liberal Party is of the view that if the scheme really works, the Government should draw up a comprehensive plan to encourage members of the taxi trade to switch to LPG, and make preparations for its implementation.

First, the Government should increase the basic coupling facilities necessary for the operation of LPG taxis. For example, it should increase the number of LPG filling stations and put in place a supervisory and monitoring mechanism for LPG taxi repair yards and technicians. At present, there are only four LPG filling stations for the taxis participating in the scheme. The shortage of LPG filling stations will naturally increase operating costs. In view of this, the Government should set up more LPG filling stations as soon as possible. We think that we will need at least two such stations in each district if we are to provide basically adequate services. Also, for the sake of safety, underground LPG tanks should be installed at filling stations; the existing surface tanks should be replaced.

Second, the Government should popularize the techniques of LPG taxi repairs. Since the repair costs of LPG taxis must not be higher than those of diesel taxis, the Government should organize an adequate number of certificate courses to train up more LPG taxi repair technicians. At the same time, for the sake of safety, legislation should be enacted to require all LPG taxi repair technicians to obtain certificate for recognized qualifications. For LPG taxi repair yards, they must be required by law to comply with ventilating and fire-prevention requirements.

Third, instead of relying on natural elimination, the Government should introduce more concessionary measures to encourage taxi owners to switch to LPG. This is intended to speed up the phasing out of diesel taxis. Natural elimination is not recommended. The reason is that there are as many as 18 000 taxis in Hong Kong, and their replacement rate is just about 200 a month. So, if we rely on natural elimination, it will take as many as seven to eight years before all diesel taxis could be replaced. In other words, we will have to wait until the year 2007 to have them completely replaced. The time required is much too long, not to mention the fact that we will not be able to bring about immediate improvements to our air quality.

Of all the possible concessionary measures, the most important one is to waive the LPG duty. Moreover, for the sake of safety, the LPG used by vehicles and that for domestic uses must be charged at the same rate. That way, the possibility of private filling can be avoided. In addition, the Government should introduce a seven-year concessionary period, during which the first registration tax for LPG taxis is to be waived, and subsidies are offered to taxi owners who switch to LPG. The Government can fix the levels of subsidies on the basis of a gradation vehicle age, and offer higher levels of subsidies to diesel taxis with younger vehicle age. When fuel costs are lowered and when early replacements of diesel vehicles will bring more subsidies, members of the taxi trade will be more willing to switch to LPG as fuel for their taxis.

Apart from focusing on taxis, the Government should also promote the use of LPG as fuel to private cars and minibuses. At present, minibuses also use diesel. So, the Government should draw up similar concessionary measures to encourage min buses to use LPG. Moreover, the Government should introduce LPG private cars, so as to provide private car owners an additional choice. The reason for this is statistics revealed that LPG is even cleaner than unleaded petrol as its combustibility rate is higher than that of unleaded petrol. Hence, LPG is in fact more environmentally friendly. To promote environmental protection to take the lead in using LPG as fuel, the Government vehicle fleet should take the lead and switch to LPG.

In the long run, the Government should study the possibility of introducing an environmentally-friendly fuel for heavy vehicles, one example being natural gas. Although natural gas is not yet in popular use in Hong Kong, the Government can follow the example of the electricity plants and import natural gas by gas tanks. We recommend that the Government should hold discussions with the bus companies and owners of heavy goods vehicles on the feasibility of switching to natural gas.

The position of the Liberal Party in regard to the LPG Taxi Scheme is very clear. If the Government wants to implement the scheme successfully, it must draw up some effective concessionary measures and extend the scheme to other types of diesel vehicles in order to improve our air quality. Air pollution affects public health directly; it also indirectly increases our medical expenses and hinders our economic growth. So, there is an urgent need for the Government to take measures to tackle the problem. In the short term, it should seek to phase out diesel vehicles which emit large amount of pollutants. In the long run, it should conduct active research on the development of more environmentally friendly technologies.

Madam President, with these remarks, I move the motion.

**Mr Allen LEE moved the following motion:**

"That, in order to improve the increasingly worsening air quality in Hong Kong, this Council urges the Government to expeditiously put in place a liquefied petroleum gas taxi scheme and take the lead in promoting it, as well as establishing concessionary measures to encourage the participation of taxi operators; at the same time, the Government should study how the scheme can be extended to include private cars and should bring in suitable environmentally friendly fuels for heavy vehicles."

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That, in view of the increasingly worsening air quality in Hong Kong, this Council urges the Government to expeditiously put in place a liquefied petroleum gas taxi scheme and take the lead in promoting it, as well as establishing concessionary measures to encourage the participation of taxi operators; at the same time, the Government should study how the scheme can be extended to include private cars and should bring in suitable environmentally friendly fuels for heavy vehicles. Does any Member wish to speak? Dr TSO WONG Man-yin.

**DR TSO WONG MAN-YIN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, how serious is the problem of air pollution in Hong Kong? We can actually have a glimpse of its seriousness by looking at past statistics. In the past one year, four out of the nine air quality monitoring stations in Hong Kong have persistently recorded measurements which were higher than the acceptable air quality standards. And, for the air pollution index, it stayed at the "moderate" level for most of the year. In fact, this "moderate" level has already exceeded the long-term acceptable health standard set down by the Government. What is more, for three days in the year, the air pollution level was higher than 100. Such a level of air pollution can cause serious health hazards to people, especially children and old people. The main reason why the air pollution index has exceeded the acceptable standards is that the density of RSPs in our air has been persistently high. Therefore, the regulation of RSP density is in fact the key to any improvements in our air quality.

As we all know, diesel vehicles are the main source of RSPs. That is why I will support Mr Allen LEE's motion in principle; I hope that the Government will implement the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) taxi scheme expeditiously as the first significant step towards switching from diesel to LPG, but I want to make two comments on Mr Allen LEE's motion.

First, I agree that the Government should take the lead in promoting the diesel-to-LPG scheme. But, I also hope that the Government will direct its efforts and resources at the replacement of diesel vehicles instead of spending any money on replacing "petrol vehicles" which do not cause too much pollution. We must capture the ring leader first, so to speak. And, we must remember that air pollution is caused by diesel vehicles, not petrol vehicles.

Research findings indicate that although LPG is more environmentally-friendly than petrol, these two types of fuels are in fact identical in terms of RSP emission. That being the case, even if we require all private cars in Hong Kong to switch to LPG, we will not achieve much in reducing the RSP density in our air.

Madam President, let me now bring up my second point. If we are to prescribe the right remedy to improve our air quality, apart from promoting the LPG taxi scheme, we must extend the diesel-to-LPG scheme to minibuses and light goods vehicles, the reason being that they are also a major source of RSPs. In the United States and Japan, LPG buses and light goods vehicles are already in common use, and in Guangdong, LPG single-decked buses are also found. So, we can say that the introduction of LPG minibuses and light goods vehicles has in fact been proven technically feasible. That being the case, the Government should really explore the possibility of extending the diesel-to-LPG scheme to these two types of vehicles as soon as possible, so as to further improve our air quality. As for the other part of Mr Allen LEE's motion, which recommends the extension of the diesel-to-LPG scheme to heavy vehicles, I do have some reservations, because, as far as I know, we will still need to overcome a number of technical difficulties.

Madam President, lastly, I want to urge the Government to implement the following concessionary measures for vehicles participating in the "diesel-to- LPG scheme":

1. Exemption of first registration tax;
2. Exemption of licence fee for the first year of registration; and
3. Extension of fuel duty exemption to LPG vehicles.

The first two are no new measures because they were already offered to the vehicle owners concerned when the Government pressed ahead with the diesel-to-petrol scheme in 1995. If the Government was capable of offering these two concessions in 1995, it must likewise apply them to the LPG scheme today for the sake of equal treatment. For the third recommended concession, the rationale behind it is that since LPG for domestic uses are already duty free, even if the Government extend the exemption to LPG vehicles, it will not suffer any great losses in revenue. In addition, such a duty exemption for LPG vehicles is also warranted from the perspective of safety because it can ensure that people will not use domestic LPG as vehicle fuels. Although the Government will receive less revenue as fewer vehicles use diesel as fuel, the significance of clean air to public health, the impetus to the tourism industry and the retention of talents should always outweigh any losses in tax revenue.

1997 has been a "choking" year for all of us. So, the Government should really implement the LPG Taxi Scheme as soon as possible this year. It should also promote the diesel-to-LPG scheme by adopting appropriate and effective concessionary measures, in the hope that this scheme can be acceptable and welcomed by the trades and vehicle owners

concerned. That way, we will be able to implement the scheme quickly and with success, thus bringing cleaner air to all of us in 1998.

With these remarks, I render my support for the motion in principle.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Dr LEONG Che-hung.

**DR LEONG CHE-HUNG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the seriousness of poor air quality in Hong Kong, as Mr LEE just said, has posed a very big threat on people's health. The result of air quality monitoring by the Environmental Protection Department shows that the contents of suspended particulates in the air in urban area are 25% higher than the annual air quality index. A research carried out by medical professionals also shows that the small particles in the air directly give rise to respiratory system illnesses. As the Honourable Allen LEE just said, they also induce lung cancer and cause a higher death rate. On the basis of the standard of the World Health Organization, if the dust in every cubic metre of air increases by 20 mg, the rate of hospitalisation will increase by 10%; if it increases by 55 mg, the death rate, may I emphasize it is the death rate, will increase by 10%. Under the present circumstances in which the number of vehicles and their use keeps on increasing, the consequences would be very serious if we do not control the air quality before it is too late.

Around 60% of the vehicles moving on the road now are diesel vehicles, the medical sector absolutely agree and support that policies should be formulated to reduce the number of diesel vehicles in order to control the suspended particulates in the air.

In 1995, the Government published a consultation document, hoping that vehicles using unleaded petrol and catalysts can replace diesel vehicles of four metric tonnes or less. However, this suggestion has been strongly opposed by those in the trade, especially those in the taxi trade, as they thought that it would increase their operating costs and reduce their abilities to compete with other means of transport. Besides, the majority of the legislative councillors at that time opposed to this suggestion, as a result, this scheme was not implemented.

Under pressure from the public, the Government launched a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Taxi Scheme at the end of 1997 and it planned to spend one year on collecting information on the expenditure and maintenance of LPG taxis.

In fact, Madam President, the use of LPG vehicles is not a new technology. Among some 30 countries and regions in the world, more than 4 million vehicles use LPG as fuel. Countries like Japan, Australia, Italy and Holland have more than 30 years' experience in using LPG vehicles. They have definite experience and standards in respect of the safety, efficiency, performance and operating costs in the use of LPG vehicles, as well as the sources and supply of LPG and LPG vehicles. Really, I do not understand why the Government still has to wait for one year after launching the pilot project before formally launching the scheme.

Actually, the Panel on Transport of the former Legislative Council has deployed a delegation to Japan to investigate the use of LPG vehicles and so has the taxi trade sent representatives to investigate the situation in Japan. Through this investigation, they understand the operation of LPG taxis in Japan and the costs incurred, that's why they now support the Government in launching a LPG Taxi Scheme and this is the major reason why this scheme can be smoothly implemented.

Madam President, I urge the Government to make every effort to provide coupling facilities for LPG taxis, for instance, to build more LPG filling stations in order that the LPG Taxi Scheme can be implemented as soon as possible. The Government should also formulate the long-term aim and timetable for air quality control to safeguard people's health.

Madam President, I so submit in support of Mr Allen LEE's motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Dr Raymond HO.

**DR RAYMOND HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I find the degree of air pollution in Hong Kong unacceptable and I believe the public feels the same. In these few years, the air quality has been worsening. We only need to walk along the street and dust and stuffy air will blow against our faces. Can we imagine that this is mainly caused by exhaust air from vehicles and the use of diesel vehicles? I very much support this motion which urges the Government to implement as soon as possible the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Taxi Scheme and to extend the Scheme to private cars.

In fact, we must look squarely at the degree of damage caused by air pollution to people's health. The Environment Protection Department (EPD) discovers that the standard of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) and concentration of nitrogen dioxide of have

exceeded the standard, which cause our air quality to deteriorate. The relevant department has affirmed that exhaust from vehicles is the main source of nitrogen dioxide and the particulates in the air, especially the respirable particulates. The medical sector has also pointed out that dust will cause pulmonary malfunction, pulmonary bleb, blood vessel embolism and even lung cancer. A research carried out by a health specialist proves that if the concentration of RSP increases by 10 mg per cubic metre, the fatality rate contributed by different causes will increase by around 1%. In addition, the number of people suffering from bronchitis, allergic rhinitis and asthma will increase in the wake of an increasing degree of air pollution.

In order to ensure that the exhaust air from vehicles moving on the street meets the environmental protection standard, the Government should stipulate that when all vehicles which have been used for six years are subject to examination, with the brakes, lighting systems, engines as well as the exhaust pipes should be tested. As far as I understand, there is no legislation in Hong Kong which stipulates that the procedures of examining vehicles which have been used for six years must include testing of exhaust pipes, the Government should therefore pay attention to this as the concentration of the exhaust air from vehicles which have been used for many years is usually higher than the standard. Moreover, I find it necessary for courses to be offered to train up adequate exhaust testing technicians to comply with the requirements of this work procedure. I do not understand why Hong Kong has to wait until this day to test LPG vehicles for the first time, when LPG vehicles have already been successfully used for some 30 years in some countries such as Australia, Japan and Holland.

I fully support the one-year pilot LPG Taxi Scheme now launched by the Government for one year, and I think that this pilot scheme can help improve our air quality. As the Scheme is a new attempt which is still at its testing stage, the Government must take the lead and formulate some concessionary measures to encourage the taxi trade to take part. As this is after all a new attempt, the Government should enable the public and drivers to be aware of the importance of improving air quality and allay their worries regarding the safety of LPG vehicles. The Government should instil in the public, and give publicity to, common knowledge and safety about LPG vehicles, for the public worries about the safety of LPG vehicles have originated from their inadequate knowledge, therefore, the Government should provide the public with detailed information on LPG vehicles through this pilot scheme so that the public can accept the use of such vehicles.

In fact, LPG vehicles are not only better than diesel vehicles in terms of environmental protection, they are also better than diesel vehicles in terms of safety. In Japan, some 200 000 LPG taxis have been operating for over 30 years and there have never been explosions or

serious accidents. The public may now have worries as they are comparing the potential dangers of these vehicles with that of domestic LPG, but in fact this is not necessary.

In concert with the pilot scheme, the Government has built temporary LPG filling stations at four locations now. However, I am of the view that if the Government is determined to extend the LPG Taxi Scheme to lorries, light goods vehicles and private cars, it should build more LPG filling stations for the convenience of drivers. In addition, to encourage more people to use LPG, the Government can consider formulating some concessionary measures such as reducing taxes on LPG fuel, I believe this will help attract drivers to take part, and in particular, will encourage more people from the taxi trade to use LPG taxis.

At present, there are around 150 000 diesel vehicles in Hong Kong, accounting for about 30% of the total number of vehicles in Hong Kong. Therefore, I think that the Government should promote the LPG vehicles scheme as soon as possible. To me, a one-year taxi pilot scheme is far too long, and the number of vehicles involved is very limited. Therefore, I hope that the Government can expeditiously consider expanding this Scheme or appointing consultants to speed up the relevant study.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mrs Miriam LAU.

**MRS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): Madam President, around two years ago, the Government proposed the compulsory use of petrol by diesel vehicles which are less than four tonnes. Strong objections were raised by the taxi and minibus industries at that time, but the Government and some advocates of environmental protection criticized them for their lack of concern for environmental protection and public health. In the face of these criticisms, the taxi and minibus industries still adhere to their principles and they think that even if other fuel is used, it must be ensured that the aim of improving air quality can really be achieved and there will not be adverse effects on the industries in the long run. Petrol is certainly not a feasible choice as it is not environmental-friendly.

Today, the taxi industry makes efforts and spends money to actively support the LPG Taxi Scheme of the Government and many environmental protection advocates have also changed their attitude toward them, while some people have even found it strange that they could have viewed things differently. In fact, the taxi industry has not changed and they are

always in support of environmental protection, but only that some people have misunderstood them. About half a year ago, I went to Japan on a visiting tour with around a dozen representatives from the taxi and minibus industries. I have to amend what Dr the Honourable LEONG Che-hung just said about the inspection delegation as it was not a delegation sent by the Panel on Transport to Japan. At that time, I took the initiative to join the inspection delegation of around a dozen representatives from the taxi and minibus industries to Japan at my own expenses. The conclusion of our investigation was that, LPG taxis .....

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Sorry, Dr LEONG Che-hung, if you wish to elucidate, you have to wait until Mrs LAU has finished speaking. Mrs LAU, please continue.

**MRS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): ..... are absolutely desirable from the angle of environmental protection, and also feasible in so far as economic efficiency is concerned. After we returned to Hong Kong from the tour, the industries have told the Government explicitly that they supported in principle the use of LPG in place of diesel, but they asked the Government to carry out a pilot scheme to ensure that LPG taxis can still maintain good operational functions and cost effectiveness in the geographical environment of Hong Kong.

The Government finally agreed to launch a LPG Taxi pilot scheme. The scheme has been carried out for some two months. Taxi drivers who took part in the pilot scheme were initially satisfied with the performance of LPG taxis while the passengers found that LPG taxis were quieter and more comfortable than diesel taxis.

However, fuel price is an important factor in determining whether LPG vehicles are attractive enough to the industry, whether they will be extensively used and whether their safety can be guaranteed. At present, the price of the LPG used by LPG taxis is calculated on the basis of the LPG retail price for domestic LPG, that is, \$4.68 per litre. Although it is cheaper than the retail price of diesel at \$6.71 per litre, the consumption of LPG taxis for fuel is 30% more than diesel vehicles. Therefore, the expenditure of LPG taxis on fuel does not differ much from that of diesel taxis. I think that the selling price of LPG for vehicles should definitely not be higher than that of domestic LPG to deter people from illegally re-adjusting their vehicles in an attempt to use domestic LPG as this can be very dangerous. Precisely for this reason, I think that absolutely no tax can be levied on LPG for vehicles. Actually, the price of LPG for vehicles should be lower than that of domestic LPG as the import price of LPG is basically lower than that of diesel. In future, LPG vehicles will fill LPG at LPG filling stations, and the fuel companies can save up the expenses now incurred in installing

pipes leading to residential premises for the supply of domestic LPG and in servicing consumption meters.

The second factor determining whether LPG vehicles are attractive enough is maintenance. If there are too few qualified repair shops and technicians for repairing LPG vehicles, the maintenance costs will surely be expensive and this makes the taxi industry very worried. If the Government is determined to introduce LPG vehicles, it should make arrangements to train up adequate repairs personnel at an early date to popularize maintenance services for LPG vehicles. By then, prices involved can naturally be kept at a reasonable level and stringent repairs standards can correspondingly be established.

The third determining factor is the prices and serviceable duration of LPG vehicles. Market supply and demand can determine the level of vehicle prices, as during the early stage, only a smaller amount of LPG vehicles will initially be introduced to Hong Kong, so the prices of such vehicles may be higher. As regards the serviceable duration of LPG vehicles, it is roughly estimated that it will be shorter than that of diesel vehicles. While diesel taxis can operate for seven years, LPG taxis can only operate for five years. Therefore, in respect of vehicle prices and serviceable duration, LPG vehicles are obviously less attractive. The Government should consider offering more concessionary measures such as exemption of first registration tax and subsidies to those who change their vehicles. In respect of offering subsidies to those who change their vehicles, I suggest that the amount of subsidies may be determined on the basis of the number of years that the diesel taxis have been used. This is also supported by the Liberal Party. For instance, on changing a diesel taxi which has been used for one year to a LPG vehicle, the owner will be offered a maximum subsidy of \$150,000 while changing such a taxi which have been used for two years will obtain a subsidy of \$140,000 and so on and so forth. This can encourage vehicle owners who have newer diesel taxis to switch to using LPG vehicles at an early date.

Finally, whether LPG can obtain convenient refill is also very important. During the period of the pilot scheme, the Government has built four temporary LPG filling stations, but they can only barely satisfy the needs during the period. In the future, if the LPG Taxi Scheme is fully implemented, there should at least be two LPG filling stations in each of the 18 districts of the territory.

The success of LPG taxis will be a big step forward in the promotion of environmental protection in Hong Kong, therefore, the Government should make every effort to ensure the

success of LPG taxis. When promoting the LPG Taxi Scheme, the Government may lose some income or have to mobilize some resources, but this is worth the while. The Government has said that public health is priceless. In promoting the changeover from diesel vehicles to petrol vehicles, the Government has taken the initiative to offer many concessionary measures, and has even said that more concessions are negotiable if the industry agreed to the Scheme. The Government now launching a scheme which is even more environmental-friendly than the petrol vehicle scheme and it should be more generous in the offer of concessionary measures. However, after all, 18 000 taxis account for only a small percentage of a total of 150 000 diesel vehicles in Hong Kong. In the long run, I think that the Government should look into the feasibility of urging diesel vehicles to switch to the use of LPG or other environment-friendly fuel so that the public can really enjoy fresh air at an early date.

Madam President, I so submit in support of the motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Dr LEONG Che-hung, do you wish to elucidate?

**DR LEONG CHE-HUNG** (in Cantonese): Thank you, Madam President. I just wish to elucidate something. I was actually referring to two inspection delegations, one was the one Mrs Miriam LAU referred to, that is, the delegation of those from the taxi industry which Mrs LAU joined at her own expense to investigate LPG vehicles in Japan, another one is the delegation of the then Panel on Transport to study transport matters. As to whether any delegation has investigated LPG vehicles, I would not go into the details here. I just wish to elucidate that I was referring to two inspection delegations. Thank you.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mrs Miriam LAU, do you also wish to elucidate?

**MRS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): I wish to elucidate what Dr LEONG Che-hung elucidated, as the Panel on Transport did send an inspection delegation but the destination was not Japan, but Europe.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Prof NG Ching-fai.

**PROF NG CHING-FAI** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the air quality in Hong Kong has been deteriorating, the sky is often hazy even on sunny days and Hong Kong tends to appear like Los Angeles. It is the right time for the Government to think of a way to completely solve this problem of air pollution which is mainly caused by the suspended particulates and exhaust air from vehicles, and it needs to carry out a research to find a better fuel to replace diesel.

The LPG Taxi Scheme carried out by a transdepartmental team of the Government last year has been found feasible, as LPG, mainly composed of simple hydrocarbon substances, is a clearer fuel than diesel.

Madam President, as far as I understand, the LPG Taxi Scheme has been supported by the transport industry and advocates of environmental protection, some even suggest that the Government should expeditiously extend the scope to cover all diesel vehicles in Hong Kong except heavy diesel vehicles. However, they are worried: (1) that the Government will levy new taxes on the fuel concerned, thereby substantially increasing the burden of vehicle owners and operators; (2) that diesel vehicle owners may not have sufficient funds and can hardly meet the huge expenses on transforming their vehicles or replacing devices; and (3) that whether they can afford the maintenance fees.

I am of the view that, while the Government implements this pilot scheme, it must give full consideration to the above worries to enable the scheme to be formally and smoothly implemented within the shortest time. In the light of the worries of those concerned I suggest that the Government can consider these methods: (1) It can follow the examples of other countries and regions and adopt fiscal measures such as tax concessions to attract users to switch to the use of LPG vehicles; for example, the Australian Government gives concessions on LPG tax and the sales taxes on the devices used by vehicle owners to transform their vehicles before switching to the use of LPG; and (2) as a fairly huge amount of capital costs is incurred in transforming diesel vehicles into LPG vehicles, it is suggested that the Government should follow the example of Japan, that is, if the owners diesel vehicles under 2.5 metric tonnes buy LPG vehicles to replace their original diesel vehicles or buy equipment to transform their vehicles, they can obtain some subsidies.

Finally, Madam President, I hope that if the result of the pilot scheme is satisfactory, the Government can adopt positive and effective measures to urge all diesel vehicles (except heavy vehicles which are technologically not feasible yet) to use vehicle fuel which is as clean as LPG such that we can breath in clean and fresh air again and see a clear sky more often.

Madam President, I so submit in support of Mr Allen LEE's motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr CHOY Kan-pui.

**MR CHOY KAN-PUI** (in Cantonese): Madam President, Hong Kong is a densely populated place and there are many vehicles. Coupled with these, industrial pollution has resulted in air pollution, air quality is increasingly deteriorating, and in some areas, air quality is even consistently lower than the international standard, thereby adversely affecting the health of the public. In the wake of an extensive relocation of factories to the north and the implementation of air control legislation by the Government, air quality has been much improved. However, exhaust air from vehicles has become the main factor causing air pollution. Exhaust air generated from different vehicles using different fuels would have varying degrees of damage on health, so do not think that petrol running vehicles would be very much better than diesel vehicles. It is true that diesel vehicles emit a great quantity of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) which would affected the human respiratory system and pulmonary functions, yet with petrol vehicles, although they would discharge less RSP, they would give out more carbon monoxide and carcinogenic substances such as benzene; whereas vehicles running on Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) can avoid the problems caused by the two. This is because LPG does not contain lead or most of the additives, and the sulphur content is extremely low, making it cleaner than petrol and diesel, and can thus greatly reduce the pollution caused by exhaust gases emitted by vehicles. As taxis are vehicles most frequently found on the roads, the Government, in the first instance, has been right in encouraging some of the taxis to replace diesel with LPG as fuel on a trial basis. Response to this trial scheme has been favourable, and if the Government wishes to further implement the scheme, it will have to adopt incentive measures to attract people in the trade to use LPG for their vehicles.

The use of LPG as an alternative fuel for vehicles is a breakthrough in Hong Kong in which the public knows very little about and naturally they are particularly concerned about the issue of safety. In fact, some foreign countries have been using LPG vehicles extensively for 30 years and such vehicles have been operating well without much problems. The Government can pool the experience of foreign countries and their technology in order to formulate regulations to ensure that LPG vehicles have safety standards, and facilities in the filling stations, adequate and safe. On the other hand, it should also extensively promote to and educate the public that vehicles using LPG as fuel are environmentally effective and is as equally safe as vehicles using diesel and petrol.

Madam President, to fully implement the LPG taxis policy, prices of LPG fuel, cost of vehicles, and whether maintenance charges would be cheaper than diesel vehicles are all factors contributing to the successful implementation of the policy. At present, the price of LPG is lower than that of diesel because the Government has not levied any fuel tax on LPG. Hereafter, if the Government were to create conditions favourable to such implementation, it should avoid imposing LPG tax so that the price of LPG would not be increased. Measures should also be adopted to ensure the stability of both the supply and prices of LPG.

Whether or not LPG filling stations are "easily accessible" and convenient, as well as the number and locations of such filling stations would have great impacts on taxi drivers, and these are also important factors affecting the success or otherwise of the policy. At present, there are only four filling stations, and even if the scheme were implemented, there would only be 20 odd such stations, to be constructed in a span of 4 to 5 years. Hence, the Government should formulate specific long-term policies and provide suitable locations and incentives for investors to open up more filling stations to ensure an adequate number of them.

Madam President, the Government is only conducting the pilot scheme on several scores of taxis, and still have to wait until the end of next year for a review. I hope that if the pilot scheme has been proven a success, all taxis in Hong Kong will switch to LPG vehicles without delay, and that the scheme will be extended to other diesel vehicles such as minibuses, goods vehicles etc. If all diesel vehicles are replaced by LPG vehicles, RSP content could be reduced by 98%, and since this would be environmentally favourable and will not damage the interests of people in the trade in any way, I believe that the move will be supported by the users.

Madam President, I so submit in support of Mr Allen LEE's motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Dr LAW Cheung-kwok.

**DR LAW CHEUNG-KWOK** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I speak in support of Mr Allen LEE's motion on behalf of the Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL).

The air pollution in Hong Kong is very serious and the damage it caused to our environment, economy and health has a stage that is no longer negligible, but the Government still has not taken positive measures to make improvements.

The Government has just imported 20 taxis using LPG as fuel. In fact, the technology of using LPG as fuel has actually been used in Europe for a few decades. The technology has also been introduced to Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing; and in Indonesia, the technology has not only been used on taxis but will also use it on buses. This technology is generally supported by people especially advocates of environmental protection.

According to the experience of foreign countries, LPG is a very environment-friendly vehicle fuel. Taxi drivers in Hong Kong who have taken part in the pilot scheme generally praise LPG taxis as quiet, having less peculiar smell, impulsive and as capable as diesel vehicles in climbing slopes. Moreover, their fuel costs are slightly lower and passengers have responded to them favourably, therefore, these taxis are welcomed.

In order to encourage more taxi drivers to comprehensively use LPG taxis, the Government should offer a full basket of concessionary policies to reduce the operational costs of LPG taxis, and to make them more attractive money-wise and more competitive.

In this regard, the Government should reduce the import duties of LPG vehicles and spare parts to reduce the costs to be borne by those in the industry. Moreover, the licence fees of LPG vehicles should be lower than the conventional vehicle licence fees. Taiwan has imported LPG vehicles since 1995, apart from encouraging people to buy LPG vehicles, their government will bear half of the necessary expenses when vehicle owners transform their vehicles for using LPG. Such a policy of the Taiwanese government has set a good example for us to copy.

The Government should also give tax concessions to LPG used as vehicle fuel as this has already been the policy in such countries and regions as Britain, France, Germany and Taiwan. With these concessions, the LPG used in vehicles is 40% cheaper than petrol. However, the Government must pay attention to the problem of illegal conversion of uses.

An adequate number of LPG filling stations is also very crucial to the successful implementation of this scheme. For instance, there are some 2 400 LPG filling stations in Holland, there are also many such stations in Australia, therefore, LPG vehicles are successfully promoted in these countries. The Government should encourage fuel suppliers to provide LPG filling services in addition to the existing services of petrol filling stations. When necessary, it should give them assistance in terms of technology and resources to help popularize the scheme.

Meanwhile, the Government should consider extending the scheme and giving the same concessions to company fleets, minibuses, buses and even private cars in order to achieve the aim of comprehensively reducing the number of diesel and petrol vehicles in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the ADPL suggests that the Government should consider the use of two other non-polluting or less polluting vehicle fuel, that is, natural gas vehicles and battery vehicles.

The use of natural gas as vehicle fuels is in no way a novelty, for they have been in use in Italy for 25 to 30 years. At present, more than 250 000 vehicles are using natural gas and New Zealand is now promoting such use. There are more than 1 million vehicles using natural gases in the world. As there is an abundant storage of natural gas in the world and its price is low. The costs of engine repairs of natural gas vehicles are lower and such vehicles have longer service lives. These vehicles discharge less exhaust than LPG vehicles and they can use two kinds of fuels which reduces their operational costs.

As regards battery vehicles, they are even more environment-friendly and achieve the standard of zero exhaust discharge. As they are less polluting and safer, their use has been actively promoted in the United States for many years. Two years ago, a city in France has also started using battery vehicle systems. In the long run, it is the most environment-friendly source of vehicle power with boundless prospects. I hope that the use of these vehicles in Hong Kong can be considered at an early date to reduce the degree of air pollution and to safeguard the people's health.

I so submit in support of the motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mrs Peggy LAM.

**MRS PEGGY LAM** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the serious air pollution in Hong Kong is mainly caused by vehicle exhaust. We have been discussing the restrictions on vehicle exhaust for many years but our discussions still bear no fruit. As air pollution has become more and more serious, it is indeed necessary to put stringent restrictions on vehicle exhaust.

The air pollution in Hong Kong is featured by a high content of respirable suspended particulates (RSP). These particulates are harmful air pollutants mainly produced by the

exhaust discharged during diesel combustion. That is why the larger the number of diesel vehicles on the road, the worse will be our air quality. Among the diesel vehicles in Hong Kong, taxis alone have already accounted for 18 000. To reduce air pollution, the first thing is to reduce the number of diesel vehicles.

In the former Legislative Council, I had proposed discarding the use of diesel taxis, but it was deemed not feasible by the then Government. Fortunately, the Government has recently awakened and launched a LPG taxi pilot scheme; this is already very late but is better than nothing. For the sake of public health, the Government should expeditiously carry out a LPG taxi scheme as poor air quality will increase the incidence of diseases and death rate of people suffering from heart disease or respiratory system diseases. If people are in contact with polluted air over a long period of time, they may suffer from illnesses such as eye inflammation, coughs and sore throats. I often have a husky voice and I wonder whether it is caused by inhaling too much of these exhaust gases.

According to the latest information issued by the Environmental Protection Department, in 1997, the RSP content and the concentration of nitrogen dioxide in the air was higher than the standard level and the air pollution in Hong Kong has become more serious. Therefore, we must take immediate actions to get rid of diesel vehicles and replace them with LPG vehicles in order to reduce the pollutants in the air as far as possible, and to save our environment and restore our health.

In Hong Kong, the number of children suffering from asthma has doubled in the past 12 years and we can say that this is also related to air pollution. In order to safeguard people's health and the health of our future masters, we must stop using diesel vehicles without delay.

Air pollution impairs the image of Hong Kong. Recently, the business of the tourist industry has been on the decline, if conditions in our environment keeps on worsening, our impression in the minds of foreign tourists will surely become be degraded and it will be increasingly difficult for the tourist industry to gain a revival.

LPG taxis are certainly beneficial rather than harmful to the taxi industry and they are supported by the taxi drivers who have taken part in the pilot scheme. However, the taxi drivers are not satisfied that there are only four LPG filling stations at present and they hope that the Government can build more LPG filling stations as soon as possible. In fact, the Government had proposed the replacement of diesel vehicles with petrol vehicles in 1995, but the plan was opposed by the taxi and minibus industry groups as the operational costs of petrol vehicles were several times higher than those of diesel vehicles, and the plan was

subsequently forced to be shelved.

However, with LPG taxis which the Government is now planning to introduce on a trial basis, they cost less than diesel taxis in terms of fuel and expenditure, and as there is no LPG tax in Hong Kong yet, the cost of these taxis will be lower than those of diesel taxis. Moreover, as these taxis are more environment-friendly, I believe that those in the industry will support this scheme.

Some people may have queries about the safety of LPG vehicles. In fact, LPG vehicles have been used in Japan and Singapore for many years and in Holland for some 30 years, as just mentioned by some Honourable colleagues. Therefore, people should not have doubts about the safety of LPG vehicles. At present, Hong Kong is not inferior to other countries in terms of technology and qualified personnel and we should not have any problem adopting this technology which have been used in foreign countries for many years. However, we still have to wait until the Government completes the LPG taxi pilot scheme at an early date before we know whether our environment is suitable for LPG vehicles.

If the LPG taxi pilot scheme will prove successful, the Government should expeditiously extend this scheme to other diesel vehicles such as minibuses and light goods vehicles to achieve the aim of improving air quality at a faster rate.

While the Government encourages taxis and minibuses to use the more environment-friendly LPG as fuel, why does it not take the lead to allow larger government vehicles such as refuse collection vehicles which are using diesel to switch to the use of LPG? I recall that when the Environmental Protection Committee was established in 1991, I was appointed the Chairman. During the six years I was in office, we made great efforts to spread the message of environmental protection and to educate the public to be aware of the importance of environmental protection, and the slogan I put forward then was "Let me start protecting the environment". I believe that the Government can take the lead and set an example by first replacing government diesel vehicles with LPG vehicles to urge those in the industry to accept LPG vehicles and set a good example for the people in Hong Kong.

Madam President, I so submit in support of the motion.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mrs Selina CHOW.

**MRS SELINA CHOW** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I recall that not long ago, we had a heated debate over the Government's policy of switching from diesel to petrol. I recall that some Members opposed the ideas of the Liberal Party then and criticized us for not being conscious enough about environmental protection. In fact, as Mrs Miriam LAU just said, we value the principle and concept of environmental protection, but at that time, we opined that the Government had identified the problem but found the wrong answer. I do not understand why the Government refrained from following the good example and the well-established practice of Japan, and instead thought of some measures which were expensive and might not be feasible. Consequently, the Government has changed and reverted to the right path, but it is a pity that it has been moving too slowly. We had once indicated at the Penal on Transport that it would in fact be too slow if the Government still wanted to spend one year to slowly consider a scheme which has been implemented by others for more than a decade, the deficiencies of which have been rectified and improved. So I hope the Government could obtain some findings as soon as possible, otherwise we will still have to wait for one year for the trial scheme to be completed, and we must bear in mind that implementation requires time as well. I had asked the Government to take synchronous action at that time for it was something very important, and I believe everyone hopes that our air quality can be quickly improved.

Here I wish to suggest that not only the Government but our society as a whole should work together to promote the consciousness of vehicle owners about environmental protection and carry out the environmental protection policy in order to achieve the best results. In the past, I used to think that the Government was not effectively enforcing the law as the Environmental Protection Department did not have any empowering legislation and we failed to see the Government installing devices at the black spots. Very often, I see vehicles emitting black exhaust when they climb up a nearby slope and I wonder why the Government failed to see this while I managed to do so? It is high time for the Government to consider giving awards besides imposing penalties. In fact, now we can have a system that have both awards and penalties. If vehicle owners value the concept of environmental protection, and make speedy improvements — now that the answer is available — they should be awarded better treatment, and be provided with more roads to improve the environmental protection effect of their vehicles. If they still hold out and refuse to make improvements, the Government has to use the "rod" or "stick".

Therefore, the Government has to adopt a two-prong measure, for while giving vehicle owners concessions, it should also enhance law enforcement and the effect of the stick to give vehicle owners an additional reason why they have to convert to vehicles which are more environment-friendly as soon as possible. This is the "carrot and stick" strategy. In this regard, the Government can make reference to the Clean Hong Kong Campaign in the past

which was very successful. Although Mrs Peggy LAM has just said that a Committee is put in charge, the Government's support of the Committee is not as strong and comprehensive as its support of the Clean Hong Kong Campaign and the idea is not as good. In the past, there were the litter bug as well as advertisements featuring movie stars and two eyes staring at people to remind the public that they should keep Hong Kong clean. These ideas are important in popularizing the idea of environmental protection. Useful or good ideas should be collected from creative persons or advertising companies. However, I think another important point must be considered, that is, the giving of awards. I think that the "spotters" who help to use the stick and monitor vehicles emitting black exhaust should be awarded as they assist the Government in implementing the policy. Awards should also be given to vehicle owners, companies, bodies or taxi groups that give strong support to the implementation of the improvement scheme by the Government. The Government can also publicize to the public that they are environmental protection ambassadors or environment-friendly vehicle ambassadors. I often think that if they can receive recognition for their efforts and if more people are awarded, they can be stimulated to play a positive role.

It is my hope that while the Government implements the pilot scheme the progress of which I hope can be paced up, it can consider including these said elements to promote the important idea of improving air quality in a quicker way.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr IP Kwok-him.

**MR IP KWOK-HIM** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the community and the Council have discussed the problem of our air quality for many times but there is still no trace of obvious improvements. Have Members noticed that in busy streets many are doing an involuntary action, which is, covering their noses with their hands? It sounds a bit exaggerating, but this precisely reveals that the air pollution problem in Hong Kong has become intolerable. The Government mentioned repeatedly that the main cause of air pollution in Hong Kong is an extremely high level of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) which mainly come from diesel vehicles. However, I must say that the air pollution indices published by the Environmental Protection Department may not necessary reflect the actual situation as the air monitoring stations are now erected by the Government on top of tall buildings and the data simply cannot represent the air quality of the busy and crowded streets and places. The Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) is of the view that the Government must install more monitoring stations on road sides and give information on the air pollution indices at road sides to ensure that the public can get accurate information on air pollution.

Madam President, in order to solve the problem of air pollution, the Government should start looking for less polluting fuels. The scheme of switching from diesel to petrol in 1996 was aborted as it was opposed by the taxi industry, consequently this urged the Government to introduce a LPG Taxi Pilot Scheme for one year. The Scheme has so far been implemented for more than two months and the result is generally satisfactory. We are pleased to get fairly good comments from drivers, vehicles owners and passengers on LPG vehicles. The DAB is of the view that it is far too early to say whether the Scheme is satisfactory at this stage but I wish to draw Members' attention to two points here.

Firstly, the economic incentive cannot be left out if we wish to attract taxis and even other vehicles to switch to using LPG. In the past, the scheme of switching from diesel to petrol was strongly opposed by those in the industry which to a very large extent was because of the substantial increase in operational costs after switching to petrol. Although the fuel costs of LPG taxis are now lower than those of diesel vehicles, it is mainly because the Government has not levied fuel tax on LPG vehicles. Therefore, if the Government does not wish to lose the battle again, it is imperative that it should device a set of concessionary measures as just mentioned by some Members, including the exemption of LPG fuel tax and the first registration fees of LPG vehicles as well as extending low-interest loans to diesel vehicle owners who intend to switch to LPG vehicles.

Besides catering for the economic interests of those in the industry, the Government should surely pay attention to the issue of safety. As LPG vehicles are after all technologies newly introduced to Hong Kong, whether there are adequate qualified personnel in Hong Kong to deal with the inspection and repair work in the future should be the concern of the community and Members of the Council. The Government should also pay attention to the LPG filling procedures of the operators in LPG filling stations. It should follow the example of foreign countries with such experience and offer specialized training courses for these operators and give them registration. As regards the locations of LPG filling stations to be set up, as a matter of principle, they should be set up to cause minimal disturbance to the public. Furthermore, the Government should extensively publicize to assure the public of the safety and reliability of LPG filling stations so as to reduce the obstructions to any expansion of this scheme in future.

It cannot be denied that if the pilot scheme is successful, it is desirable to further extend the Scheme to private cars. In fact, after most private cars have switched to the use of unleaded petrol and three-way catalysts, the polluting degree of their exhaust has been greatly reduced. I believe the further extension of the scheme to public light buses and light goods vehicles are practical and feasible proposals and will effectively improve the air quality as a

whole.

Madam President, choosing less polluting fuel is a way to alleviate the pollution caused by vehicle exhaust. Have Members ever thought that a badly maintained vehicle will produce excessive exhaust regardless of whether it uses LPG or diesel? As Hong Kong people do not have adequate knowledge of, or are not too much concerned about, vehicle maintenance and the quality of the vehicle maintenance industry is not uniform enough, people have always neglected the problem that excessive vehicle exhaust is caused by inadequate maintenance. Last month, an environmental protection body and I organised a vehicle exhaust testing activity outside the Legislative Council Building with the aim of arousing alerting the the public to the need for vehicle maintenance. If the Government still does not actively publicize the importance of vehicle maintenance, or fails to enact legislation to enhance exhaust testing of vehicles before licence renewal and ignore the improvement required for the quality of the vehicle repairs industry, then while we tackle the problem of RSP today, we will have to tackle the carbon monoxide, hydrocarbon compounds and nitrogen oxide emitted by LPG vehicles in future. Therefore, only when clean fuel and sound maintenance are made to work hand in hand can our air quality be obviously improved.

Madam President, I so submit in support of the motion on behalf of the DAB.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr James TIEN.

**MR JAMES TIEN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in respect of the protection of our environment, many people from the industrial and commercial sectors had reservations in the past as our industries were still in their development stage a decade or two ago and could not thus afford to take many measures for improving the environment in the face of competition. However, today, most industries have been moved to the north and the problem that remains, air pollution, is mainly caused by taxis and lorries. I believe that if the Government makes efforts to help taxis switch to LPG, simply calculating on the basis of \$6.91 for a litre of diesel or \$4.68 for a litre of LPG, we will find that money can be saved in the long run if taxis switch to LPG. If taxis make an one-off switch to LPG, certainly expenses has to be incurred by the Government, but I believe that this will certainly be helpful in the long run. Members also mentioned that if the public suffer less from respiratory problems and consult doctors less, much medical expenditure can also be saved.

Madam President, I am of the view that in a modern city, the employment situation and our living environment are important factors affecting our ways of living. If we would like

Hong Kong to be a financial centre that attracts many foreign investments, we have to understand that many senior executives from foreign countries will work and live in Hong Kong with their families and they care a lot about our environment. Everyday, we watch our air quality level on television and we find that our air quality indices are one and a half times those by the US standard, therefore, many Americans cannot get used to our air quality. This will also have negative impact on foreign investments in Hong Kong. If we can effect an improvement to this problem, I think it will be of great help in maintaining our status as a financial centre.

Madam President, as other Members have discussed in detail how this can be specifically achieved, I do not intend to elaborate on this any further. I so submit in support of Mr Allen LEE's motion.

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

(No Member indicated to speak)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands.

**SECRETARY FOR PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND LANDS** (in Cantonese):

Madam President, Members are rightly concerned about the quality of the air we breathe in everyday. The Administration welcomes the many constructive suggestions raised by Members today on measures to improve the quality of air and would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to them.

In recent years, air pollution arising from industrial activities and petrol vehicles have been effectively put under control. Nonetheless, emissions from the large number of diesel vehicles in Hong Kong remain a cause for concern. There is a need to substantially reduce the number of diesel vehicles by replacing them with those powered by cleaner fuels in order to bring the ambient concentrations of a harmful air pollutant known as respirable suspended particulates (RSPs) down to its health based Air Quality Objective levels.

In 1996, we conducted an in-house study on the technical feasibility of introducing LPG vehicles in Hong Kong to replace part of the diesel vehicle fleet. After examining technical

issues including refilling infrastructure, safety concerns, legislative framework and availability of suitable vehicle models, we have initially concluded that LPG vehicles can be safely used in Hong Kong.

LPG vehicles have been in use in many overseas countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, and Australia for many years. While we have no doubt about their safe operation and environmental merits, their large scale introduction to Hong Kong hinges on the development of a supporting infrastructure. We therefore took the lead to usher in the technology and the associated infrastructure. These include developing a network to provide fuel to the LPG vehicles, formulating standards and guidelines to ensure the safe operation, proper repair and effective maintenance of the vehicles, and initiating legislative amendments to remove unnecessary obstacles for their wide use.

To clarify the doubts expressed by the transport trades about the reliability of LPG vehicles when they are used under the local intensive driving environment, and to obtain the necessary cost information on fuel consumption and repair and maintenance requirements for devising a motor fuel strategy to improve air quality, we launched a trial run of LPG taxis in November last year. Taxis are selected for the trial because they account for about 30% of the traffic-related RSP emissions in our urban areas. Switching them to LPG would hence improve our air quality significantly. Moreover, the supply of LPG taxis suitable for use in Hong Kong is immediately available and they can be introduced as soon as the supporting infrastructure permits. I would like to point out here that the trial scheme involves only 30 taxis and two sedans. The successful launching of the trial run is dependent on the following factors. In this connection, I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude towards the several parties concerned.

Firstly, the vehicle suppliers. Two major taxi suppliers have provided us with 30 Japan made taxis free of charge so that the participating taxi drivers do not need to purchase the vehicles in order to join the trial run. This is a very important point because the LPG taxi drivers only have to pay the same amount of rent as they used to pay for the ordinary taxis.

Secondly, the vehicle suppliers have also introduced into Hong Kong associated techniques such as repair and maintenance of LPG vehicles; more importantly, a team of maintenance technicians have arrived from Japan to take care of the repair work of the 30

LPG taxis, this is most helpful towards the transfer of techniques and provision of training for our own technicians.

Thirdly, the support and co-ordination efforts from the fuel company concerned. This could well answer a point raised by Members just now. We understand that with only 32 LPG vehicles running in Hong Kong at present, it would not be cost effective from a business point of view for the fuel company to convert four of its refuelling stations as LPG refilling points, because each point could only serve seven to eight vehicles at most. The fuel company is in effect sponsoring this trial run.

Finally, the support from taxi bodies and taxi drivers. Without the co-operation from the abovementioned parties, the trial run could never be launched.

The trial was originally intended to last one year and aimed to provide information on the operation, repair and maintenance requirements of the vehicles under Hong Kong's practical setting. We would like to find out, in particular, information on how the LPG taxis operate in Hong Kong's hot summer with the air conditioners switched on all the time; as well as along the slanting roads on Hong Kong Island. Our original trial was designed to include the four seasons of a year, however, the information obtained in the first two months of the trial indicates that at the current LPG selling price, the operating costs of LPG taxis are similar to their diesel equivalents. Users of LPG vehicles including drivers and passengers are also satisfied with their performance. The positive feedback received is very encouraging indeed. In parallel with the trial, we are formulating a programme to set up a refilling network to support the large scale introduction of LPG taxis, and are considering the fiscal aspects of a clean air motor fuel strategy and its implementation timetable. We fully agree that incentives should be introduced to encourage taxi operators to switch to LPG. However, given that the trial has just started, it is premature at this stage to conclude the form any such incentives should take.

Subject to outcome of the trial, we aim to switch the entire taxi fleet to LPG as soon as possible. We agree that LPG vehicles should have a wider application in Hong Kong for maximum environmental benefits. Our strategy is to apply the LPG vehicle technology to taxis as a start and then extend to other classes of diesel vehicles such as public light bus, small school buses and vans. The kinds of vehicles for conversion to LPG and the pace of switch nonetheless hinge on technical factors such as the time required to provide sufficient LPG filling stations, the supply of suitable vehicle models to Hong Kong, and the cumulative risks arising from the size of the LPG vehicle fleet.

It is proposed in the motion that the LPG vehicle scheme should be extended to include private cars. This appears to be an attractive proposal. However, we should remember that since 1992, all newly registered petrol vehicles have been required to operate on unleaded petrol and be fitted with catalytic converter. This requirement effectively reduces tailpipe emission of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and benzene from individual petrol vehicles by up to 90%.

Although LPG vehicles emit less hydrocarbon pollutants, they are only marginally cleaner than unleaded petrol vehicles. The continued, and even increased, use of unleaded petrol vehicles fitted with catalytic converters will not raise the ambient concentrations of the major air pollutants to any health concern levels. It is therefore still an environmentally sustainable clean vehicle technology on which we can continue to rely. On the other hand, given that an infrastructure for the refilling, repair and maintenance of LPG vehicles will take some time to develop, we have to phase in LPG vehicles in a co-ordinated and systematic fashion. As our air quality problem stems mainly from the large number of diesel vehicles, our priority action must focus on them first. Nevertheless, we will certainly not preclude the use of LPG by private vehicles as a longer term option pending the establishment of a complete support infrastructure.

As regards heavy duty diesel vehicles, we have been liaising with overseas vehicle manufacturers on whether LPG buses and coaches could be supplied to Hong Kong. The problem is that suitable double deck buses and large goods vehicles using LPG as fuel are not available yet, not to say the air-conditioned LPG double deck buses which are most preferred in Hong Kong. As such we are also closely monitoring the use of new clean fuels, and tailpipe emission control technologies such as diesel catalysts on large buses. For the time being, a more practicable way forward would be to expedite replacement of the old models quickly with new ones which comply with the latest Euro II emission standards we have adopted since April 1997 or the forthcoming Euro III standards. The new models would be far much cleaner than the old ones. To achieve this, we have strengthened the annual smoke inspection procedures and stepped up enforcement against smoky vehicles so that aged vehicles which cannot be economically maintained to the expected standards are phased out. Just now Members have referred to the large number of smoky vehicles found in certain areas. Here, I would like to invite Members to join our Spotters Scheme to help us determine whether certain smoky vehicles should be prosecuted or required to be repaired properly.

We are looking towards the introduction of LPG vehicles as an essential measure to improve air quality. I find Members' support to this initiative most encouraging and would like to assure Members that we will try our best to expedite the large scale introduction of LPG vehicles by putting up a comprehensive supporting infrastructure and devising sufficient incentives to promote their use as wide as possible. We will also discuss with the transport trades expeditiously the time table of the trial as well as the scheduled progress, with a view to shortening the trial period.

Thank you, Madam President.

**THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, DR LEONG CHE-HUNG, took the Chair.**

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr Allen LEE, you may now reply and you have five minutes 42 seconds out of your original 15 minutes.

**MR ALLEN LEE** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, I am very glad that all of the 11 colleagues who have spoken in this Council are in support of my motion. Basically, we have reached the consensus that all of us are extremely concerned with the problem of air pollution in Hong Kong and we hope that the Government can expeditiously put in place the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Taxi Scheme so as to speed up the promotion of work in this aspect.

Regarding the speech delivered by Dr TSO WONG Man-yin, I have a few points to make in response. Maybe I have not made myself very clear, or she has not listened carefully to what I said about petrol powered private cars. I did not ask the Government to provide any subsidies. I only hope that the Government can give encouragement. Actually, vehicles running on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) will, in any case, be cleaner than those running on unleaded petrol. I hope the Government can promote this by means of encouragement. But there is no need for it to give any subsidies in terms of resources.

I have stated very clearly in my speech that I hope the scheme can be expeditiously extended to public light buses and light lorries. As for heavy lorries, I have never mentioned about the use of LPG. I am aware that no technology is yet available to allow large, heavy lorries to use LPG. What I meant is, in the long run, the Government should bring in suitable environmentally-friendly fuels, such as natural gas, for heavy vehicles because we know that some countries have already switched to such fuels.

As for the Government's support, I only wish to urge the Government not to delay. It should instead expeditiously formulate a set of measures, such as by giving concessionary terms, encouraging taxis to switch to LPG expeditiously and so on. It should not hold discussion again after the completion of the trial scheme one year later because the scheme will then be delayed for a few months or half a year again. The Government should formulate these schemes as soon as possible to let operators know what is the best way for the Government to promote the schemes.

Finally, I am very grateful to Members in this Council for their support.

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Allen LEE be approved. Will those in favour of the motion please say "aye"?

(Members responded)

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Those against please say "no".

(No Member responded)

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I think the "ayes" have it. I declare that the motion is carried.

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**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Second motion: Improving air quality.

### **IMPROVING AIR QUALITY**

**MR EDWARD HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, air is one of man's most basic needs. Man or woman, rich or poor, young or old and regardless of nationality, each of us needs air and air is free. Unfortunately, we have no right to choose to breathe fresher and cleaner air.

The air quality in Hong Kong has deteriorated to a worrying state. The Environmental Protection Department has recorded more than 16 occasions when the Air Pollution Index (API) at ground level was over 100, indicating that the air pollution level is "extremely high". The highest reading was 167. With regard to pollution in terms of suspended particulates in the air, Hong Kong is worse off than Singapore, Seoul, Tokyo and even London. According to a report of the World Health Organization, the present air pollution level in Hong Kong may lead to the premature death of around 2 000 people each year. In view of this, the Liberal Party has proposed a motion today to urge the Government to actively and expeditiously formulate long-term and comprehensive measures to prevent the air quality from further deteriorating.

First, to address the problem, the Government must start with the means of transport. First and foremost, it should try to offer incentives to encourage the owners of the 18 000 taxis in Hong Kong to switch to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis expeditiously, so as to implement the LPG taxi scheme as early as possible. At present, the biggest worry among taxi owners is that they would have to pay a high price for new taxis. They are also uncertain whether the price of LPG will remain at a low level over a long period. With an LPG taxi costing at least \$200,000, not all taxi owners can afford it amid the current economic downturn.

I suggest that the Government should subsidize part of the purchase price with low-interest loans. It should draw up a regressive loan plan, under which a larger loan amount will be granted for newer taxis, while a smaller amount will be granted for older taxis, in order to encourage taxi owners to purchase new taxis as soon as possible.

As regards the pricing of LPG, the Government should give an explicit undertaking not to levy duty on LPG in the future, in order to ensure that the fuel cost of LPG taxis will not be higher than

the cost of diesel at present. This will also ensure that LPG for vehicle use will not be more expensive than that for domestic use, thus precluding that some car owners might privately fill up their tanks with domestic LPG and hence the potential hazards. I hope that through various incentives offered by the Government, the LPG taxi scheme in Hong Kong will be completed by 2003 or before.

Apart from taxis, we also need to pay attention to the over 4 000 diesel public minibuses that are running in the streets at present. Technically speaking, minibuses can also use LPG. Thus, it is quite a simple matter. The Government can expeditiously implement an LPG minibus pilot scheme and draw up a timetable for minibuses switching to LPG. The Government has also said that 30 to 40 LPG filling stations will be coming on stream by the end of next year and that their number will increase gradually in the following few years. I believe that the number of LPG stations will be sufficient to meet the demand of the schemes to switch to LPG taxis and minibuses at the same time.

For heavy vehicles that cannot use LPG, the Government should expeditiously study the possibility of introducing other types of environmentally-friendly fuels.

The first type of fuel that can be considered is natural gas. Overseas experience shows that the use of natural gas in driving heavy vehicles of over five tonnes has achieved very good results. Even the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in the Mainland has introduced natural gas buses. In Hong Kong, we are already shipping in natural gas cylinders for electric power generation. The Government should actively study how to make use of the existing arrangements to apply natural gas to vehicles.

Another fuel that can be considered is diesel turbo which is already available in European countries, or another fuel called city diesel. I have translated it as "城市柴油" myself. Its fundamental principle is burning diesel in a cleaner way by adding additives. This can reduce the emission of suspended particulates by 25%. However, this type of diesel is not yet available in Hong Kong. We should examine, or together with the oil companies, study the feasibility of introducing these types of environmentally-friendly diesel.

Madam President, my overall impression is that the Government has never actively conducted research on and introduced pollution-free means of transport. For instance, has the Government tried to develop electric buses following overseas examples? Such electric buses should be able to operate in level areas.

Furthermore, the hybrid engine which has been successfully tested and is now in use in Los Angeles, United States also merits our consideration. Vehicles installed with this type of hybrid

engine mainly uses electric power. However, when power is insufficient, it will automatically switch to fuel for propulsion. Railway system is also an efficient and environmentally-friendly means of mass public transport. I hope that the Government will continue to actively develop the rail system.

Apart from improving vehicular fuels, the enhancement of vehicle maintenance standards is equally important. If vehicles are regularly well maintained, the chance of air pollution caused by overstrained mechanical parts will be considerably reduced. In his policy address, the Chief Executive has confirmed that Hong Kong needs to develop high technology and high value-added industries. In my view, the Government can co-operate with various scientific research institutes to conduct research on new technology to reduce the emissions of vehicles, borrow from successful overseas experience and introduce methods to enhance vehicle maintenance standards.

Having talked so much about reforms in the means of transport, I would like to speak on another very important area and that is, how to improve air quality through town planning and environmental protection. First, if the business centre of our city continues to be overly concentrated in Central or the urban areas, the demand for transport of people commuting between home and work will grow continuously, and the number of vehicles as the main transport means will keep increasing. This will inevitably affect the air quality. However, if we can develop more business areas outside Central and reduce the demand for transport of people going to and from work, it will help to improve the air quality. This is one reason why I object to the new phase of the reclamation project in Central. I suggest that when the Government carries out town planning in the future, it should make the reduction of demand for transportation a key consideration and develop new business centres gradually, so that more people can work in the areas where they live or in the neighbourhood, in order to reduce the use of transport.

Second, the Government should seriously consider designating more pedestrian precincts during holidays. For instance, if the Government can consider making individual streets in Causeway Bay where high API readings have been frequently recorded recently as pedestrian shopping areas, it will not only help improve the air quality in the area, but will also attract the people and tourists to stroll and shop in that area. Overseas, pedestrian precincts are greatly welcome and supported by shop owners. Therefore, I hope that the retail industry in Hong Kong will support this proposal.

Third, I urge the Government to actively implement tree-planting programmes to improve the environment. Insofar as roads are concerned, planting trees on both sides of the roads can not only beautify the environment, but will also help to produce fresh air. I urge the relevant authorities to reserve space on both sides of the road for tree-planting when they develop new roads in future. Apart from planting trees along roads, the Government should also launch large-scale tree-planting

campaigns in extensive areas and the countryside.

Apart from internal factors, the air quality in Hong Kong is also affected by external factors. In winter, the north-easterly monsoons will first pass through South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and the industrial cities in South China and bring the air pollutants into Hong Kong. Therefore, we have to address the cross-border air pollution problems squarely. Recently, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) has conducted a study on the air quality of the Pearl River Delta region in collaboration with the Guangdong Provincial Government. This is a very good start. However, I hope that cross-border co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong will not be restricted to the exchange of information or joint study only. I hope that after the completion of the study, both sides will expeditiously come up with concrete measures to reduce pollution and enact laws for that purpose. At the same time, I hope that both sides will strictly enforce preventive measures against pollution.

Lastly, I would like to respond to the amendment proposed by the Honourable Miss Christine LOH. The proposals I am making today for improving the air quality include measures for the long, medium and short terms. For instance, "offering adequate financial incentives to encourage the taxi trade to switch to the use of LPG expeditiously" is obviously a short-term measure. In my view, the amendment proposed by Miss Christine LOH is identical with my motion in terms of direction and goals. There is really no need for Miss LOH to add the word "short-term" before "measures" in my motion.

Indeed, some parts of Miss Christine LOH's amendment are merely supplements to the proposals I have listed. However, I have reservations concerning one of the additions. Her proposal about "introducing compulsory emission testing for all vehicles" is well-intended, but unnecessary. At present, when each new vehicle leaves the factory, it has a certificate of quality for its exhaust emission system. With the present car manufacturing technology, very seldom would the exhaust emission system of a new vehicle malfunction during a period of time immediately after leaving the factory. It is totally unnecessary to require that all vehicles regardless of their age must be tested. This excessive measure will cause the people inconvenience and is a waste of resources.

As the additional proposals made by Miss Christine LOH are unreasonable, the Liberal Party will not support them. I also urge other Members to vote against her amendment.

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

**Mr Edward HO moved the following motion:**

"That, in view of the seriousness of Hong Kong's air pollution problem whilst the Government's proposed scheme to replace diesel vehicles is progressing too slowly and not sufficiently comprehensive to safeguard public health, this Council urges the Government to expeditiously formulate long-term and comprehensive measures to improve the air quality, including offering adequate financial incentives to encourage the taxi trade to switch to the use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) expeditiously; examining the feasibility of introducing LPG or other environment-friendly fuels for use by other types of vehicles; conducting researches on mechanical installations that can reduce exhaust emissions and enhancing vehicle maintenance standards; studying the feasibility of introducing pollution-free public transport; launching large scale tree-planting campaigns; making the reduction of demand for vehicular transportation a key town-planning consideration; and strengthening the co-operation with neighbouring regions in the Mainland with a view to alleviating the cross-border air pollution problems."

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Edward HO, as set out on the Agenda, be passed.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Miss Christine LOH will move an amendment to this motion, as printed on the Agenda. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the motion and the amendment will now be debated together in a joint debate.

I now call upon Miss Christine LOH to speak and to move her amendment.

**MISS CHRISTINE LOH**: Apart from the last part, I very much enjoy the Honourable Edward HO's motion. It is truly an excellent one and I agree with most of it whole-heartedly. I wish to thank him for raising the motion. My amendment aims to strengthen it by adding in specific short-term measures which the Administration can take immediately. I will discuss Mr Edward HO's response to my requirement for compulsory testing in a moment.

Madam President, air pollution is worsening. There is no argument about that. We have had a number of very high Air Pollution Index (API) readings already this year. Although the API readings indicate short-term (24 hour) exceedances of our Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) in such places as Causeway Bay, the long-term objectives are being exceeded in even more districts.

I urge Members to note that it is possible for daily AQOs to be met every day of the year but annual AQOs to fail still. Exposure to short bursts of high levels of air pollution may not damage your health immediately, but continued exposure to lower levels of air pollution may be damaging.

For example, in 1997, annual AQOs for total suspended particulates (TSP) and respirable suspended particulates (RSP) were exceeded at seven out of nine districts in Hong Kong.

Projections are for things to get worse. Despite continued improvements in new, imported vehicle emission standards, there are more and more vehicles on the road, and those vehicles are not being well maintained. Trends in ozone pollution are particularly worrying since Hong Kong's annual average for ozone increased more than 80% in the past 10 years. This is likely to be a serious issue in future.

*Immediate actions*

Madam President, Hong Kong has to sprint to stand still. I would like to have this Council's support to get the Administration to take immediate actions in three specific areas:

Firstly, to introduce compulsory emission testing for all vehicles;

Secondly, to substantially increase the existing fine for smoky vehicles to encourage better maintenance; and

Thirdly, to step up enforcement actions against smoky vehicles.

These are measures that will address emission from all vehicles, not just taxis. We need all car owners to understand that they must minimize emissions.

Madam President, I would like to talk a little bit about what a vehicle is. Most of us see a vehicle as a mobility convenience. If we are to adopt a new attitude and look at a vehicle also as something that emits poisonous gas, we might have a new attitude to the strength and toughness of regulation that is needed. It is because if we still regard a vehicle as a mobility convenience, we may stop short of requiring heavier and stricter regulation. I will come back to this point in a minute.

*Reality check - some statistics*

Let us have a reality check on just what the situation is in Hong Kong. According to the statistics of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), while taxis account for 26% of RSP emissions in urban areas, medium and heavy vehicles, including buses and trucks, account for another 26%.

The current enforcement actions against smoky vehicles are just not working. Last Saturday,

a dedicated official EPD spotter stood on the corner of Hennessy Road and Fleming Road, outside the EPD offices, and counted 78 vehicles emitting excess black smoke in one hour.

Last year, over 26 000 emission testing notices were issued by the EPD — 63% to lorries, 24% to taxis and 11% to public light buses.

Up to the end of October this year, I understand that the number of emission testing notices issued have increased some 15% to 20% over last year.

This may be because the spotters are doing a better job, but I suspect that the spotting scheme is not reducing the number of smoky vehicles on our roads.

Of those 26 000 vehicles tested last year, 2 862 vehicles failed and 63 licences were cancelled as a result. It is curious that we have a high spotting rate and such a low failure rate. We must question whether the scheme is working properly at all.

#### *Immediate results*

I believe my short-term proposals will have positive results.

My first proposal, as I said earlier, is to introduce compulsory emission testing for all vehicles as part of the Transport Department's annual road-worthiness test, there will be, therefore, an incentive for vehicle owners to maintain their vehicles. Well-maintained vehicles do not emit black smoke. I do not know why Mr HO regards this as a sort of interference in people's lives. As I said, my attitude is: If you own a vehicle, if you maintain it well, there should not be a problem. I just cannot understand why this should be regarded as undue interference in people's lives or in people's businesses. I am sure the Liberal Party will have a lot to say about that. But if you are serious about air pollution, if you want to be a responsible car owner, whether you are private car owner or commercial can owner, why do you object? It is emitting poison. The police look at it that way. Be strict, and make sure that we can cut down emissions within a short period of time.

I understand that the Transport Department is already testing some vehicles on a sampling basis but this should be extended to all vehicles as soon as possible. Vehicles failing to maintain emission standards should not have their licence renewed.

My second proposal is that the current \$450 fine for smoky vehicles is clearly insufficient. I suggest a fine of \$5,000. I know people are going to gob. I know that the commercial car drivers and owners, in particular, are going to gob. But again, if you accept that the black smoke that you see and other emissions that you do not see are poisonous, then please, please try to re-adjust your

attitude. Why should the public be subsidizing poisonous pollution? Why should we put our own public health at undue risk?

In parallel, of course, we need to improve the emission test itself. The EPD's current snap-acceleration test is easy to pass, since it does not replicate real driving conditions. More accurate emission testing equipment, already piloted by the EPD, should be brought in to all emission testing centres. This will make it harder for vehicle owners to cheat the test.

Thirdly, my proposal is that we need to step up enforcement action against smoky vehicles. This can be done by the EPD and the police — we may even wish to consider extending the authority to traffic wardens. A large-scale crack-down on smoky vehicles would soon get the message across. And I wonder whether Mr HO thinks that this is again interference in people's private affairs. I do not think so.

#### *Emissions from power stations*

I have also added an amendment about emissions from power stations. I think we should not forget that our power stations are the largest emitters of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide.

While we may not feel the same effects at ground level as from vehicle emissions, the burning of fossil fuels for electricity is adding to the dangerous cocktail of pollution.

We must be more serious about implementing "Demand Side Management" (DSM) which aims to cut energy usage, and hence emissions through energy efficiency and conservation. The EPD's estimates show that about \$4.9 billion (in 1991 prices) is wasted each year from wasteful use of electricity and other fuels.

The cost savings from avoided energy waste could be ploughed back into the economy to stimulate recovery, and provide jobs in the energy efficiency sector.

However, for DSM to be pursued vigorously, the utilities must be given the right incentives, and the Administration needs to develop a more coherent overall energy policy.

Madam President, we do not manage to pass too many motions nowadays because of the split voting system. We manage to pass one earlier in this afternoon. And I hope we will not fail with this non-partisan motion. And I hope the Liberal Party might change their minds. At least, they

will consider thinking that we should look at the vehicle as something that emits poison. If you look at it this way seriously, why should we not regulate it much more strongly? If you do not like what I am proposing or if you want to face it, fine, we can discuss that. But I hope you would agree that this is the right direction to go. Thank you.

**Miss Christine LOH moved the following amendment:**

"To add "both short-term and" after "this Council urges the Government to expeditiously formulate"; to delete "and" after "long-term"; to add "introducing compulsory emission testing for all vehicles; substantially increasing the existing fine for smoky vehicles to encourage better maintenance; stepping up enforcement actions against smoky vehicles;" after "including"; to delete "and" from "and strengthening the co-operation with neighbouring regions"; and to add "; and vigorously pursuing demand-side management of electricity to reduce consumption of electricity from fossil-fuelled power stations" after "with a view to alleviating the cross-border air pollution problems"."

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Miss Christine LOH be made to Mr Edward HO's motion.

Does any Member wish to speak?

**MR LAU CHIN-SHEK** (in Cantonese): Madam President, first of all, I have to "declare my interests". I am a victim of poor air quality and suffer from serious respiratory tract troubles. Whenever the air is poor, I will feel short of breath, especially when I am standing in Causeway Bay to appeal to the public to do this or to do that. Therefore, I think that to improve the air quality is a very pressing task, and I fully endorse a motion debate on this matter.

Actually, today we could see a lot of places around the world with deteriorating air quality, and it is a mockery on our so-called civilized society. In order to improve our living standard, we have invented a lot of scientific products to make our lives more comfortable on the one hand; but these products have ruined our ecosystems and environment and posed hazard to our health on the other. This is really "a dilemma of the civilized society", and a question which we have to reflect on. Frankly speaking, the measures proposed in both the original motion and the amendment can only cure the symptoms but not the disease, and perhaps this is indeed the tragedy of today's civilized society!

No matter whether we are going to encourage environmental awareness or introduce legislative control, I think it is most imperative that everyone in the community (including the Government)

should have an awareness to protect and improve our environment, to change the way we live, the way we spend, the way we behave, and to come up with a more environmentally-friendly way of living. Only through this could we achieve the goal of improving the quality of our environment.

However, the Government is obligated to play an indispensable role in the process of improving our environment. Today, I would like to make some suggestions in two areas and hope that the Government will implement them with vigour.

First of all, as both Honourable colleagues have just said, the principal "culprit" of air pollution is the black smoke and pollutants emitted by vehicles; and apart from developing LPG taxis, I think it is more important for the Government to bend upon developing the mass transit systems, so that members of the public can cut down on the use of private cars and other non-mass carriers, because these modes of transport are less environmentally-friendly and not cost-effective. In fact, Hong Kong is a densely populated place, and either in terms of the environment or transportation, Hong Kong should actively develop the mass transit systems like the rail system; but unfortunately the Government has all along adopted a very conservative stance towards developing the rail system. Very often, the population density of an area has to reach a very high level before the Government will make up its mind to develop a rail system. I think this is a very grave mistake.

Nowadays, there is still no rail network in certain urban areas and new towns. For example, though Kowloon City District has a population of 500 000, the plan for the Kowloon City Mass Transit Railway (MTR) extension has been put off by the Government for more than 20 years; and last year, the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC) submitted its plan to develop the East Kowloon and North Hong Kong Island MTR Line but it is still waiting for a reply from the Government. I hope that the Government can change its conservative stance on rail development and endeavour to develop the mass transit systems, so as to reduce the use of vehicles in general, thereby improving the air quality.

The second point which I think the Government ought to consider is that it should look into ways of improving our air quality when it draws up plans for urban and new town development. The fact that the air quality of core districts like Causeway Bay is particularly poor is because in addition to the heavy traffic volume, there are also a lot of high-rise buildings. Since no "ventilation outlets" were provided at the planning stage, the pollutants are all trapped in the area. This is one of the major factors which lead to deteriorating air quality. On the contrary, "ventilation outlets" were included in the plans for new towns like Tseung Kwan O, and the air quality of these new

towns is obviously better. I hope the Government can put more thoughts in town planning with a view to improving the air quality of Hong Kong.

Madam President, poor air quality affects the health and living standards of everyone, including you and me, and it will also adversely affect our tourism industry and other economic developments. It is the first and foremost task of the Government to adopt measures to improve the air quality, and I hope that the Government can give us a positive reply.

Thank you, Madam President.

**MRS SELINA CHOW** (in Cantonese): Madam President, with Air Pollution Index (API) readings frequently reaching new heights, Hong Kong has a worsening air pollution problem. For instance, in respect of air quality at street level in the commercial area near Causeway Bay, we have registered 16 readings of over 100, a level which is very high indeed. As a matter of fact, air pollution in Hong Kong is worse than that in many cities in Southeast Asia and Europe. For example, with respect to air pollution caused by suspended particulates, Hong Kong is two times higher than London and is worse than such Asian cities as Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Seoul and Tokyo. We are extremely concerned with the overall health of Hong Kong people. I believe it is the earnest hope of everyone of us that we can make improvement in this area.

Of course, diesel vehicles are one of the sources that lead to air pollution in Hong Kong. This is why the Liberal Party has all along supported taxis to switch to LPG, as this will help improve air quality in a substantial manner. For this purpose, the Government must provide sufficient incentives, including offering low-interest loans, to encourage taxis to switch to LPG. I believe one of the recent heated topics is that oil companies must reduce the price of LPG. This is greatly supported by the Liberal Party. This is a very important point we must take note of if we are to promote our work in this area.

Just now, Miss Christine LOH talked about the interception of smoky vehicles. Although this can only provide temporary relief, this is, after all, an important palliative for at least we can prevent the air from being polluted unnecessarily. Earlier on, Miss Christine LOH mentioned some figures to query the Liberal Party. Let us first look at those figures. According to Miss LOH, more than 20 000 vehicles have been caught for emitting black smoke. She therefore asked why only 2 000-odd vehicle owners were prosecuted? I do not know whether or not Miss LOH has asked the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). But as far as I understand it, we have now come to two scenarios. For instance, you might have caught a smoky vehicle driver and

asked him to take his vehicle to an inspection centre. But he might be so anxious that he cleaned the engine before that. Therefore, by the time the vehicle was inspected, it would not emit black smoke anymore. This is probably a good thing because the driver will hurry up to clean the engine so that the vehicle will not emit black smoke anymore. Another scenario is that drivers might tune the fuel injection of the engines before they take their vehicles to the inspection centre. I understand that the EPD is apparently testing a new instrument which can find out whether or not the engine of a light vehicle has been tuned. We must hurry up to conduct the test and expeditiously exterminate the improper conduct of drivers who are not in full compliance with the rules. This is because such conduct is not conducive to environmental protection.

Miss Christine LOH has been criticizing the Liberal Party just now and, almost like accusing us of "standing in her way", asked why we said something like that. I would like to make some calculations with her. Just now, she said that more than 20 000 vehicles had problems. But we know that 300 000 out of the 400 000-odd vehicles in Hong Kong are private cars. According to Miss LOH, these 400 000-odd vehicles will then need to line up for inspection every year. But the problem we have at the moment concerns 20 000-odd vehicles only (though we think this number is already too large). Vehicles should only be inspected when they have problems. But Miss Christine LOH said otherwise. In her opinion, the 400 000-odd vehicles should better line up for inspection. If we consider the dismerits, the inspection will only bring much business to car repairers for more than 400 000 vehicles will be lining up for inspection. Furthermore, this is going to bring about extreme unfairness for out of the 400 000-odd vehicles, only 20 000-odd vehicles have problems. Some of them even do not have the problem we are talking about. It may eventually turn out that only 5% of the vehicles are having that problem. But the remaining 95% will need to be inspected as well. What is more, they have to pay for the inspection as it is necessary to pay for each inspection. I do not know how many countries do something like that every year. Even such advanced countries as European countries will not require new cars which have been used for several years to be inspected. Is it not an annoying measure to members of the public? Perhaps Miss Christine LOH should ask the 95% car owners who have been keeping their vehicles nice and clean what opinions they have about her suggestion. I really have no idea what it is if it is not an annoying measure to members of the public.

Another point which I very much agree is that enforcement must be carried out properly. As a matter of fact, what has been done is not adequate. I agree that more immediate enforcement actions should be taken in black spots. Furthermore, the "spotter scheme" can be strengthened by involving more members of the public to prevent and stop smoky vehicles. Apart from this, we find that the API readings of major shopping areas have reached a very high level at the moment. Just before I entered this Chamber, I received a document from a person living in Tsim Sha Tsui. He said that the filter of his air-conditioner had turned from white to black just after two months. I am very worried because Tsim Sha Tsui is a place where there is a high concentration of retailers,

and so is Causeway Bay. I earnestly hope that the public can make extra efforts in this area to prevent the situation from affecting our retailing industry. Thank you.

**MR HUI CHEUNG-CHING** (in Cantonese): Madam President, to strengthen control by way of legislation is a common practice for improving vehicle emissions. For instance, the Government can enhance the statutory power of the police so that they can ask drivers to turn off the engines of their vehicles while awaiting patrons to reduce emission, as well as stepping up enforcement actions against smoky vehicles and so on. All these are measures that the Government can adopt, though I am afraid that the effectiveness of legislative control will be very limited. According to a number of study reports, and as the experience gained by the United States over the past few decades shows, in terms of the effectiveness of protecting the environment, the reliance on administrative instructions such as enacting legislation to require vehicles to install pollution-free devices and so on will lag far behind the use of unleaded petrol (ULP). Bearing these examples in mind, the Government's direction is right in encouraging vehicles to use ULP as well as introducing LPG or more environmentally-friendly fuels. The crux of the problem rather lies in whether the Government can succeed in persuading drivers to switch to environmentally-friendly fuels.

It is precisely for this reason that whether the Government can succeed in implementing the scheme targeting on LPG taxis will have a profound influence on whether other vehicles will follow taxis to switch to LPG in future. Therefore, the Government must endeavour to ensure the success of the LPG taxi trial scheme. It is obvious from the relevant consultative document that the Government understands that prices of LPG for vehicle use, operating costs for LPG taxis, supporting facilities of filling stations, manpower and resources available for maintenance service are all major incentives for determining whether taxis will be willing to switch from diesel to LPG. It is regrettable that the Government has failed to put forward substantive proposals targeting at these areas in the consultative document. The major problems can be divided into three aspects:

Firstly, it will cost LPG taxis \$0.66 for each kilometre, which is \$0.04 more expensive than diesel. On the other hand, LPG taxis generally need to be replaced after running for four to five years, but diesel vehicles can run for eight to 10 years. The difference in the rate of depreciation is nearly 50%. As the competition in the public transport market has become increasingly keen, tax relief is probably the best means for lowering the costs of LPG taxis. However, the Government is not willing to make commitments as far as tax items are concerned;

Secondly, as far as filling stations are concerned, it is undoubtedly right for the Government to pay special attention to questions like site selection and the safety of residents. But will this lead to an insufficient number and an uneven distribution of filling stations in the urban

area? And will these sites be located at convenient points? In this regard, the Government has failed to give any explanation. Furthermore, the Government has planned to build 40 to 50 filling stations in the next two years, claiming that the stations can cope with at least 5 000 taxis. But compared with a total of 18 000 taxis, the gap is still very large. If the Government has no intention to allocate additional resources for setting up more stations, how can it convince taxis to switch to LPG as soon as possible?

Thirdly, as regards maintenance, it is essential for garages repairing LPG taxis to comply with strict requirements. Coupled with the fact that LPG taxis require a lot of additional spare parts, the maintenance fees will be raised. But has the Government provided assistance in this respect?

Furthermore, it seems that the Government, in promoting LPG taxis, has only concerned with the comparative cost-effectiveness between LPG and diesel, and neglected one important issue and, that is, whether the cost-effectiveness derived from the enjoyment of fresh air by drivers is more important than emission. If the Government can tell drivers during the promotion campaign the extent of harm exhaust gases will do to their health, will it get double results when it persuades the drivers to take the initiative to switch to LPG?

In fact, the Government needs more than new technologies to reduce pollution caused by emission. More importantly, it requires flexible administration because the whole process will involve many departments, including the Environmental Protection Department, Transport Department, Hong Kong Police Force, Education Department, Lands Department, Commissioner for Tourism and so on. But it is regrettable that the Government has failed to mention this aspect. I therefore hope that the Government can pay more attention to it.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MR CHAN WING-CHAN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, Hong Kong's air quality has been deteriorating in recent years. The APIs recorded at the roadside air quality monitoring stations located in Central District, Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and so on have kept on rising over the past few months; for a number of times, the readings have even risen to as high as 165. On the roads and streets territory-wide, we could always see people covering their noses to avoid breathing in the dust that could easily suffocate them to death; on the other hand, if people stay outside in certain districts for too long a time, their faces would most probably be covered with dust, if not blackened.

Therefore, improving the air quality is indeed an urgent task which brooks no delay.

Among the various contributory factors of air pollution, nitrogen dioxide emission from diesel vehicles, ozone, as well as respirable suspended particulates are the ones that have attracted comparatively greater public concern; however, dust from construction sites, exhaust emissions from factories, thermal emissions from commercial institutions and so on have also caused Hong Kong's air quality to deteriorate continuously. In the circumstances, the Government has enacted several laws to monitor the various sources of air pollutants. In this connection, a LPG taxi scheme has been introduced last year with a view to replacing diesel taxis with LPG taxis.

Nevertheless, with much regrets, the Government has failed to explain clearly to both the sector and the public the major points of concern in its consultation document regarding the LPG taxis proposal. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) believes that the Government's failure to provide clear objectives for the problems would eventually hinder the efforts to improve air quality. For this reason, the DAB holds that it is very important for the Government to put in all efforts to mobilize, support and assist the sector if it is to convert the entire taxi fleet to LPG. In this connection, financial incentives should be an important consideration which encourages diesel vehicles to switch to LPG. For instance, the Government should guarantee that the operating cost as well as cost of maintenance and so on for LPG taxis would not be higher than that of diesel taxis.

The DAB has come to the view that the proposal to switch to LPG taxis is just one of the many ways to help alleviate the air pollution problem caused by vehicles, since vehicle maintenance standards will also affect the exhaust emission levels. At present, the technical skills level of car mechanics in Hong Kong varies rather greatly. In this connection, I believe many Honourable colleagues who have their own cars may as well be very familiar with the unpleasant experience that their cars are still emitting large amount of dark smoke despite the major maintenance work carried out.

In our opinion, the difference in technical skills existing among car mechanics is directly related to the inability of the relevant training institutions to catch up with the pace of technological development. Therefore, the Government should revise the existing training courses for car mechanics and allocate more resources to both the technical institutes and the Vocational Training Council to enable them to upgrade their relevant courses with technological development.

Moreover, it could also consider introducing a licensing system with a view to upgrading the general quality of the trade. In addition, the Government may also implement a quality garage scheme and publish the service standards as well as fees and charges of the garages participating in the scheme to give car owners some choices.

Madam President, the DAB believes that car owners would take the initiative to properly repair their vehicles if they could better understand the importance of proper vehicle maintenance in terms of environmental protection, their own personal safety and value for money on the one hand, and be supplied with adequate information of the good garages open to them on the other.

In addition, outdated urban planning, narrow roads and tall buildings, as well as the lack of green belts would also contribute to the accumulation of pollutants in the air. I need to point out here that the development of pollution-free public transport should remain a key town planning consideration in the future, since mass transportation is the most effective way to resolve the air pollution problems brought about by motor vehicles. Apart from that, large scale tree planting campaigns should also be encouraged. As we all know, apart from assisting in alleviating air pollution, trees grown along roadsides and on hill slopes could also serve as natural noise barriers and help to stabilize the relevant slopes. In the Mainland, certain better-planned provinces and cities have already stipulated that green belts must be provided at both sides of the roads to alleviate the environmental pollution brought about by motor vehicles. The DAB believes the Government should follow this measure and require that all newly constructed roads must be equipped with green belts; besides, it should also try as far as practicable to plant more trees along existing roads to help improve the air quality.

Madam President, the DAB understands that the deteriorating air quality is attributable to not only motor vehicles but also many other sources of pollution. One example is the coal-fired power stations, since the level of exhaust emission produced by them would by no means be lower than that produced by motor vehicles. For this reason, in addition to actively mobilizing the two power companies to exercise control over their exhaust emissions, the Government should also make the two companies promise to use as far as possible natural gases instead of coal as fuel, with a view to reducing the level of exhaust emissions, and thereby alleviating the pollution problem directly. Besides, the Government should also co-operate with the mainland authorities to facilitate improvement to the air quality of the area and restore the beauty of Hong Kong's landscape and scenic spots. This would certainly be of help to the tourism industry as well.

Madam President, I so submit. Thank you very much.

**MR LAW CHI-KWONG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I would like to share with Members some statistics about pollution. I wonder if everyone knows it, noise was the number one cause of

complaint in 1996. By 1997, it was air pollution. If we look at the breakdown for all the cases, we will see it was complaints against car exhausts that ranked first. In terms of districts, it was Kwai Ching that received most complaints. Members elected by voters in the New Territories West beware! The Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui and Mong Kok areas ranked second and Yuen Long ranked third. It appears that of the three districts with the greatest number of complaints, two came from the New Territories West geographical constituencies.

The Honourable Michael HO will later speak about air quality and health issues, while the Honourable Albert HO would talk about transport and air quality. For now, I just want to dwell on issues such as cross-border air pollution, the promotion of large-scale tree-planting campaigns, mandatory emission tests, reduction of electricity consumption and increasing fines against smoky vehicles.

First on cross-border air pollution. About four or five years ago, I was on one occasion at Mr Martin LEE's place at the mid-levels chatting, looking from his home at the Pearl River estuary when the northwesterly wind was blowing. There was an obvious difference in view: visibility was extremely low at the estuary where smog was blown towards Hong Kong from the estuary in the north. That was pollution across the boundary. When we have time and when the northwesterly wind is blowing strongly, we may try to take note of the position. We will notice the polluted air from the Pearl River estuary. Earlier when the Finance Committee scrutinized an application for a study on air quality control, some colleagues asked me why we needed the study. I was surprised that there were people who did not understand. I was surprised that there were people who did not know that air pollution is not just an issue for Hong Kong only, that it is related to neighbouring regions, and that it can only be tackled by joint efforts from all involved. I think it is a bit late for the Government to start the study. All we can do now is to quicken our pace in improving the co-operation between the two regions.

About tree-planting campaigns, I can recall taking part in similar exercises as a small boy. We called it forestry work camp then. I learned a lot from the camp, such as the way to plant trees, and the benefits trees would bring. In addition to labour, the work camp could enhance the knowledge of participants in trees and their contribution to the environment. In the past, such exercises often took place in the rural areas, but we did not seem to be doing enough in tree planting in urban areas. As the Honourable Edward HO said, planting trees on both sides of the roads could improve the outlook of the environment and protect it as well. It merits our hard work to promote tree-planting on roads. I think the Government can consider working together with some primary and secondary schools to promote tree-planting campaigns, for these can educate the new generation and at the same time improve the environment and the air quality for the community.

The third issue is whether or not we should require all vehicles to undergo smoke emission

tests. We do understand that responsible car owners should conduct regular inspections for their cars. In fact, other than testing for smoke emission, many parts of the car may well need testing at least twice a year. It would not cost too much additional time or money to carry out routine tests and smoke emission tests for their cars. But I do agree that a number of car owners will oppose the idea of requiring all cars, old and new, to undergo tests for smoke emission. If we need to bring in legislation for regulation purposes, I think we need further and more comprehensive discussion and consultation to determine the way to proceed with the matter. Do we want cars in use for three, four, six or eight years to be inspected? Or do we want new cars in use for just one year to undergo inspections as well? I believe the issue warrants comprehensive consultation.

As regards the reduction of power consumption, we can say that it is a matter for all of us insofar as environmental protection and air quality are concerned. But the general public knows very little about "energy efficient" equipment. For example, I cannot tell how much of taxpayers' money can be saved over a period of one year if this Chamber changes to "energy efficient" light bulbs. I might have to ask the Secretariat to find out. There should be a significant amount saved for the taxpayers if all bulbs are changed to "energy efficient" ones. If all households know how much money "energy efficient" equipment can save for them, I think it would be easier to promote the idea of reducing power consumption. Obviously, we need to put in more efforts to educate the public widely and to make them understand that saving electricity is beneficial both to the environment and to their wallets.

Another issue is related to the fines imposed on smoky vehicles. Those who live on Hong Kong Island and have to drive up Garden Road must have noticed the huge number of smoky vehicles around, emitting smoke. Sometimes it is really dreadful to drive behind these vehicles. In principle, we agree that there should be a substantial increase in the fines, but we need to discuss about the exact rate of increase. This is because we understand that even if responsible car owners take the trouble to inspect their cars regularly, their cars may still emit a large amount of smoke due to unexpected engine failures. If the law is too harsh, will unfairness occur? I think the matter warrants further study.

As regards Miss Christine LOH's amendment, the Democratic Party supports its spirit, although we think that a number of details still requires investigation, discussion, and consultation. In view of this, Madam President, I support the original motion and the amendment.

**DR RAYMOND HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, as to how bad the air quality of Hong Kong is, we can know for sure from the API released by the Environmental Protection Department

daily through the mass media. It is actually not difficult for us to find out to what extent the air quality of Hong Kong has deteriorated just by taking a walk downtown Causeway Bay or in industrial areas such as Kwun Tong. What more alarming is that many people are gradually feeling that fresh air is a luxury and air pollution is one of the prices we have to pay for economic development.

Although the public is also aware that the air quality of Hong Kong is deteriorating, only a handful of environmental protection organizations which are concerned about air pollution would proactively ask the Government to put in more efforts to address the problem expeditiously. I am not sure if it is because air pollution does not pose an immediate hazard to public health. The public at large just accepts the fact tacitly and takes polluted air as part of life in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it is really a great pity that air pollution has never received the same extensive attention and discussion as other more immediate livelihood issues such as housing or employment.

In fact, there may be many reasons why the public is not very concerned about air pollution, one of which is that they do not know much about its seriousness. Besides, the negative impacts of the problem will not surface until a number of years later, nor do they pose any immediate hazards to life, so there would not be a sense of urgency. Another reason may be that the public knows the problem exists, but they may have the wrong impression that the Government only prioritizes the interests of the business sector and air quality is never a major item on the policy agenda. If any of the above reasons holds water, people will not exert pressure on the Government like they do with other livelihood issues, as a result, the problem of air pollution cannot be solved within the foreseeable future.

The Government's responsibility for addressing air pollution is unshirkable. We also have to face squarely the worsening air quality right away. First of all, we ought to find out the sources of air pollution. And emission from vehicles (especially diesel vehicles) is definitely one of the major sources. In this connection, the Government must expedite the replacement of diesel vehicles and the implementation of LPG taxi scheme. At the same time, it can join hands with the relevant authorities of the Mainland and other countries to study the feasibility of using other environmentally-friendly fuels. It should also proactively develop railway networks which are both environmentally-friendly and highly efficient. I concur with the Honourable LAU Chin-shek on this matter. In fact, we have been talking about the East Kowloon line and the Island West extension for over 20 years and they are still castles in the air. I just do not want to talk about them anymore. A more thorough solution is to study the possibility of introducing pollution-free modes of public transport, while at the present stage regulations must be strengthened to reduce the

impact on air quality of vehicle emissions. Other than stepping up legislation, the enforcement of the relevant laws should also be made more stringent so that air pollution caused by vehicle emissions can be reduced.

On the other hand, the rapid development and urbanization of Southern China have also put immense pressure on the air quality of neighbouring regions. Therefore, it is imperative for Hong Kong and Guangdong effect co-operation insofar as the improvement of air quality is concerned. I heartily welcome the setting up of the Hong Kong/Guangdong Environmental Protection Liaison Group which will undertake a joint study of the air quality in the Pearl River Delta. However, the study will not start before April next year at the soonest and the whole project will take about 18 months to finish. While a report will not be available for the Liaison Group's consideration before the end of 2000, and it will also take some time to formulate corresponding policies, so we cannot expect that the study will lead to any immediate improvement of air quality in Hong Kong. Anyway, the co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong is a positive step towards solving the problem. The governments of the two places should, however, speed up the study and come up with effective measures as soon as possible in order to prevent the further deterioration of air quality.

The improvement of air quality must also involve the active participation of the public. On the one hand, they may share the responsibility by, for example, using public transport as far as possible, enhancing the maintenance of their vehicles and reducing non-essential energy consumption; on the other hand, if the public attaches importance to environmental protection, the Government will also be driven to accord higher priority to environmental protection work, unlike the present situation where government policies only attach importance to economic development to the neglect of environmental considerations. Therefore, the Government should put in more efforts and proactively enhance the people's understanding of the issue so that they know more about environmental protection and its long-term influence on themselves. I believe the Government has a very important role to play in this respect.

Madam President, I so submit.

**DR TANG SIU-TONG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in September this year, Causeway Bay set the record of having air quality readings of over 100 for four consecutive days again. We can now frequently see reports about the seriousness of air pollution in downtown or industrial areas.

But even for rural areas such as Yuen Long, which is far away from industrial or downtown areas and where the traffic flow is not heavy, the average annual air quality index was also above the standard for two consecutive years. This shows that the air pollution problem in Hong Kong is not just confined to "isolated areas". It has become a territory-wide problem.

In fact, the air that we breathe everyday contains various kinds of pollutants. Of these pollutants, the impact of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) on human bodies is the most profound since such particulates can trigger off or cause chronic bronchitis, asthma, emphysema or even death. According to the findings of numerous independent studies, the death rate "induced by air pollution" will rise by 1% when the content of RSP in each cu m of air rises by 10 mg.

Vehicle exhaust emissions is the main source of RSP, whereas 98% of RSP emitted by vehicles come from diesel vehicles. Therefore, the ban on diesel vehicles, accounting for one third of the total number of vehicles in Hong Kong, has become a key issue in solving the air pollution problem in Hong Kong. By means of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxi trial scheme, the Government tries to study the use of LPG vehicles as one of the ways to reduce air pollution. When the Provisional Legislative Council was in session last year, the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance succeeded in passing a motion to urge the Government to implement a LPG taxi trial scheme with a view to improving our air quality. At that time, the Government reacted enthusiastically in response to environmental protection quests by committing that it would run a one-year LPG taxi trial scheme. A timetable for the implementation of the LPG taxi scheme was outlined in the policy address as well. Nevertheless, in the recently published paper entitled "A proposal to introduce LPG taxis", apart from expressing its willingness to set up additional filling stations and train qualified mechanics, the Government has failed to make any commitments as to implementing any concessionary schemes and establishing an "economic incentive" mechanism to ensure the successful implementation of the LPG taxi scheme.

According to the paper, LPG taxis are not better than diesel taxis, both in terms of effectiveness and operating costs. Furthermore, the Government requires that LPG taxis must be ex-factory import and no modified vehicles can be used. As a result of this, the costs of switching to LPG vehicles by the taxi trade will be increased instantly. Moreover, apart from showing unwillingness to help lower the prices of LPG, the Government has also failed to promise that it will waive fuel duty on LPG. Consequently, the trade finds it impossible to save operating expenses even in the long term. Speaking from a commercial angle, it is perhaps hard for us to ask the trade to "lose money" in support of "environmental protection". The LPG scheme will therefore eventually end in failure.

The Hong Kong Progressive Alliance proposed last year that the Government should provide the trade with more financial assistance such as exempting LPG fuel duty and granting concessions

for first registration tax and car purchase. Much to our regrets, the consultative paper has failed to implement the relevant proposals. I earnest hope that the Government can consider these proposals as soon as possible. Apart from the LPG taxi scheme, the Government should also expeditiously study the feasibility of requiring other diesel vehicles, particularly medium-sized diesel vehicles of high emissions, to switch to LPG or other environmentally-friendly fuels. It is learnt that the United States, the Netherlands and Austria have succeeded in implementing LPG buses. The Government can well make reference to these examples and study the feasibility of introducing the technology into Hong Kong.

Lastly, I want to talk about idling engines, an issue easily ignored by people but definitely should not be taken lightly. According to the information provided by environmental protection groups, idling vehicles with engines running will have more alarming emissions than running vehicles. On average, the amount of nitric oxide emitted by 37 idling vehicles is equivalent to that emitted by 4 000 running vehicles. Many European and American countries have already put in place legislation to regulate idling vehicles. Unfortunately, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region has failed to follow such examples. In my opinion, the Government should, on the one hand, consider enacting legislation to control the emission of exhaust gas by idling vehicles and, on the other hand, strengthen environmental protection education and publicity so as to bring out the seriousness of the related problems and put them into concrete terms with a view to raising the public's awareness of protecting the environment. When drivers understand that it will eventually harm other people as well as themselves if they pull up their vehicles without turning off the engines, the problems will be solved more easily.

In spite of the fact that government expenditure on environmental protection has soared from \$2.2 billion in 1995 to \$3.3 billion this year, it seems that our environment, particularly air pollution, has not been substantially improved. I hope that in making full effort to stimulate the economy and leading Hong Kong towards the road of economic revival, the Government can, at the same time, step up improving our environment and air quality. Otherwise, even if our economy revives and the spending power of the public improves, our quality of living will still worsen. And things will not turn better tomorrow!

Madam President, I so submit.

**MRS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the Chief Executive said in his policy address this year that in order to abate water pollution, the Government plans to spend \$12 billion on sewage collection and treatment over the next five years. Obviously, the Government thinks that for the sake of having cleaner water, it is worthwhile to spend some public funds.

The Chief Executive also talked about another most pressing environmental issue, that is, air pollution; but he stopped short saying how much will be spent on improving air quality. Yet, he made it very clear that all next taxis would be required to use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as fuel starting from the end of the year 2000. We do not yet know how much the Government will be spending on promoting the use of LPG taxis, and many issues crucial to the success of the LPG taxis scheme, such as the prices of LPG taxis, the price of LPG, the number and distribution of LPG filling stations and the number of garages and technicians available for LPG taxi maintenance, are still not known.

Government officials have assured the taxi trade that the operating costs of LPG taxis will not be higher than those of diesel taxis. However, even though the prices of LPG taxis are lower than those of diesel taxis at present, it should be noted that they do consume more fuel. That is why the operating costs of LPG taxis may not necessarily be lower than those of diesel taxis. Moreover, with respect to the pricing of LPG or fuel duty, nobody can now give any assurance. And the useful life of LPG taxis may well be shorter than that of diesel taxis. In other words, the depreciation rate of LPG taxis will be higher, and this will raise their operating costs correspondingly. As such, how can the Government guarantee that the operating costs of LPG taxis will not be higher than those of their diesel counterparts?

The Government "believes" that during the initial stage of the LPG taxi scheme, there will be some 40 LPG filling stations. There are now more than 180 petrol filling stations in Hong Kong, and 40 LPG filling stations are equal to about one fifth of all existing filling stations. Since LPG filling stations must be located 55 ft off any residential settlement, it will be difficult to identify sites in the urban area for building such stations, and this may lead to a shortage and an uneven distribution of LPG filling stations in the urban area. Under such circumstances, how can the Government guarantee that there will be a sufficient number of LPG filling stations and that they will be evenly distributed?

Garages which provide repair and maintenance services for LPG taxis have to be more spacious, and operators of these garages have to invest a lot of capital on renovation before their existing garages can comply with the stringent requirements. Since only a very small number of garages can meet the required standards, LPG taxi maintenance services may not be easily available; its maintenance costs may be higher; and the time required longer. Though the Government has indicated that some garages are willing to provide repair and maintenance services for LPG taxis and technicians will be trained, we do not yet know how many garages and technicians will actually be available to provide such services. Therefore, how can the Government guarantee that the maintenance costs of LPG taxis will not be higher than those of diesel taxis?

It can be said that the length of taxi queues is a good indicator of the state of our economy. At present, long taxi queues can often be seen, and this shows that the economy of Hong Kong is

still in bad shape. Since many taxi owners are "single-taxi" owners, and their income has gone down substantially. They can hardly make ends meet as they have to repay their taxi mortgage loans and support their families. So, how can they have the means to take out another mortgage on a LPG taxi under the present economic conditions? It is also doubtful whether they can obtain any loans from banks.

If the Government wishes to implement the LPG taxis scheme as soon as possible, it has to work out solutions to the above problems as soon as possible. The Government should understand that in order to attract taxi operators to switch from LPG to diesel, it has to offer sufficient financial incentives to taxi operators by, for example, waiving the first registration tax and annual licence fee for LPG taxis, undertaking not to levy any duty on LPG, and providing financial assistance for purchase of LPG taxis, in addition to alleviating the uncertainties felt by taxi operators about their future. In order to make the air of Hong Kong cleaner, I think it is worthwhile to spend some public funds on this area.

Furthermore, with respect to support facilities, the Government should render its full support and occasion the greatest convenience. Some petrol dealers have approached me, saying that they have plans to modify existing petrol filling stations to provide LPG filling facilities, but the Government insists that this constitutes a modification of land use, and a premium has thus to be paid. With such an attitude of "profiting as much as possible from the situation", how can the Government ensure that the pricing of LPG can be maintained at attractive levels? How can petrol dealers be persuaded to set up more LPG filling stations? And, how can the LPG taxi scheme be implemented at an early date?

Madam President, the Government has indicated that it would examine the feasibility of requiring other types of diesel vehicles to use LPG or other environmentally-friendly fuels. I wish to remind the Government that before it extends the LPG scheme to other types of vehicles, it should first conduct a comprehensive test, fully consult the trades concerned, provide adequate information and offer adequate financial incentives. It must not repeat what it has done with the LPG taxi scheme this time around. In other words, it must not release a consultation document with no substantial contents before the trial is completed. Though the Government claims that it wants to conduct a consultation exercise first, it has in fact decided to push ahead, even at a time when the taxi trade is still full of worries.

I have always insisted that we should adopt a multi-pronged approach to improve the air quality of Hong Kong. In particular, I think that the Government should take positive and active measures, but unfortunately, the Government has hitherto remained extremely passive, with the Environment Protection Department (EPD) concentrating only on stepping up prosecutions against

smoky vehicles and on imposing heavy penalties on drivers. When ever has the EPD taken the initiative to launch a study on how to reduce black smoke? Unlike the Government, the taxi trade has expressed a positive concern, and it is only with the impetus given by the taxi trade that the Government has finally launched the pilot scheme on LPG taxis. And, it is also with the sponsorship of the taxi trade that the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has managed to successfully devise an "exhaust fumes filter", which can reduce the amount of suspended particulates in diesel vehicle emissions. In order to improve the air quality, the Government must adopt a more positive attitude and should not shift all the responsibilities to the taxi trade or vehicle owners.

The Honourable Miss Christine LOH's amendment calls for a substantial increase in the fine to be imposed on smoky vehicles. I do not think that her amendment is desirable at all. I think that it is much too passive to achieve our goal simply by imposing fines, and this may easily victimize the innocent. I have always encouraged vehicle owners to keep their vehicles in good conditions, but as everyone knows, there is a great variation in the standard of vehicle maintenance and repairs in Hong Kong, and a lot of garages are simply not up to standard. Besides, since the Government has not introduced any regulatory measures, it is very difficult for vehicle owners to assess the quality of the repair services they receive. If we do not first make any efforts to tackle the core problem and encourage car mechanics to improve their skills, it will be unfair to penalize car owners so very heavily, for they may have done nothing wrong except giving their cars to "unscrupulous" garage operators for repairs and maintenance.

With these remarks, I support the original motion, but object to the amendment.

**DR LEONG CHE-HUNG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, a number of my colleagues did talk about the seriousness of air pollution. I believe no one will raise any objection. Neither will anyone think that it is not right to say something like that. In fact, air pollution is so serious that it has reached a level of "breathing is hazardous to your health", not just "smoking is hazardous to your health". I am not intentionally making this remark to scare people. As we all know, the Roadside Air Pollution Index has repeatedly reached new heights over the past few months. Studies made by the medical profession also pointed out a long time ago that suspended particulates in the air had a direct bearing on such respiratory diseases as chronic bronchitis, asthma and emphysema. Although Dr TANG Siu-tong has just mentioned it, I want to stress once again that according to the information released by the World Health Organization (WHO), the hospitalization

rate will rise by 10% if the suspended particulates in one cu m of air rises by 20 mg; an increase of 55 mg will push the death rate up by 10% as well. Apart from these, filthy air caused by exhausts emitted by diesel vehicles and passive smoking also has a close relationship with the development of asthma among children. In fact, not only Mr LAU Chin-shek finds that he is not breathing smoothly. A study conducted in 1996 showed that 16 out of every 100 children who were aged below 13 contracted asthma, a number which doubled the figure five years ago. The medical profession has been watching closely as to how to improve our air quality in order to protect public health. It is regrettable that the Administration has been acting as slow as a snail in adopting corresponding measures. We find it really hard to understand.

Just now, Members have talked about the merits of switching from diesel to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and expressed disappointment at the slow pace of the Government. I do not want to concentrate my speech in this area anymore. How can the slow action of the Government and its practice of doing things hesitantly curb the air pollution problem which is growing worse?

Just now, Mr Edward HO pointed out that the current level of air pollution in Hong Kong could cause 2 000 people to die prematurely each year. As it is a matter of life and death, when can the situation be improved? I would like to look at this issue from three levels. Just now, Dr TANG Siu-tong also mentioned that many drivers kept their engines on even though they were not running. This problem is more serious with buses, coaches and private cars driven by professional drivers. Which department, or should the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) exercise control on these vehicles? Which department should be responsible for educating the public or even controlling the situation by means of penalties? Why can we not consider adopting these measures? In fact, we have discussed this issue a number of times in this Council over the past years. But it seems that the Government has to date still failed to implement the relevant measures.

Over the past decade, the number of private cars in Hong Kong has grown by more than one-fold. This is undoubtedly a major factor contributing to the worsening air pollution. The Administration should formulate plans with various major mass transit organizations to encourage the public to make use of public transport so as to slow down the growth of the number of private cars.

Madam President, we find not only the air outdoors has a serious pollution problem. Indoor air quality face the same serious problem as well. This has virtually put the public in a situation where they find themselves "to be in a dilemma as to whether they should stay indoors or outdoors". According to the findings of a survey conducted by the EPD last year, indoor air quality of more than one third of the offices in Hong Kong is far below the international acceptable standard, thereby making offices a breeding place for germ transmission. Furthermore, it was found that

almost one third of our air contains suspected or confirmed carcinogenic substances, which are above the standard set by the WHO. One third of the respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the indoor air quality of public places or the commercial buildings where they work. The main culprit is substandard air-conditioning systems. Problems pertaining to passive smoking are also another major culprit.

It is imperative for the Administration to lay down indoor air quality standards and put them into practice and under control. At the same time, the Government should further extend the ban on smoking indoors to offices and various public places.

Madam President, our air quality, both indoors and outdoors, has greatly threatened public health. To really improve the living quality of the public and to stop public medical expenditure from rising as a result of air pollution, the Administration must expeditiously put control measures into practice.

Lastly, I would like to offer a few comments on the amendment. There are two points I would like to raise. The first point is a matter of general principle. I think Members should understand that although the motion debates we conduct have no binding effect on the Government, we can exert pressure on the Government by speaking in one voice and moving in the same direction. Therefore, if Members agree with the underlying principle of a certain motion but disagree with certain minor details, I hope they can communicate with each other as far as possible, instead of proposing amendments. This is because in so doing, the Government will form an impression that we have no uniform direction at all. As a result, it will ignore us completely. The moving of amendments will also create an environmental protection problem as more paper is needed for printing documents.

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

**MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the main topic for today's debate concerns air pollution, with the focus put on vehicle emissions. We all know that vehicle emissions only represents an important component as far as air pollution is concerned. In fact, there are many factors contributing to air pollution. An example of these is "passive smoking", as mentioned by Dr LEONG Che-hung earlier. Dust found in construction sites can also lead to air pollution. Although the topic for today's motion debate does not cover an extensive scope, I hope, in discussing the problems relating to air pollution today, the Government can also pay attention to other areas with a view to solving the problems.

Just now, Mr LAW Chi-kwong mentioned that air pollution was particularly serious in New

Territories West. I would also like to explain why this is so. As far as I understand it, the density of buildings in some districts of New Territories West, such as Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi, is excessively high. Air circulation is restricted just because there is too little space left. The fact that many heavy vehicles run in those areas, coupled with the fact that too many buildings have undergone redevelopment over the past few years, has made the pollution problem even worse. As for Yuen Long, dust is produced in a comparatively large amount because of the excessive number of construction sites. Therefore, we should also pay attention to the planning issues pertaining to these areas in discussing the air pollution problem today.

I fully endorse Mr Edward HO's point about planning just now. In particular, I greatly support many of the issues raised by Mr HO today. Although the issues raised by the Liberal Party in the past were frequently concerned with capitalists and both Mr HO and I should have held opposing views, I greatly support most of the points he has raised. I feel that he understands many problems that exist in reality and has been able to put forward some of his views. The difference between Mr HO and Miss Christine LOH is that Mr HO mentioned that the Government should provide an incentive to encourage the public to solve the problems, while Miss LOH talked about penalty instead. In my opinion, it is not that we do not need penalty. To a certain extent, penalty is essential. It will not work if we do without penalty. This is because no one will bother about anything if there is no penalty in this world.

This question we have today is that as far as vehicles are concerned, diesel vehicles cause the most serious pollution problem. However, most diesel vehicles are used for "making money". It will definitely increase the costs if we ask the owners of these vehicles to make improvement. Madam President, we all know that no one will reject fresh air. Even car owners would not want to see their cars emitting black smoke.

Talking about black smoke, it reminds me of an incident. Last week, we went to visit a special school. As I was late, I decided to drive myself and I was following our LC3 light bus. The black smoke emitted by it was similar to that released by a smoke canister. Following it, I could hardly see the road clearly. How I wish that it shall be used no more. (*Laughter*) I asked the driver why that was so. He said he had inspected the bus lately, and he had been prosecuted by the Environmental Protection Department too. But the black smoke problem remains unresolved. I hope the President can follow up this matter. (*Laughter*)

As far as black smoke is concerned, diesel vehicles have a more serious problem with suspended particulates. But there are a few issues we can consider. Firstly, apart from taxis, light goods vehicles also run on diesel. This is because diesel vehicles perform better and their horsepower is greater. In particular, other vehicles will perform less satisfactorily in climbing up steep slopes. It is for these reasons that professional drivers prefer diesel vehicles. Nevertheless,

they also agree that diesel is not good as far as environmental protection is concerned, and they also hope that diesel can be replaced by another fuel. But unfortunately the Government has failed to provide them options. What the Government has done is only to force them to continue to use diesel, without considering how to provide alternatives within the operating costs of professional drivers so as to give them more choices. Therefore, we should hold the Government responsible in this respect.

Just now, many Honourable colleagues mentioned the liquefied petroleum gas taxi trial scheme, which is a good attempt indeed. We have now taken the first step, though I am afraid that it has been too late. What matters most is that the trial only targets at taxis, without looking into light goods vehicles so far. In that case, what shall light goods vehicles do? The Government will only set up a compulsory system, or shirk its responsibility on to drivers when it is not acting positively. Miss Christine LOH has asked the Government to raise the penalties. But this will only make the situation worse for drivers. In particular, the passenger and cargo transportation industry has been performing badly under the current economic downturn. If the Government still insists on raising their operating costs and fining them under the present circumstances, it will be the same as asking them not to work anymore and join the unemployed ranks instead. Should that really happens, they can only choose to apply for unemployment assistance and then they will become a burden for the community. Therefore, we should not employ punishment unilaterally because this is not an adequate measure. It will be most satisfactory if the Government can explore more options rather than relying on compulsory means to solve the problem. Professional drivers often say: "If the head were full of hair, no one would prefer to have favus of the scalp on it". This is why I do not agree that we should resort to punishment in solving the air pollution problem. Although Miss Christine LOH always stresses on environmental protection, a point which is supported by every one of us, we must explore a good method to solve the problem. If we only know to pin the label of environmental protection on others, many people will find it impossible to stand the pressure. In mentioning environmental protection, apart from publicity, I think the only way to solve the problem and the best way to do it is to provide more options for the public.

**MR ALBERT HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in 1997, the density of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) recorded by six of the nine air quality monitoring stations in Hong Kong did not conform to the air quality objective. These stations are located in Kwun Tong, Yuen Long, Sham Shui Po, Central and Western District, Tsuen Wan and Mong Kok respectively, meanwhile, it was also recorded in Kwun Tong, Sham Shui Po and Mong Kok that nitrogen dioxide concentration did not conform to the air quality objective. Recently, the roadside air quality index in Causeway Bay has risen steadily and indices over 100 have frequently been recorded. This shows that air

pollution in the urban area is fairly serious and it poses a threat to the health of people suffering from respiratory or cardiac troubles. Moreover, the health of ordinary people living continuously in an environment with polluted air will also be endangered. Therefore, I think that the Government must expeditiously take comprehensive measures to improve our air quality.

As diesel vehicles emit large quantities of RSP and nitrogen dioxide and they account for two thirds of the total vehicular mileage in the urban area, the Government must give priority to doing away with diesel vehicles and controlling exhaust emissions by diesel vehicles.

The Government has recently suggested the introduction of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis and the Democratic Party supports this move. Unfortunately, the Government has not made adequate commitment in its proposal and it is not committed to giving the trade various tax concessions or ensuring that the future prices of vehicles and fuels and the maintenance charges will not be higher than those at present. In fact, the Government is duty-bound to improve our air quality and protect people's health, and it should not shift all the responsibilities onto the taxi trade or ask them to bear the costs and risks of the whole scheme. On the contrary, the Government should offer sufficient financial incentives to encourage the taxi trade to switch to LPG for the benefit of the whole community.

Merely introducing LPG as fuel for taxis is not enough because in densely populated areas such as Mong Kok and Causeway Bay grave pollution at roadsides is also caused by buses, minibuses and lorries. For this reason, the Government should expeditiously explore the introduction of other more environment-friendly fuels for minibuses, buses and lorries in place of diesel.

In fact, many governments, universities and environmental protection bodies in foreign countries have actively carried out studies to improve air quality. Their studies include the use of diesel and petrol substitutes, improving the composition of diesel and petrol as well as the structure of motor engines with the aim of minimizing the exhaust emissions from vehicles. Despite the very serious state of the air pollution problem in Hong Kong, the Administration has not taken positive actions to improve air quality. I hope that the Government can make further reference to foreign experience and follow closely the latest progress of foreign studies in this respect. Once it discovers any suggestion suitable for use in Hong Kong, it should implement a pilot scheme to test its effectiveness. Government officials must initiate positive actions to master the latest technological and research developments. This is the direction we should take to solve the air pollution problem.

I have recently received a proposal on Renewable Energy Industry published by the

Environmental Education Research Institute. The proposal is about their plan to co-operate with the University of Hong Kong to start implementing from January next year a pilot scheme on the use of biofuels on buses. These biofuels are actually processed from the waste cooking oil of restaurants. The use of biofuels added to diesel will reduce the RSP and nitrogen dioxide in vehicle exhausts and modifications need not be made to the engines of vehicles using biofuels. According to the Institute, quite a number of places in the United States have begun to use biofuels. Has the Government got any information on similar schemes? Has the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) studied this? What assistance will the Government offer to universities conducting tests on their own accord? Will it prudently consider adopting the results of such researches so that they can have practical values?

In respect of the more long-lasting improvement measures mentioned above, I hope that the Government will work out long-term development strategies and confirm the schedule of implementation so as to allow the public to know the Government's target and determination.

As for short-term measures, the Government must step up enforcement actions against smoky vehicles. The EPD has recently spent \$480,000 on 12 portable vehicle exhaust testing equipment ordered from Europe to cope with the relevant work. Last year, the EPD also imported a new equipment, dynamometer, for testing exhaust emissions of light goods vehicles below 5 tonnes. This pilot scheme has been completed and the EPD has decided to specify from the middle of next year that vehicle testing centres should use the new equipment to test light vehicles. As for heavy vehicles over 5 tonnes, the EPD has just started a test which will last for three months. I find that these measures will have positive deterring effects against smoky vehicles and that the EPD should inject more resources into speeding up the use of the new equipment in exhaust emission tests.

The Government should step up publicity to call upon drivers to switch off the engines on stopping their vehicles in order to reduce exhaust emissions.

To improve the air quality of densely populated and highly polluted districts such as Mong Kok and Causeway Bay and reduce congestion, the best way is to reduce traffic flow. It is because the victims of vehicle exhausts are often people working and living in these congested areas. I hope that the Government will develop mass transit carriers and restrict the use of such areas and roads by public transport and private cars. This way, there will be less traffic congestion and exhaust emission.

I so submit in support of the original motion and the amendment.

THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, DR LEONG CHE-HUNG, took the Chair.

**MISS CYD HO** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, today I will speak in support of Mr Edward HO's original motion and Miss Christine LOH's amendment.

The air in Hong Kong is in fact worsening with each passing day. Many of my colleagues said when they looked out of the window, the sky was not as clear as before. Air pollution has now reached such a serious state that not only our breathing is being affected, we can even see air pollution with our naked eyes. In the consultative paper published by the Government on a proposal to introduce liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis, the Government has publicly admitted that Hong Kong ranked third among Asian cities with the worst air pollution problem. From the global perspective, Hong Kong ranks eighth in terms of suspended particulates. But all these international rankings are not something that we should be proud of.

Looking back at Hong Kong itself, air pollution has done great damage to our economy. According to some statistics made by environmental protection groups, within the six years from 1991 to 1997, 22 000 people died because of problems with their respiratory systems. Assuming that each patient who suffers from respiratory troubles will need to be hospitalized for five-odd days, he will then incur \$36,000 in medical expenses. Adding the expenses up, medical expenses for treating respiratory diseases over these six years will amount to \$0.8 billion.

In fact, poor air quality will affect both our respiratory systems and hearts, as well as leading to eye irritations. It is estimated by environmental protection groups that with a rise of 1 mg of RSP, 64 more patients will need to be hospitalized each year, and this is tantamount to an additional medical expenditure of more than \$2 million. If the Government can use these money to improve our air quality, it can reduce medical costs on the one hand, and improve the public health and raise our productivity on the other. Why did the Government refrain from doing that?

I believe Members will all agree that our air quality has deteriorated more rapidly than before over the past two years. But relatively speaking, the Government has slowed down its pace in taking relevant measures. Although the LPG taxi trial scheme has been in operation for almost a year only, it has received many acclaims. Except for the people in the trade who have expressed little confidence in the scheme because the Government has failed to provide supporting facilities to tie in with the scheme, other people have given many positive opinions. However, the Government has deliberately slowed down the progress by conducting a three-month consultation. Sometimes, I really find it hard to understand the criteria adopted by the Government in conducting consultation. The consultation period for the Public Order Ordinance and the Societies Ordinance was two weeks. As for the review on the restructuring of district organizations, the consultation

period was one month. But surprisingly, the consultation period will last for three months for the LPG trial scheme which has received so many acclaims. According to the consultative paper, the Government will only start requiring all newly imported taxis to run on LPG until the year 2000, and encouraging all car owners to switch to LPG until 2005. Assuming that a taxi has a useful life of 10 years on average, we will have to wait until 2010 for all taxis to switch from diesel to LPG.

If car owners and drivers do not have confidence simply because the Government has failed to put in place a supporting scheme, they will still have no confidence no matter whether or not the consultation will last for three months or six months. The consultation will eventually end in failure. Such being the case, why does the Government not speed up implementing the LPG scheme? Is it because of the fact that there are insufficient filling stations at the moment and that the number of which will only be expanded to 40 until the year 2000 that has made professional taxi drivers lose confidence to switch to LPG?

Now I want to respond to one of the issues raised by my colleagues in connection with the operating costs of taxis. In fact, as far as the operating costs of a taxi is concerned, the most expensive item is the license, rather than fuel or the price of the taxi itself. When taxi licenses were at their peak, each taxi license costed \$3.6 million. Now the price has come down to \$1.6 million, a difference tantamount to the cost of nearly 10 taxis. If we calculate in terms of 10 taxis and assuming each taxi can run 10 years, the total will add up to 100 years. If the Government still continue with its tender system and our community still prefer spending money on speculating on taxi licenses to improving air quality, it will be very saddening indeed.

Of course, in order to have cleaner air, we should not only confine to encouraging taxis to switch to LPG. We still have 4 000 public light buses, and some of them are medium buses, including our LC3. Apart from these, we have many lorries and buses as well. We all know that the exhaust gas emitted by these types of vehicles is obnoxious when we stand by the roadside waiting to cross the road. I believe many Honourable colleagues have the experience, after standing hours outside the Sogo Department Store or in Peddar Street raising funds, of feeling having put on some weight as their lungs have inhaled a lot of suspended particulates. I once saw the pair of white shoes worn by Miss Emily LAU turned black right after she has stood outside the Sogo Department Store for just an hour. Therefore, I would like to remind Members not to wear white trousers and white shoes if they need to go there to raise funds!

Of course, the consultative paper has also mentioned that the standards adopted in Hong Kong for the purpose of monitoring vehicle emissions are very strict and even stricter than that adopted in Europe. But I would like to raise the point that enforcement has been too loose. When I press the pager issued by this Council each day, I will definitely see a warning that reminds us to drive

slow on reaching what locations every evening. The pager will also tell us the locations where we should drive slow since the police will set up several road blocks each evening for detecting speeding vehicles and taking photographs. But I have never seen the police intercepting smoky vehicles. Some of my colleagues in this Council are spotters. After receiving complaints about smoky vehicles, they will inform the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), which will in turn notify the relevant car owners to send their vehicles to the EPD for inspection, normally two weeks after the initial complaints. For those car owners who are co-operative, they will have their cars repaired before sending them for inspection. This is not a bad thing anyway. But for those car owners who are not so co-operative, they will tune the engines of their cars by lowering the fuel intake. After the inspection, they will raise the intake again. As a result, their cars will continue to emit black smoke as usual.

Apart from taking such boring measures as taking strict enforcement actions, encouraging the switch to LPG taxis and strengthening prosecutions for the purpose of improving air quality, we can adopt some air improvement measures which are more positive and can make us feel more refreshing, and that is by planting trees and reducing the use of paper. I would like to take this opportunity to propose to the Director of Audit that he can, after presenting that thick report, invite the Financial Secretary to go planting trees together. I believe seven of my colleagues from the Public Accounts Committee will definitely lend their overwhelming support to this suggestion.

**THE PRESIDENT** resumed the Chair.

**MR BERNARD CHAN:** Madam President, I have lived in Los Angeles for five years, where smog has been a big health issue for the residents. But over the years, air quality has much been improved by the concerted efforts of both the society and the authorities. Hong Kong's air quality has already been deteriorating. Smog is now clearly visible from high altitude. The Government has frequently advised us to stay indoors and do not go for sports when the sun undergoes photochemical reaction with incredibly high concentration of suspended particulates.

Poor air quality results in premature death of adults and in serious respiratory impairment of youngsters. Many kids suffer from allergic problems, which damage their learning and sports abilities. Huge medical expenses and insurance bills resulted from poor health have offset a high percentage of Gross Domestic Product growth. The consequences are not unfamiliar to us, as our staff takes regular sick leave.

Fresh air has become our lost treasure. To retrieve it takes immense energy and determination — it is a community-wise exercise requiring a discerning leadership from the

Government. To my regret, converting diesel taxis to liquefied petroleum gas taxis is the only major issue on our Government's agenda of air improvement. But the slow progress in the conversion can hardly catch up the speed of air deterioration. Just to notice that the percentage frequency of hourly visibility lower than 8 km has soared from 5% in 1995 to a double in 1997. The trend is very worrying. But we see only the Government's slow reactions in erecting just three roadside air monitors and conducting an inefficient cross-border study on air pollution.

I am expecting bolder and more timely strides against the problem. Ideas stemmed from the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the Air Quality Management Plan since 1995 in California may give us some insights.

Firstly, we have to set up our own data collecting devices to identify the source, type and intensity of pollutants. Corresponding standards should be devised to indicate tolerance, action or emergency action.

Secondly, there should be changes in town planning. Road junctions at the heart of the city should be avoided. Public transport should be given top priority. Construction and demolishing works should be strictly monitored in terms of pollution levels.

Thirdly, a governing board for air quality management, comprising officials, the business sector, municipal representatives, academics and green activists, should be set up. Its major task is to propose policies and to monitor work progress.

Fourthly, more incentives should be given to the private sector for voluntary compliance. Companies, which have earned a considerable amount of green credits, should be given reinforcements in terms of business opportunities. By the same token, companies lagging behind green standards would face tougher measures. Clear intermediate goals, say, reducing air pollutants by 20% in four years, should be fixed for luring concerted efforts in society.

I am not prepared to give further thoughts on vehicle emission, which has been thoroughly addressed by our colleagues. I hope the officials will carefully attend to each of our suggestions. Time is running out and it is the time to end our passive suffering.

Madam President, I support the Honourable Edward HO's motion. Thank you.

**PROF NG CHING-FAI** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in the past, the Government and people often thought that advanced environmental protection measures ought not be adopted in Hong Kong, perhaps we thought that Hong Kong was no longer an industrial production base and we only had to

maintain a fairly good business environment, freedom, the rule of law and a simple tax regime, as these added to the China factor would allow Hong Kong to reap what we had not sown. We have overlooked a fact that society that despises new technology and innovative ideas will finally eat the bitter fruits. The use of environmentally-friendly and sustainable technologies has been the social and economic trend of developed countries since the 1980s. If we do not keep up with the others quickly, we will soon find that our technological standards are below standard, for instance, export products will have to meet environmental protection standards, we will then have to pay very expensive prices.

Moreover, the expenses on cleaning up environmental pollution have kept increasing. In the past, some developed countries and many developing countries did not attach importance to environmental protection and were not willing to give up highly polluting energy resources and raw materials in their pursuit of production growth. At last, they have to pay very expensive fees for clearing up serious pollution. At present, the heated discussions about cleaning up the underground pollution of the previous Kai Tak Airport, I am afraid, are only the tip of an iceberg. Among the various types of pollution, air pollution affects Hong Kong people most seriously. For this kind of pollution that we cannot see but only feel, every person in Hong Kong has paid the price of their health and having shortened life expectancy. As a result, the Government and society have paid more and more for the public's health care and medical expenses. Other invisible costs are particularly enormous as a place with low environmental quality cannot attract investors and persons of ability.

About an hour ago, my Honourable colleagues passed me such a sample given us by a foreigner. He said that it was a filter in his office which had only been used for two months. He said that this filter was whiter than Snow White when it was new but it is now like this. Lastly, he added sternly that pollution drives away investors and tourists and increases the demands for hospital beds and graveyards. We can take this perhaps as a reminder.

Madam President, air pollution in Hong Kong is mainly caused by vehicle exhausts. In the 1970s, the Government started discussions on the Electronic Road Pricing Scheme, restricting the entry of vehicles to urban centres, rejuvenating energy resources, electric cars and pollution-free fuels. But all these dreams have not come true. At that time, people found that environmental protection policies do not match the free market principle and our business environment but today people have reached a new consensus on the free market principle and the quality of life has become a factor constituting the business environment. The rules of the game have also changed and we have to go back to work on environmental protection. But we undoubtedly have to pay higher costs and face more obstruction. Nevertheless, it is better late than never.

Madam President, since the 1980s, the Government of California in the United States started

implementing a rejuvenating energy policy covering solar energy and wind as well as a reform of power generation facilities with new innovative environmental technologies. The Government of California believes that if it continues to invest substantial capital in traditional oil facilities, it will soon be threatened by the shortage of oil and an increase in its price, and it will also fail to enjoy innovative environmentally-friendly energy technologies, at the expense of an opportunity for long-term development. In terms of the use of energy by vehicles, Hong Kong attaches importance to short-term interests after all and it is unwilling to change its excessive dependence on diesel, petrol and coal. In the long run, we should try our best to avoid using hydrocarbon fuels as the nitrogen dioxide generated is the cause of the greenhouse effect and such fuels are deemed as pollutants. Mr Edward HO suggests examining the feasibility of introducing other environmentally-friendly fuels, and I totally agree with him.

As for the introduction of new low-pollution energy for vehicles, I think that the Government is duty-bound to launch a study and consultation on the overall policy and coupling measures and make efforts in the following four aspects:

1. Launch extensive publicity and elaborate on the grounds of the development strategy, people's needs and support;
2. Environmental protection measures have to be cost effective;
3. Coupling measures (petrol filling stations, vehicle repair factories, new vehicle import specifications, new technical training and supply of spare parts) to ensure that the level of services enjoyed by people using new energy will not be lower than that enjoyed by other people using traditional energy; and
4. The policy has to be continuously and steadily implemented so that people who have altered their vehicles will not suffer losses when changes are made to the policy.

In addition, I wonder whether the Government will consider a new method of promoting new vehicle energy. The Government should start using the new fuel on government vehicles (dust carts, postal vehicles and vehicles for use by civil servants), and when the low-pollution fleet of the Government is successful, it will be more convincing and the use of the fuel can gradually be extended to public transport fleets governed by legislation and which have their own filling stations (such as the feeder buses of the Mass Transit Railway Corporation and other public buses) and then to other types of vehicles. This will be more effective than targeting at the taxi trade alone and the same method can actually be adopted for the promotion of other new measures.

Madam President, in respect of the use of low-pollution fuels, Hong Kong is obviously not an

advanced place and it is of great urgency to improve air quality. I support Mr Edward HO's original motion and hope that the Government will consider the measures I have proposed. As for Miss LOH's amendment, there are some instances of overlapping as the word "comprehensive" is already found in the original motion and it already signifies short-term and long-term measures. Moreover, it also fails to add anything new. As to Miss LOH's proposal of compulsory tests for all vehicles, it gives people an impression that we would rather kill the wrong person than let the culprit go. I find it hard to give her amendment my support.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MR NG LEUNG-SING** (in Cantonese): Madam President, everybody knows that there is serious air pollution in Hong Kong especially in some commercial centres where people and vehicles cramped together. After the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has increased the use of roadside air quality monitoring stations, higher than ordinary air pollution indices have often been recorded. The Chief Executive has particularly mentioned this problem in his second policy address and it shows that the problem has aroused social concern.

As for the punishment targeted at smoky vehicles under the existing legislation, the key lies in more stringent enforcement so as to achieve deterring effect. Enhanced prosecutions against owners of smoky vehicles should be continually and steadily taken to create a culture of environmental protection in our community in a more effective manner.

As regards the proposal in the policy address that all new taxis should be switched to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by the end of 2000, this is undoubtedly a right direction and I believe that the trade concerned and the Government can fully communicate and co-ordinate and make joint efforts to improve our air quality. However, the Government can actually make efforts itself to promote environmental protection and play a leading role. For instance, the dust cart fleets of the Urban Services Department and the large number of vehicles used by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force should expeditiously switch to LPG or other more environmentally-friendly fuels. As the major force for promoting environmental protection in Hong Kong, the Government must pioneer actions to encourage other trades to switch to more environmentally-friendly fuels as this will be more convincing.

Furthermore, in some commercial districts such as Causeway Bay just mentioned by many Honourable Members, the roadside air quality is so poor that it is hardly acceptable. To protect people's health, the Government should quickly come up with feasible improvement measures. I

think it might as well consider the suggestion of suitably installing some sprinkling or spraying systems at the roof of buildings in such districts to reduce the suspended particulates in the air as these systems will have practical effects in dry or non-windy seasons. Provided that the cost of the project is suitably controlled and calculated, be it public or private buildings, the Government can install similar facilities for improving air quality as appropriate and I believe that they should help improve the overall environment.

Finally, I still find that compulsory emission tests for all vehicles and pursuing demand-side management of electricity as proposed in the amendment is too much detached from the actual situation, and it is doubtful whether they are feasible. Therefore, I still have reservations.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MR HOWARD YOUNG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, our deteriorating air quality will affect people's health and strike a blow at the tourism industry. We can imagine that when tourists who have especially come from foreign countries to Hong Kong shop around Causeway Bay find that they are suddenly surrounded by stuffy air and cannot breath smoothly, will they still have the leisure and mood to go on shopping around? Or when tourists follow the instruction of the guidebook for tourists and make a special trip to the Victoria Peak in order to have a bird's eye view of the Victoria Harbour before it turns into a river, they happen to find that a pollution curtain is hovering above the Victoria Harbour, it will spoil their fun and we can hardly expect them to recommend Hong Kong to their relatives and friends when they return home.

The tourism industry is a very important link in our economic chain. But because of the financial turmoil, the tourism industry is taking a stringent test and the Government and the industry are making every effort to save the tourism industry. At this critical moment, we cannot allow any adverse situation that can strike a blow at the tourism industry to last, and improving our air quality is a pressing task.

In fact, fresh air and the appealing city appearance of Hong Kong as well as the importance we attach to environmental protection can be a new selling point of the local tourism industry. When we recognize that Hong Kong can no longer attract tourists by its good reputation of being a "shopping paradise" and the "Pearl of the Orient" alone, and when we have to make efforts to look for new selling points to diversify Hong Kong's attraction as a tourists spot, "a new environmentally-friendly and green Hong Kong" will definitely be a new theme that keeps up with the global trend and can attract foreign tourists mindful of environmental protection. An environmentally-friendly Hong Kong includes other aspects such as water quality and the reclamation of the Victoria Harbour, besides air quality we are discussing about today.

I fully support Mr Edward HO's suggestion that the Government must actively promote the LPG vehicle scheme and conduct a comprehensive study on the introduction of other environmentally-friendly fuels for heavy vehicles as well as developing pollution-free means of transport. If the exhaust emissions of means of transport can be controlled, it can more effectively prevent further deterioration of air quality. The tourism industry plays an important role in this respect. For instance, when coaches are waiting for tourists, they can turn off the air-conditioning on the coaches when air-conditioning is not needed. Actually, this measure was adopted in the past and was widely publicized among tourists.

I also greatly support environmental protection activities for improving air quality and our environment such as tree-planting projects. I can share with Members an experience. In general, when we talk about cities in the Mainland, their poorer appearance as compared with that of Hong Kong may pop up in our minds. Many cities in the Mainland have actually created an environment with fresh air and pretty city appearance through plantation. Besides the Zhuhai Special Economic Zone frequently visited by Hong Kong people, Shiqi City in Zhongshan is also a good example. Flowers, plants and trees are planted in the middle of broad roads and the sides of small streets in Shiqi City, and it can be described as a garden city in the South of China. It is more important for plantation and greening to be carried out in Hong Kong as it is far more densely populated with tall buildings towering around. I urge the Government to carry out plantation and greening projects in the development of new roads. Greening can not only beautify the environment, and those who have taken up botany will know that greening can also improve air quality and beautify cities.

I will not support, but even oppose the amendment today. The amendment has not added any substantive contents to the original motion and its proposals are difficult to implement. Moreover, I do not find it necessary to immediately carry out inspection of all vehicles in Hong Kong.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MR MICHAEL HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I would like to discuss today's topic from the perspective of people's health.

We often mention air pollution index. But perhaps some people do not quite understand what the index is all about. I would like to show people how serious air pollution is from another perspective. On any day in November, if we can look up and see the red autumn sun hanging in the sky like a preserved egg yolk which is not at all dazzling around 8 am or 4 pm, it indicates that air pollution on that day is very serious. If we are observant, such a phenomenon is not uncommon in recent years. It also proves that air pollution in Hong Kong is worsening.

More and more people are suffering from diseases arising from air pollution. As some Members have just mentioned some studies in this area, I am not going to repeat them. But I have got some statistics from the Hospital Authority (HA) relating to respiratory tract diseases over the past four years. First of all, let us take a look at the number of admissions due to asthma: in 1994, there were more than 7 000; in 1995, there were more than 8 000; in 1996, the number rose to 10 000 while in 1997, it was 10 120; a 26% increase over a period of three years. Besides, more and more children are suffering from asthma. Even though the HA has allocated more resources to set up special clinics for asthma, these children cannot have their disease totally cured no matter how much sophisticated equipment is installed and how many specialists are trained if air pollution remains unresolved. Apart from asthma, we can also take a look at the number of admissions due to chronic obstructive airways or chronic bronchitis: in 1994, there were 19 300; in 1997, there were 24 600, a 25% increase. These are typical diseases directly related to the air we breathe everyday. If we cannot resolve the air pollution problem, we can never help these patients solve their problems even though new antibiotics or new tracheal dilating medicines can be developed in the future.

In fact, the hospitalization of these patients incurs huge expenses. This is also a burden to be borne by the whole community. Although we may incur some costs if we carry out proper car inspection and maintenance, yet medical expenses can be saved on the one hand and the number of sick leaves taken by the workforce will be reduced on the other. Productivity can thus be increased. I believe that we can certainly get considerable return from it. Thank you, Madam President.

**MR JAMES TIEN** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in Hong Kong today, improving air quality is not an environmental protection problem but also a health problem, or even an economic problem. Mr Michael HO has just said that the Government has to spend a lot of money on medical expenses every year to give patients treatment.

For many other problems, the Government often engage consultants to carry out studies and work out reports. However, Members and the Government may not know accurately the economic losses brought by air pollution to Hong Kong. Students will be absent from school, staff will be sick and the industrial and business sectors will lose many working houses. Or, even if staff feeling ill and have respiratory system problems still go to work, they may not be fully devoted or they may only be 70% to 80% devoted to their work, how much productivity will be lost? Now that the Government has spent huge sums on other consultancy projects, can it also work out a consultancy report on this problem and tell us whether the existing losses are billions or tens of billions of dollars? If billions of dollars are lost every year while Mr Edward HO's motion only

asks the Government to offer low-interest loans, in other words, the Government only needs to spend \$200 million to \$300 million every year and we are not asking the Government to bear the total sum of \$3.6 billion, that is \$200,000 for each of the 18 000 taxis. After \$200 million to \$300 million has been extended as low-interest loans, diesel taxis will expeditiously be changed to LPG taxis and we do not need to wait for five more years for diesel taxis to be naturally eliminated step by step. Will this be more beneficial to the community and the financial situation of the Hong Kong Government? I believe that this will be more beneficial after we have taken medical expenses into account. I hope that the Government will consider this.

Madam President, there is an economic slump and many people are discussing about how Hong Kong can leave the abyss. Mr Howard YOUNG has referred to the tourism industry. When tourists find that the air quality in Hong Kong is that poor, they will not bother to "see" after they have come to Hong Kong. And when they return to their own countries, they may ask their friends not to visit Hong Kong.

Moreover, on the question of attracting foreign capital to Hong Kong, staff of foreign companies will consider if it is worth the while if they have to bring their families to live in Hong Kong with poor air quality for three to five years, despite the high salaries and bonuses. They may not be willing to come to Hong Kong to work if they have to live here for a few years before returning to their own countries. Will this strike a blow at our plans to import foreign expertise, boost foreign investment and develop into an economic metropolitan? Will this also strike a blow at the Government's latest idea of turning Hong Kong into New York and London in Southeast Asia?

Madam President, I greatly support the suggestion that the engines of stopped vehicles have to be switched off. I certainly understand that this cannot be done in some cases. Take the taxi trade which Mrs Miriam LAU is deeply concerned about as an example, taxis waiting for passengers have to move every now and then, if their engines are switched on and off, the pollution so caused may be even more serious. We think that the engines of stopped coaches should be switched off. Stopped coaches are usually waiting for tourists who will take more than half an hour shopping. Therefore, there is no reason why coaches have to wait for the tourists with their engines on. Or, some lorries may have to wait for dozens of minutes for goods to be loaded or unloaded, why do the drivers not switch off the engines? One possible reason is that they hope that the police will let them go because when the engines are on, they are deemed as loading or unloading goods, but when the engines are off, they will be deemed as illegal parking. The Government should conduct a review in this regard and consider if they are parking illegally if they are really loading or unloading goods. In fact, letting them turn off the engines for several minutes will help save fuel and alleviate air pollution.

Madam President, Members of the Liberal Party have expressed their views on the original motion and I do not wish to drag on. The feasible short-term measures have been stated in the original motion. When Miss LOH spoke on her amendment earlier, she gave me an impression that she has always been most concerned about environmental protection while the Liberal Party had all along been concerned about the economy and people's livelihood and we seemed to have snatched her topic. I hope Members would not mind. We support her but she really does not have to show such defiance towards Mr Edward HO. (*Laughter*)

Actually, like Miss Christine LOH, I have also been registered as a spotter for more than a year. If the fine for smoky vehicles is substantially increased, a problem will emerge. At present, the fine is over \$300 but if we spot a taxi or another vehicle emitting smoke and copy down its licence plate number, it will involve more than some \$300. The driver has to send the vehicle for inspection which will hold up his work for a few hours and that is already punishment. When Miss LOH spoke just now, she failed to mention the extent to which the fine should be substantially increased. But some environmental protection bodies have suggested a fine of \$10,000. We all know that a taxi driver earns less than \$10,000 a month now, should we fine a taxi driver for his income in a whole month just because he drives a smoky taxi? Miss LOH has not said that the fine has to be increased to \$10,000. But if it is increased to \$1,000, that is not a substantial increase. Do we want a substantial increase in the fine to have penalizing effects or to make the driver concerned lose his income in a whole month? I think some Honourable Members may have divergent views on this.

Furthermore, many Members have mentioned compulsory inspection of all vehicles. There are tens of thousands of vehicles in Hong Kong. How much has to be spent if annual inspection is made compulsory? Are there so many vehicle inspection centres in Hong Kong to cater for tens of thousands of vehicles in one go? We can only inspect 20 000 to 30 000 vehicles a year now.

Madam President, I so submit in support of the original motion.

**MISS EMILY LAU** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I speak in support of Mr Edward HO's motion and Miss Christine LOH's amendment.

Madam President, I do not know whether you recall that I raised a question in the Council a few months ago asking if the Government would consider letting people who often worked in the streets wear gas masks. I find that there is greater need now and I am afraid that not only those

working in the streets but also many people crossing the roads need gas masks. Madam President, the situation is really serious. As many Members have already expressed their views, I would not repeat what they have said, and I would only make certain points they have not made.

Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's remarks have made a deep impression on me because Mr LEUNG, a representative of the grassroots, shows appreciation of our Honourable colleagues from the industrial and business sector. Why? Madam President, it is because money has to be spent and that is very important. We know that the Conservancy Association, an environmental protection body, has conducted a survey in October and interviewed 1 519 persons in 17 places. The questions do not only relate to air pollution but also cover a wider scope like global warming. It is found that more than 80% of the interviewees are aware of this problem and they find it very serious. When asked whether they think that the Government should do something, 71% of them said that the Government had to take immediate actions as they thought that the problem was affecting their lives seriously. When asked if they were willing to pay, 39% of them said that they were willing to do so, 41% said they had to see while 20% said that they were not willing to pay.

Miss Cyd HO just mentioned the Director of Audit. I have been a member of the Public Accounts Committee for years and I find that two tasks have not been duly fulfilled. Perhaps Mr Eric LI has to elaborate on this. They are related to environmental protection. Originally, we had to conduct a hearing which may be held later concerning the incinerator in Tuen Mun and clinical waste. Dr LEONG Che-hung is not here at the moment. This issue has dragged on for five years, and the Director of Audit has made a report saying that nothing can be done. I would like to ask the Director to elaborate on this later. Another issue is about charges for construction materials disposed at the landfills. These are not done as tasks that require money are not feasible. Madam President, how can we, representatives of public opinions, collect money from our electors? They are definitely not going to pay, who is going to pay then? If the Government has to pay, does the money just fall from heaven? It is after all taxpayers' money. Yet, the Government is not willing to pay and it insists that money should be collected from people concerned and if they do not pay, it will not take actions. The Government should actually offer to pay and then increase taxes later. However, it will then be condemned for increasing taxes. I think the Liberal Party and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong as well as the breakfast group will then unite together.

Madam President, I agree fully with Mr Edward HO and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung that environmental pollution is a very big problem. However, having talked so much, I just want to point out that if we have such a poor environment, we must spend money to clean it up. But, who

is going to pay? If people have no food and they have to be beggars, we certainly cannot ask them to pay. However, every person should understand that they have to pay. When we put this into practice, some Honourable colleagues will uphold justice and stand up. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has just said that Miss LOH is pressing the public with a gigantic hat labelled environmental protection and putting them under great pressure. Mr Edward HO also says that there will be very great pressure. In fact, the community is under pressure now. While we are debating over the issue, will the Government put forward any plan in future? Even our motion debate today has overruled paying more money.

Madam President, we represent public opinions and many people may not like spending money. But if we find this correct in principle, we should be bold enough to tell them so. We are definitely not persecuting the public or forcing them into a miserable stage of having no food but when the responsibility has to be shared among everyone in the community, they have to pay. Therefore, if this cannot be done, tax increase is the only way out. After all, there has to be a source of the money to be spent. We all support the "polluter pays" principle but when the polluters are asked to pay, they are not willing to do so. What should be done? I find it very strange that Members have not focused on this point today. If we speak in a high-sounding manner and advocate principles in this Council, Members will give their support. What is so good about Miss LOH's proposal? I certainly support increased punishment as punishment has to be deterring. Members say that the situation is poor but it is probably not too poor, that is why some Members can still say: "Right but it is not possible ..... All the responsibilities should be borne by the polluters and they should pay". Where does their money come from? I hope that Honourable colleagues will ask Mr Edward HO to elaborate on the source of the money. I agree to Dr LEONG Che-hung's remark that this Council should convey a message to the Government that we are bold enough to bear the responsibility and tell the public that money has to be spent when needed. I hope electors will excuse me and vote for me again in the next election. Nevertheless, I have to say that this must be done and if we do so together, let us wait and see whom among us will be returned by the next election. Perhaps Members will say, "Emily LAU, you are a fool, let you tell the public about this. They will not vote for you next time". All right, let me be the fool. Madam President, I so submit.

**MR MARTIN LEE** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have waited until Miss Christine LOH comes back before I raise my hand to indicate my wish to speak for I support her. We all know that it is pressing to improve our air quality. According to the Democratic Party, the more measures the Government adopts the better, and the more quickly they are implemented the better. Therefore, there is no reason why I should not support the amendment of Miss Christine LOH. Mr Edward HO has moved a motion on improving air quality while the amendment of Miss LOH improves the quality of the motion of Mr Edward HO on improving air quality. (*Laughter*)

Therefore, there is no reason why I should not give my support.

Today, I have heard many different views. For instance, Prof NG Ching-fai has said that the Government would rather kill the wrong person than let the culprit go in providing for compulsory emission tests for all vehicles. These are actually tests only and it does not mean that vehicles will certainly be not up to standard. Punishment should be given if a vehicle is really smoky and the Government is not killing the wrong person. Penalty is not needed if a vehicle is not smoky at all. Are tests not acceptable? Although money has to be paid for vehicle inspection, it is worth the while as drivers cannot see their vehicles emitting smokes when they are driving. Is a test such a big deal? If it is really found that the vehicles are smoky, maintenance should immediately be carried out. This actually falls in line with the original motion of Mr Edward HO as "enhancing vehicle maintenance standards" is stated in his motion. How can such standards be enhanced without inspection? Therefore, I do not think that there is any problem. The Government is not killing the wrong persons so as not to let the culprits go, but it is not killing the wrong persons or letting the culprits go.

Mr James TIEN does not agree to a substantial increase in fines. We should not forget that there are minimum and maximum penalties according to the law. If we make reference to the common law cases, we will know clearly that the maximum penalty will only be given in the worst case we can imagine. Take the bus company that has just closed down as an example. Assuming that the buses of this company emit smoke everyday and it disregards advice and it does not make improvements even though it has been prosecuted. Under this circumstance, it is not too much to impose upon it the maximum fine of \$10,000. The maximum fine will only be imposed under the worst circumstances we can imagine. Members should not be worried.

I am very interested in the Government's views in this regard. The Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands is here today, and he is one of the officials working for environmental protection. We are actually assisting them in their work and we hope that they will strongly support the motion and the amendment, otherwise, we will be very disappointed. In fact, they should co-operate with the police. I have heard some radio programmes in which people complained about the drivers of nanny vans carrying children to and from schools. Among these drivers, those who are alert about environmental protection will turn off the engines while waiting but those who are not alert will leave the engines on so as to enjoy conditioned air. However, the police only issue Fixed Penalty Tickets to those who have turned off the engines while they direct drivers who have not turned off the engines to drive away. Therefore, I hope that the officials concerned will establish closer links with the Hong Kong Police Force and that policemen will not issue Fixed Penalty Tickets this way, otherwise, all of us will become victims of vehicle exhaust.

I hope that my Honourable friends of the Liberal Party will take it easy. If the motion is

amended, the motion is after all proposed by Mr Edward HO and they can still win applause and be happy. I just hope that there will be a happy ending. Thank you, Madam President.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr Edward HO, you may now speak on Miss Christine LOH's amendment. You have up to five minutes to speak.

**MR EDWARD HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I think I do not need to use up the five minutes. I am always appreciative of Miss Christine LOH's concern about environmental protection but it is a great pity that her speech today gives me an impression that she is the only one concerned about environmental protection. Just now, she turned and pointed at the Liberal Party just like a teacher teaching her students. (*Laughter*) Actually, environmental protection ideas are not patented and people or bodies do not have patents to them. Yet, everyone in Hong Kong is concerned about environmental protection. Dr LEONG Che-hung has just said that the air we breathe may affect our health and this is the concern of everyone. If we are not concerned about environmental protection, we will not have this motion debate today. I am very glad that many Members support the mainstream ideas of the motion.

Miss Christine LOH is mistaken about a point or two. Firstly, we oppose her amendment but not all of its contents. She has just said that I oppose the suggestion in her amendment about vehicle maintenance, but I am actually not opposing this point. I do not oppose the suggestion in her amendment about energy saving but only the part about vehicle inspection. I think she may be mistaken.

Secondly, in respect of vehicle inspection, she has said that now that vehicles have to be inspected every year, they should also be inspected for emissions incidentally. She may be mistaken again. At present, vehicles other than diesel vehicles basically do not need to undergo annual inspection but only an inspection from the seventh year onwards. The inspection is not on emissions but on mechanical parts related to the braking systems. Certainly, I will not oppose inspection on old vehicles but the topic we are now discussing about is that a new vehicle should be issued a license by the Government after being given a factory certificate that there is no problem with the vehicle. I do not need to drag on as Mrs Selina CHOW has just said very clearly that there are 100 000 vehicles in Hong Kong, do we have to inspect each and every one of them?

When Mr LAW Chi-kwong mentioned this point in his speech, he said that the Government may have to carry out a study or consultation. But he supported the spirit of Miss LOH's amendment. I would like to ask the leader of the Democratic Party, Mr Martin LEE, a question: Are we going to vote on the wordings or spirit of the motion or amendment? They say that the public should be consulted but Mr Martin LEE has put it bluntly that he supports the motion; no consultation is needed. I wonder if the Democratic Party really wishes to consult the public. Madam President, I suppose you may later allow them to leave the Chamber for five minutes to think this over (*laughter*) —Mr Martin LEE shakes his head to indicate that this is not necessary — I think all of us should ponder over this.

As for vehicle inspection, Miss Christine LOH has said that Members including herself do not oppose phased vehicle inspection but it is not stated in her amendment that vehicle inspection can be carried out phase by phase and it is only stated that all vehicles should be inspected. We have actually pondered over this very carefully and we would like to express our opposition. We know that we should unite as one and speak for environmental protection but it is a great pity that we ultimately cannot support her amendment.

Thank you, Madam President.

**SECRETARY FOR PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND LANDS** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I thank Mr Edward HO and Miss Christine LOH very much for moving the motion and the amendment respectively to give me the opportunity to explain to Members the comprehensive plan that the Government is working on to secure clean air for Hong Kong. But first I believe that it will be helpful to his Council and to the community if I spend a few minutes setting out the state of air pollution in Hong Kong, the progress being made and the problems we have to tackle in dealing with this problem.

Air pollution is complex. Our daily air pollution index is a shorthand way of reporting pollution that comes from various substances. These are total suspended particulates (RSP) — basically dust of many different types; respirable suspended particulates — small particles, again of many different types, that can be taken into the lungs; sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone. For each of these substances and for certain other elements that may affect health, such as lead, statutory air quality objectives have been set. These objectives are based on the best available evidence of risks to human health.

The pollutants have many different sources. In terms of the volume of emissions, power stations contribute about 70% of sulphur dioxide, 45% of nitrogen dioxide and 34% of the particulates emitted from combustion sources. Vehicles emit 7% of sulphur dioxide, 45% of

nitrogen dioxide and about 50% of the particulates from combustion. Other major emission sources are the many industrial and commercial activities, construction activities and vessels. However, in terms of air pollution in the urban areas, motor vehicles, particularly diesel vehicles, are the dominant source. Indeed, half of the RSP in the urban areas come from diesel vehicles.

Different concentrations of these pollutants will cause different effects. Particulates cause haze. When oxides of nitrogen combine with other hydrocarbons under sunlight, ozone and photochemical smog can be formed. This is the "orange salted egg yolk" as described by many Members, including Mr Michael HO.

Local wind and atmospheric conditions also have profound effects on the build up of pollutants and their effects. As a general observation, during the summer months, when the prevailing winds are coming from the southeast, off the sea, our air tends to be relatively clean as our pollutants are carried into the Mainland. During the winter months when the prevailing winds are reversed, however, we have pollutants emitted in the Mainland added to our own.

That is the technical background. How are we performing against the air quality objectives?

In 1989, when we published the White Paper on pollution in Hong Kong and our strategy in combatting it, we were failing to meet all air quality objectives for total suspended particulates, RSP and sulphur dioxide. We also failed to meet the objective for incidents of short-term maximum exposure for nitrogen dioxide although we were meeting the objective for average exposure over a year. Objectives for ozone, carbon monoxide and for lead were met.

Last year we met the objectives for incidents of short-term exposure to total suspended particulates and RSP. While the objective for annual average exposure for both these pollutants is still not being met, as a result of tightening up of vehicle fuel and emission standards in recent years, we are beginning to see an improving trend. With the replacement of diesel taxis with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) powered taxis, we should see more significant improvements in the coming years. Last year we met all objectives for carbon monoxide, ozone and lead. Sulphur dioxide levels are now well below all objective levels and continue to decline as tighter standards for vehicle fuels and vehicle emission performance take effect.

So much for the good news. Before Members criticize the Government for being complacent, however, the bad news is that, although Hong Kong has put in place much the same package of emission controls as Europe and the United States over the last decade, we have not seen the gains that have been made in many European and American cities. One major factor has been offsetting almost all the improvements we have made through better control of industrial and power station emissions, reduction of dust from roads and construction, and improvement of fuel standards and vehicle emission standards. It has offset almost all efforts we have made. That factor is the

massive increase in the number of vehicles on the roads. Overall, this has grown from 323 000 in 1989 to 512 000 today. Although individual vehicles are becoming cleaner, the overall volume of emissions from vehicles is becoming larger which increases the pollution that we all experience at street level. As pointed out by some Members, continuing poor levels of vehicle maintenance and the illegal use of substandard fuels also make the problem worse than it need be. Moreover, the type of emissions coming from our vehicles reacts with the type of emissions that are coming into Hong Kong from outside to increase the smog effects that we all see in the winter months. In 1991, visibility fell below 8 km for less than 5% of the time. Last year visibility fell below 8 km 10% of the time.

Clearly, tackling the problem of vehicle emissions is the priority area for action, but I do want to make it absolutely clear that we fully share the view of Mr Edward Ho and Miss Christine LOH, which is also the view of Mr Albert HO and many other Members who have spoken in this debate, that this is just the priority area, not the only area to work on. As Members have said, the measures to tackle air pollution must be comprehensive if they are to achieve the community's aspirations for clean air.

Let me now amplify on the measures that were set out in the Chief Executive's policy address and in the policy booklets issued by my Bureau and by my colleague, the Secretary for Transport, and on the existing programmes that will be sustained in the coming years, all of which together will help to improve Hong Kong's air.

Just now, Mr HUI Cheung-ching, Dr TANG Siu-tong and Mrs Miriam LAU have put forward various proposals to expedite the implementation of the LPG taxi scheme, including economic incentives. We will thoroughly consider these proposals, including the economic incentives, and the public's views that we are collecting until the public consultation period ends by the end of this year.

Let me stress that while much attention has been given to the proposals to convert the entire taxi fleet from diesel fuel to LPG, our interest and actions cover the entire vehicle fleet. Apart from the planned introduction of LPG for taxis, we are taking other actions covering the vehicle fleet in four major areas:

First, further improvement to vehicle fuel and emission standards:

- we will ban completely the use of leaded petrol in early 1999.
- the Euro II emission standards and diesel fuel with even lower sulphur content which were introduced last year have been extended across the vehicle fleet during

this year and will bring continuing reductions in diesel particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide and hydrocarbon emissions. These standards are among the most stringent practical diesel emission standards in the world.

- now that the European Union, Japan and the United States have introduced emission standards for new motorcycles and compliant vehicles are available on the local market, we will implement the same standards here within 1999.

Second, to back up these standards we will undertake much more stringent inspection of vehicles and enforcement both against smoky vehicles and against the illegal supply of diesel fuel that does not comply with our low sulphur requirements. The measures include:

- more stringent annual inspections and emission tests were introduced in November last year. Mr Albert HO has actually answered the questions raised by Mrs Selina CHOW for me just now. We are introducing chassis dynamometers, which will make the inspections more rigorous and effective. Those for light vehicles have already passed the tests successfully and will be in place within a few months. Tests on systems for heavy vehicles are being conducted at the moment and suitable equipment will be introduced as soon as possible. We will refuse to renew licences of vehicles that fail emission tests during annual inspections and revoke licences of vehicles that fail spot checks.
- still on law enforcement, we are issuing the police with new types of portable smoke meters, to make it easier for them to prosecute smoky vehicles through fixed penalty tickets issued on the street. Enabling legislation to allow them to use this equipment will be laid before this Council shortly.
- we have taken note of the calls from Miss Christine LOH, Mr LAW Chi-kwong, Mr Martin LEE and other Members for an increase in the fixed penalty fines for smoky vehicles, to \$1,000, \$10,000 and \$100,000. Proposed legislation for this will be put to this Council as early as possible in 1999.
- the Customs and Excise Department will be vigorously investigating and prosecuting the distribution and use of illegal diesel fuel.

Third, in response to the views of Mr CHAN Wing-chan and Mrs Miriam LAU regarding the poor levels of the present vehicle maintenance, the Environmental Protection Department and Transport Department will step up their programmes to educate vehicle owners and mechanics to

exercise their responsibility to maintain vehicles properly. I would like to thank the Motor Traders Association of Hong Kong, taxi and minibus trade associations and other groups who are working with us to help in this important education process.

Fourth, to answer Prof NG Ching-fai, we are working on introduction of further new cleaner fuels and technologies. We welcome the work being done by the Polytechnic University, with support from the taxi trade, to develop exhaust filters that may help reduce pollution from the existing taxi fleet. As regards Miss Cyd HO's suggestion of converting the minibus fleet from using diesel fuel to LPG, we will be working with the minibus trade to carry out trials with cleaner fuels for the fleet in 1999 and we are studying very closely proposals for other new fuels. It is important to register a word of caution, however. LPG will make an important contribution in reducing RSP now emitted by the taxi fleet, but given the actual circumstances of Hong Kong, the feasibility of replacing the fuels of the buses and other heavy vehicles with LPG still awaits our study. For the time being, given the various practical factors, we do not feel that this is a practical option. Besides, there would be no point in substituting LPG for petrol in the private vehicle fleet, since petrol vehicles are not responsible for any significant proportion of the problem with particulates. Furthermore, despite the advantages of LPG over diesel now used by the taxi fleet, in the wider perspective of Hong Kong's long-term air quality, it is still a source of pollutants, just as petrol or other newer fuels like the so-called "city diesel" or "bio-diesel" suggested by Mr Edward HO and Mr Albert HO. Therefore, I agree with Prof NG Ching-fai that for the sake of our environment in the longer term, we need to look into fundamentally different types of engine and power sources for road transport.

Having spoken at length about vehicles, now let me turn to the Government's other areas of action on air pollution. Let me repeat my earlier point that action in every area, both by every government agency, by the private sector as well as each individual is essential to meeting our common hope for better air quality.

Clearly much greater understanding and co-operation with our neighbours in Guangdong is essential to tackling a growing regional problem of air pollution. The joint study on air pollution throughout the Pearl River Delta that is conducted by us and the Guangdong authorities will provide both sides with the means to better identify the sources and conditions that are causing the problem, so that together we can develop more effective measures to reduce it. Let me assure Dr Raymond HO that we are not going to wait for the conclusion of that study before taking any action. Both we here in Hong Kong and our counterparts in the Mainland will press ahead vigorously with our own actions to reduce air pollution. At the meeting held by the Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau Environmental Protection Liaison Group last week, the Guangdong authorities gave a detailed introduction on the work done by the Guangdong Province and Shenzhen to improve air quality. If Members are interested, I will send out such information to them later on. The study

will give us the information both Hong Kong and the mainland authorities need to see what further programmes and planning will be needed to protect air quality across the region as a whole while both sides continue to respond to the demands of their populations for employment, housing and other social and economic needs.

One point has not been mentioned by Members which I consider very important is that much of the air pollution we find coming across our boundary is, without exaggeration, the product of factories that Hong Kong based businesses have built in South China. I have heard some voices from some quarters about the cost of complying with environmental regulations in Hong Kong. This pollution is the evidence that there is no escape from the costs of pollution. The longer we neglect the necessary pollution control measures, the greater those costs will become. I am greatly encouraged by the clear message that is coming from the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce and from the Private Sector Committee on the Environment about the need for the industry to improve its environmental performance. I also very much welcome the steps that have been taken by industries operating in Hong Kong. I repeat the pledge that has been made by the Financial Secretary that we will work closely with the industrial sector to help it meet environmental requirements with the minimum of cost and maximum of benefit. And I do very much hope that the good practices that the industrial sector has been adopting here will be taken up by those who operate factories in the Mainland. It is important for the environment there and here. And I very much agree with Mr James TIEN and Mr Michael HO that improvement to the environment and air quality not only matters for the health and productivity of employees but also the sustainability of business and loss of the earth's economy.

Mr Edward HO has suggested to improve air quality, we can start from urban planning, avoiding concentrating the commercial areas in one or two districts. In this regard, the Government has started the study on how to make the best use of the transport interchanges in different districts over the whole territory, such as surrounding areas of railway stations, bus terminuses and Mass Transit Railway stations, to develop them into new commercial centres so as to divert people away from the few traditional commercial districts such as Central, Causeway Bay and Tsim Sha Tsui, and reduce the heavy demand on road traffic in these particular areas and the air pollution thus created as a result of their need to travel to these areas to work. We will continue to look into this area.

I very much endorse the views and suggestions of Mr Howard YOUNG and many other Members on tree planting. The environmental benefits as well as the shade and visual amenity are very substantial. Every year around 1.5 million trees and shrubs are planted around our city and country parks. I am delighted by the tremendous response there has been from the business community in Hong Kong to the campaign by environmental groups and the Agriculture and

Fisheries Department to encourage the "Corporate Afforestation Schemes" in recent years. In the coming year, with their support, it is expected that half a million trees will be planted in the country parks alone.

One of the important roles that the Municipal Services Departments and the Municipal Councils have performed is planting and landscaping within our city. At the local level, the District Boards have also been doing much small scale planting work. It will be important during the planned process of reorganization of local administration that we do not lose sight of this. Indeed, I very much hope that the proposed new District Councils may help to focus more attention on this means of improving the quality of our urban environment and our air, and may encourage more local initiatives to be taken toward this work. Landscaping groups within the Planning Department, Territory Development Department, Architectural Services Department, Housing Department and Highways Department stand ready to advise and assist the local bodies, and are reviewing their own practices and objectives so as to help in this area.

Mr LAU Chin-shek urges the Government to expedite the development of railways. The policy address has set out the new directions being pursued by the Transport Bureau, supported by my Bureau and the Planning Department. We are working towards an environmentally-friendly, mass transit based development strategy. The schemes that have been set out over the last few weeks for a 40% increase in our railway network over the next five years are a major step in that direction. This will be followed up with the development of housing and employment opportunities focused around the new rail systems. The second railway development study and third comprehensive transport study which will be completed in the coming year will map out further steps we will take to ensure that this more sustainable approach to the pattern of development in Hong Kong will be continued.

Miss Christine LOH, in her amendment, has drawn attention to the significance for air quality of the way in which we generate and use electricity. We are giving priority to managing the demand for electricity, not just through the demand side management programmes that my colleague the Secretary for Economic Services is negotiating with the power companies, but throughout the community by education programmes and information on energy efficiency, by the work to promote more energy efficient buildings, and by the development of new, environmentally responsible energy sources. In the event that any new generating capacity may be needed, the Administration has already made clear that coal will not be an acceptable power source.

Finally, in response to the views of Mr Bernard CHAN and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, we will continue to enforce vigorously all measures to reduce dust from roads, construction activities and other sources that add to the overall air quality problems.

I would again like to thank this Council for holding this debate and for the ideas and support for the action to improve air quality that have come from so many Members. The motion has helped to make clear the importance of action not just with particular parts of the vehicle fleet, but comprehensively with transport, energy, planning, industry, construction, afforestation and co-operation with our neighbours in order to achieve and sustain improvements in our air. I trust that I have made clear the Administration's commitment to follow through such a comprehensive programme, both through extensive new measures in the short term and in our planning for the future.

I would also like to thank all those in the community who are working with us to achieve this goal of cleaner air. In particular, I would like to thank the taxi associations, oil companies and the Motor Traders Association who are working with us on the LPG taxi scheme. It is a complex business to introduce and manage the conversion to an entirely new type of fuel. The current economic downturn makes the assessment of the scheme all the more difficult for each party that is involved. It is very much to the credit of all these groups that, despite the difficulties, they want to make the scheme work, want to help improve the environment of Hong Kong. Their persistence is highly commended by the Administration.

Madam President, in closing I would like to quote the remarks by Mr Edward STOKES of the Hong Kong Conservation Photography Foundation as reported in an article on air pollution in the *Sunday Post* of 22 November. I quote, "There's not going to be an improvement in environmental conditions here, certainly in air quality, until the public is behind the Government." I believe that this is the same distinctive message that Miss Emily LAU has just given us. Madam President, the Government sees the improvement in air quality, improvement in environmental performance, as crucial for our city and a centre-piece for action by the Administration, no matter it is for the sake of our economy, tourism or manufacturing industry, or even for our own health and for reducing our medical expenditure. Therefore, I regard this work as the Government's focus projects. I trust that we can count on the encouragement and the support of this Council for the measures we will need to take on legislation, enforcement, education and publicity campaigns in the months and years ahead.

Thank you, Madam President.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Miss Christine LOH be made to Mr Edward HO's motion.

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)

Miss Christine LOH rose to claim a division.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Miss Christine LOH has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for three minutes.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Will Members please register their presence by pressing the button and then proceed to vote?

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Before I declare that voting shall stop, Members may wish to check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): The result will now be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Michael HO, Miss Margaret NG, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr SIN Chung-kai and Mr LAW Chi-kwong voted for the amendment.

Mr Kenneth TING, Mr James TIEN, Mr Edward HO, Dr Raymond HO, Mr Eric LI, Mr LEE Kai-ming, Dr LUI Ming-wah, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr Bernard CHAN, Mr CHAN Wing-chan, Dr LEONG Che-hung, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Mr Howard YOUNG, Mr LAU Wong-fat and Mrs Miriam LAU voted against the amendment.

Mr Ambrose CHEUNG, Mr HUI Cheung-ching, Mr Timothy FOK, Mr FUNG Chi-kin and Dr TANG Siu-tong abstained.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Miss Cyd HO, Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Wing-tat, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Miss Christine LOH, Dr YEUNG Sum, Mr LAU Chin-shek, Miss Emily LAU, Mr Andrew CHENG and Mr SZETO Wah voted for the amendment.

Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Mr Gary CHENG, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr HO Sai-chu, Mr NG Leung-sing, Prof NG Ching-fai, Mr MA Fung-kwok, Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung voted against the amendment.

Mr Ambrose LAU abstained.

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

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 26 were present, five were in favour of the amendment, 16 against it and five abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 27 were present, 13 were in favour of the amendment, 12 against it and one abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, she therefore declared that the amendment was negated.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr Edward HO, you may now reply and you have up to three minutes 11 seconds out of your original 15 minutes.

**MR EDWARD HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, first, I would like to thank Honourable Members for speaking one after another on this problem of concern to Hong Kong people. Many Members have made some new points. For instance, Dr LEONG Che-hung has made a point about the indoor environment and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has talked about dust at construction sites. I hope that the Government will take account of these new points. I appreciate that the public officer has given such a detailed answer covering the questions raised by many Members.

However, I hope that the answer has not been drafted in advance and that it will not be the Government's empty talk. I hope that the Government will follow up the new suggestions made today. When Mr LAU, the Deputy Director, mentioned fuels just now, it seems to me that he only heard me say turbo-diesel but I have actually talked about other new fuels. He will know this when he read my speech in future. In any case, I hope that the Government has taken the new points we made today.

I would like to respond to a couple of other points. Firstly, my old friend, Miss Emily LAU finds it inappropriate for Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung to agree to certain of my suggestions as they involve expenses and other conditions. In fact, we also know that money has to be spent in order to improve our environment and it is not possible for us to evade spending. Actually, not much expense is involved and greater economic losses will be incurred if money is not spent now. Dr LEONG Che-hung and Mr Michael HO have touched upon the medical problems while Mr James TIEN has discussed about the losses in the industrial and commercial aspects. Therefore, the Government should make these expenses. In this regard, I hope that the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau will hold discussions with the Financial Secretary as the money should be spent. I agree to the remarks of Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung that there have to be incentives and we cannot just talk about punishment. This is precisely the case. It will be unfair if we only condemn the wrong doers. I would also like to respond to Mr Martin LEE's remarks that we do not wish to win applause; we just emphasize principles.

Lastly, as time is running out, I only want to make two points. Firstly, improvements should be made to the Legislative Council Secretariat's van, LC3, to avoid polluting our environment. Secondly, there are four slips of paper reminding me that I can speak for three minutes 11 seconds, we probably need to save on this .....

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): You have exceeded the time limit for speaking. (*Laughter*)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Edward HO, as set out on the Agenda, be passed.

Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

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## **PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT**

**MR LAW CHI-KWONG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move the motion which has been printed on the Agenda.

Let me first outline the reasons and background behind this motion debate proposed by me. We all know well in advance that the Government will make the issue of environmental protection policy one of the highlights of discussion in the policy address. As this is an issue of extreme importance, it deserves another occasion for discussion apart from that in the policy address. To avoid being repetitive, I shall focus on the principles and directions of environmental protection in the motion. As for the specific policies related to this, I hope to discuss them in next week's debate. We also hope that Honourable Members can comment on the paper on environmental protection policy issued by the Democratic Party at the beginning of this month.

Over the past years we have not hesitated to give up the quality in our environment as a price we paid for social and economic development. It goes without saying that there is a close relationship between environmental protection, the community and the economy when worsening pollution is scaring off foreign investors and tourists and when the incidence of respiratory diseases is on the rise. Therefore, the Democratic Party urges the Government to attach importance to factors relevant to environmental conservation and sustainable development in formulating various social and economic development plans. When laying down policies on environmental protection, considerations should be given to achieving greater economic benefits on environmental protection efforts through the adoption of matching economic policies with a view to seeking public support and striking a balance between the three areas of social and economic developments and environmental protection.

To ensure that our policies will take account of the factors of economic development and environmental protection, it is essential that we make comprehensive laws and policies on the conservation of natural resources. For otherwise the various plans of environmental conservation will become nothing more than empty talk and publicity efforts. A sound policy should have punishment and reward and coupled with appropriate economic tools and taxation policies which serve as incentives for participation from the public and various sectors. That is the most effective way to promote environmental protection. I know that the public is concerned about what kind of taxation policies we have in mind. I would like to stress that the taxation policies we are talking about can be divided into two categories. The first are concessions given to encourage green

efforts on the part of individuals and businesses. The second is the charging of taxes on those destructive acts, and I stress, destructive acts, on the environment as a means to reflect the social costs incurred. Details on the proposals will be given by the Honourable SIN Chung-kai later.

Many members of the public still hold the view that environmental protection is a matter of social commitment and it will only increase public expenditure. In view of this, the Democratic Party thinks that a more open attitude should be adopted by the Government on this matter. Economic means such as introducing private sector participation and competition should be used to expedite the implementation of infrastructural projects for environmental protection. This will achieve four results, namely, the achievement of targets in sustainable development, the encouragement of private sector participation, the stimulation of economic activities and the raising of cost-effectiveness in environmental protection policies. Mr SIN Chung-kai will elaborate on this point later as well.

The cultivation of a sense of environmental protection in the public is what we in the Democratic Party consider to be the most important element in the promotion of sustainable development. The most effective way to enhance such a sense of environmental protection is to encourage and facilitate the participation of the general public in planning, formulating and implementing environmental protection policies. Details on this proposal will be given by the Honourable Martin LEE later.

On the formulation of policies on the conservation of natural resources, I would like to spend some time to outline our the Democratic Party's position. Our excellent geographical conditions and climate, that is to say, as found in our undeveloped areas, make it a suitable habitat for the growth of many plants and animals. According to government estimates, there are roughly 421 species of birds, 2 800 species of vascular plants, 150 marine species and 50 species of coral in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, quite a lot of these precious natural resources have been destroyed in the process of our economic development over the years.

Despite the earmarking of more than 60 spots of vital ecological importance in the New Territories since the beginning of 1970, there is no single comprehensive set of law to protect these important ecosystems to date. There are only some piecemeal ordinances and policies such as the Country Parks Ordinance, the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance, the Animals and Plants (Protection of Endangered Species) Ordinance and guidelines on the protection of wetlands under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and so on. For the development, uses and plans in the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), approval must be sought from the Town Planning Committee. Even though the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulation is in force, the existing policy is that if active measures are taken in the development project within the

buffer zone of the wetlands to minimize the damage done to the ecosystem or if the developer is willing to offer compensation, then there is a chance that the project will be approved. However, after undergoing development, the natural resources and ecosystem of the place will sustain a certain extent of damage and remedial actions may not be able to restore the natural resources to their original value. The situation is worse off when developers merely carry out the protective measures half-heartedly.

There have been signs and reports that villagers and developers are extremely dissatisfied with government control on development in important ecological locations. Recently, in Sha Lo Tung and Wong Yue Tan, there are cases of villagers and developers destroying the ecosystem of these places deliberately so that the ecological value there disappears completely. Then a report on the so-called latest ecological information of the place will be submitted to the Government. The Government is thus led to believe that there is no conservation value in these places and so the development plans are likely to be approved. Under existing laws, when faced with these acts of destruction to the ecosystem, the public can do nothing to prevent these beautiful places from being destroyed. Their right to enjoy the natural resources is not protected by law. I wish we can all understand that as members of the international community, we are charged with the responsibility of protecting the resources of the earth. We should never believe that large scale development projects should be allowed to override the interests of mankind.

In the absence of a comprehensive protection policy of our natural resources, it is difficult to strike a balance between the needs of environmental protection and the pressure of economic development. It is also likely that natural resources are sacrificed in the name of economic development. The Territorial Development Strategy Review has also pointed out that the expected scale of development may cause a deterioration of environmental quality and so the formulation of a comprehensive policy for the protection of natural resources is an urgent task that can brook no delay.

The formulation of a comprehensive policy for the protection of natural resources starts with the making of an all encompassing set of legislation. The objectives of such a policy should be two-fold. First, it should protect and improve the living environment of the people and the natural environment of the territory, ensuring that a balance is struck between the needs of environmental protection and the pressure of economic development, thereby safeguarding the right of each and every person and our next generation to enjoy the same quality and quantity of natural resources that we have. Second, comprehensive laws on the protection of natural resources must take into account economic and social development plans and to require that economic and technical policies and measures conducive to environmental protection be adopted so that there will be co-ordination between efforts made in environmental protection, economic and social developments.

The Democratic Party proposes that the following principles be adopted by the Government to form a groundwork for the formulation of policies and laws in this respect:

1. It is both the right and responsibility of all organizations and individuals in society to enjoy and protect our natural resources. All organizations and individuals have the right to report and prosecute those who pollute and destroy the environment.
2. Any organization or individual who has done anything to destroy the environment must bear the consequences as specified in law.
3. The conservation of natural life and the ecosystem should adhere to the principle of avoiding disturbance to the ecology and that the latter should be preserved in its original form as much as possible.
4. Plans or acts which may endanger natural resources should be subject to as much control as possible.
5. The quality and quantity of all kinds of natural resources must be protected and maintained as much as possible so that the environmental quality of this and the next generations will not deteriorate.

I hope that such legislation and policy can alert the people of Hong Kong to re-examine their relationship with the earth, the environment and other people. It is also my earnest wish that they can cease to believe that they are in full control of nature. They should rebuild and continue to cultivate kindness, care and concern to the environment, the other people, as well as to plants and animals.

Lastly, I would like to cite some examples which illustrate the lack of co-ordination between government departments. The standard of dark smoke in the vehicle inspection centres of the Transport Department is less stringent than that of the tests conducted by the Environmental Protection Department. Therefore, some "smart" drivers will have their cars inspected in the Transport Department centres. The second example is that there is also a lack of co-ordination in clearing up rubbish found on the beaches. The Urban Services Department takes care of the rubbish on the while the Marine Department takes care of the rubbish on the sea. But there is no department responsible for the clearing up of rubbish below the sea surface. It can therefore be seen that policies are implemented in a very haphazard manner. When for example samples of sea

water are taken from our beaches for testing purposes, the Urban Services Department, the Environmental Protection Department, the Marine Department and the Agriculture and Fisheries Department will all take sea water samples. This shows how repetitive and inefficient the work is. In the planning of the newly developed areas, the Government has stated that trains will be used in the place of other means of transportation. On the other hand, in the developed urban areas, there is a lack of environmental protection considerations in policies related to the addition of bus routes and the number of buses. Recently, the Government has permitted the First Bus to open more bus routes and reduce the fares for certain routes with a view to attracting more passengers for the route from Shau Kei Wan to the Wan Chai MTR station. This move runs counter to the policy of encouraging more people to use the mass carriers.

The lack of co-ordination among government departments serves to slow down the pace of our efforts to improve our environment and to carry out sustainable development. Therefore, to achieve better utilization of the resources and to speed up the improvement of environmental quality, the co-ordination between government departments must be enhanced. I will talk more on this point in the debate on the policy address later.

With these remarks, I hope Honourable Members can speak on this motion and support it. Thank you, Madam President.

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

"That this Council urges the Government, while striving to achieve social and economic developments, to implement a strategy for sustainable development in Hong Kong, having regard to the balance between economic development and environmental protection and their interactive relationship; the strategy should include:

- (1) attaching importance to factors relevant to environmental conservation and sustainable development in formulating various social and economic development plans;
- (2) conducting a full review of and making comprehensive laws and policies on the conservation of natural resources to conserve the ecosystem in Hong Kong and enhance its environmental quality, thereby strengthening Hong Kong's economic competitiveness and creating a good living environment for the next generation in Hong Kong;
- (3) adopting appropriate economic tools and taxation policies so that the prices of commodities, services and development plans can fully reflect their environmental

costs and provide resources for the promotion of green efforts;

(4) using economic means such as introducing private participation and competition to expedite the implementation of infrastructural projects for environmental protection; and

(5) apart from strengthening the co-operation with the mainland authorities in promoting environmental protection work, enhancing the co-ordination among various Policy Bureaux and enforcement departments within the Government as the first step and at the same time encouraging and facilitating the participation of the general public, district bodies and non-governmental organizations in planning, formulating and implementing environmental protection policies."

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr LAW Chi-kwong, as set out on the Agenda, be passed.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr LAU Kong-wah will move an amendment to this motion, as printed on the Agenda. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the motion and the amendment will now be debated together in a joint debate.

I now call upon Mr LAU Kong-wah to speak and move his amendment.

**MR LAU KONG-WAH** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that Mr LAW Chi-kwong's motion be amended, as set out on the Agenda.

Madam President, the latest trend is nostalgia. Some people will indulge in fond memories of the past glories of the economic boom. Some will invoke childhood memories of the unspoiled pristine nature. The natural environment that we used to have in our childhood days was certainly better than what we have now. If we are to trace back to our grandfather's time, the natural environment those days was even much better. Just now Mr LAW Chi-kwong said that economic progress had caused destruction to the natural environment, evident in past development. For sustainable development to become a reality, we must prevent our natural environment from being damaged in our efforts to make economic progress. I believe this is a consensus among us. Once damage is done to the environment, it is difficult to make remedies. Despite the fact that the Chief Executive has put environmental protection in a key position in this year's policy address, we hope that Honourable colleagues will deal fair and square with this issue in this time and age of

environmental protection.

Mr LAW Chi-kwong's motion is akin to our position in many ways. This applies especially to the second point in his motion where the last sentence mentions "creating a good living environment for the next generation of Hong Kong". This reminds me of a slogan recently advanced by our party, that is, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong, which goes like this: "Vote for hard work, rapid solutions, bright ideas to improve our common environment". Our target is to make this slogan known all over Hong Kong. The words "hard work" in this slogan refers to more concern. The words "rapid solutions" means swifter response. "Bright ideas" means smarter services. If we use these three phrases to assess the efforts put in by the Government in environmental protection, it is easy to find that there is indeed enhanced concern, but the response is not swift enough at times. As for services, do we have smarter services in this respect? I would think that this is very much far from our expectations.

Madam President, I would like to cite a few examples. The first one is the pollution of the Shing Mun River. The Policy Secretary should know very well that he and I have walked along the river banks of the Shing Mun River on a few occasions. The Government has made a pledge to the Sha Tin residents and to the people of Hong Kong as well, that the Shing Mun River will be one with willow trees hanging over the river banks and one which people can row boats in the moonlight. Now almost 20 years have passed, and we have not seen any of these become a reality. What can we do? I have said before that if the Shing Mun River pollution problem remains unresolved, the symbolic meaning of environmental protection in Hong Kong will be lost, for this project of cleaning up the Shing Mun River has great symbolic meaning.

Madam President, the second example. We can see a lot of baskets in the public housing estates. These are meant to be used for collecting different kinds of waste materials for recycling. Some of these baskets are for waste paper, some for plastic bottles and some for other things. We used to think that this recycling plan was quite successful and the public was actively supporting the plan by putting the plastic bottles into the baskets. However, as I learned from operators in the recycling industry, these plastic bottles collected are not recycled but that they are sent to the landfills. This is not we want. This will not help protect the environment, though it may serve some educational purpose in any case.

Madam President, the third example is the recovery and recycling of waste paper. We all know that after the recent closure of the Concordia Paper Company, the Government has really put in a lot of efforts to find land for the waste paper recycling operators to continue with their business. A few days ago, we visited the old Kai Tak Airport and learned that a piece of land had been set aside for use by the waste paper recycling industry. It has an area of about 15 000 sq ft and the monthly rent is only \$1,000. This is a very generous offer from the Government. It is also a kind

of subsidy and encouragement. The problem is that there is no sufficient supply of electricity. I saw that the waste paper had to be treated with a foot pedal, without the aid of any machinery. If the waste paper recycling company wants to lay some power cables, but these will cost it \$2 million. From this it can be seen that there is a problem with the co-ordination among government departments. So, I think environmental protection is no easy task to complete. At times we feel quite helpless though our heart is willing.

Madam President, I will not doubt the sincerity of Mr SIU, the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, and that of the Chief Executive. If they are really determined to put in more efforts, I think examples like these will not happen again. The colour green is used by some people to describe the environmentalists. There are, however, different shades of green. Those who go about on a bike, avoid using cars and grow their vegetables can be said to be dark green. There are people who drive and may in the course produce exhaust. But they may flash their handkerchiefs and what they do can be called light green. How green then is the Government? It is neither light green nor dark green, it is not green at all. It is simply half-hearted. This can be seen in the examples which I have just cited. The green policy and the implementation of green efforts by our Government are only half-hearted. So I hope Mr SIU can really show more determination and stop being half-hearted on this issue.

Coming back to Mr LAW's motion, there are two points which I think should be raised. First, the motion is not comprehensive enough. Second, there are some proposals which are not acceptable to us. I wish to go into these one by one.

The first thing which should be added into the motion is a goal, apart from a direction. A goal will enable us to realize the cost-effectiveness of environmental protection efforts. In future, an assessment mechanism should be set up as well.

The second point is the taxation policies which the Democratic Party has proposed. I will study these in detail later. I have talked with Mr LAW Chi-kwong over the telephone on this issue. The Democratic Party is proposing to levy tax on products which are not environmentally friendly. That proposal will be elaborated by Mr SIN later. But I cannot imagine how this can be done. The glasses, clothes and shoes we wear, for example, may not be produced through environmentally friendly processes, especially shoes. Should they be taxed then? Will this lead to new items of taxes or even a sales tax? This is something we cannot accept.

The third point. We feel that the kind of co-operation with Guangdong is not

comprehensive enough. We think that this is of vital importance. We are living under the same sky, are we not? Talking about air pollution, we cannot say that we will not join forces to tackle it. We cannot just focus our attention on local affairs while ignoring what is going on in the Mainland. We are of course glad to know that both Hong Kong and Guangdong authorities are beginning to conduct some surveys and the Council has approved of the funding proposals. We want to see more than surveys. We want actions. Another thing is that both the people of Hong Kong and Guangdong are drinking from the same Dongjiang river, the water quality of which is our grave concern. Although we have approved provisions for the construction of a closed aqueduct, as I have said many times, this closed aqueduct can only solve the problem around Dongguan, it cannot solve the problem of pollution upstream of Dongjiang, that is, around Weizhou. So when this closed aqueduct is complete, I suspect this will not be very effective.

Madam President, in my amendment I also mention the issue of transparency, that is, regular meetings should be held between the two parties and that the contents of the meetings should be transparent as well. Once we asked the Guangdong authorities for some information on the Dongjiang water, but the information is for our eyes only and the public has no access to it. The public will certainly have suspicions. As far as I know, the Guangdong authorities will conduct tests on the carcinogenic substances in the Dongjiang water next January. I hope that our Government will ask for the findings and release them to the public.

Madam President, owing to the above reasons, we cannot accept one of the proposals made by Mr LAW Chi-kwong. However, we hope Honourable Members can support the rest of the proposals and co-operate as much as possible. In this way an important message can be sent by this Council to the public that we are in support of the environmental protection concept put forward by the Chief Executive and that we will support the environmental protection policies and promote sustainable development. Thank you, Madam President.

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

"To add ", and specifying the targets for environmental improvement to ensure that the various environmental protection policies can materialize" after "economic development plans"; to add "(3) adopting the most cost-effective methods to solve various environmental problems in formulating environmental protection policies; (4) acknowledging the social service functions of environmental protection industries, and encouraging the development of such industries in Hong Kong through financial subsidy and concrete supporting policies, as well as enhancing the competitiveness of environment-friendly products by introducing appropriate tax concessions and purchasing policies;" after "creating a good living environment for the next generation in Hong Kong;"; to delete "(3)" and substitute with "(5)"; to delete "adopting appropriate economic tools and taxation policies" and substitute

with "using economic means such as collecting recovery deposits and landfill charges from the commercial and industrial sectors to make the producers aware of the environmental costs"; to delete "so that the prices"; to add "their" before "commodities"; to delete "can fully reflect their environmental costs and provide resources for the promotion of green efforts" after "services and development plans" and substitute with ", in order to encourage businesses to adopt more environmentally friendly modes of production"; to delete "(4) using economic means such as introducing private participation and competition to expedite the implementation of infrastructural projects for environmental protection; and"; to delete "(5)" and substitute with "(6)"; to delete "apart from strengthening the co-operation with the mainland authorities in promoting environmental protection work,"; to delete "as the first step" after "enforcement departments within the Government"; and to delete "." from "implementing environmental protection policies." and substitute with "; and (7) strengthening the co-operation with the mainland authorities in promoting environmental protection work and enhancing transparency to ensure that problems relating to Dongjiang water, air quality and sewage disposal can be fully solved."."

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

**DR LEONG CHE-HUNG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, the Government has recently outlined a series of targets and measures for the future environmental planning of Hong Kong, using "Clear Water, Blue Sky" as a slogan. However, it is still a big question mark if or when it can be achieved.

Hong Kong's environment is already seriously affecting people's health. According to a recent survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the incidence rate of respiratory diseases among students in Kwun Tong with serious air pollution is three times higher than that in Sha Tin. Medical studies also show that the degree of air pollution is directly proportional to the hospitalization rate. Each year, air pollution causes the premature death of more than 2 000 people. The medical expenses incurred as a result of environmental problems borne by the community are hard to estimate and imagine. However, nowadays, environmental pollution causes more problems other than in health. It also affects town planning, transport development, tourism and even economic development. For this reason, we should support any suggestion and measure to improve the environment. That is why I support the original motion and amendment today.

Madam President, in the final analysis, two big questions must be considered in relation to environmental protection. First, why has Hong Kong's environment deteriorated to such an extent?

Second, what have the Government and we overlooked and what can be done to remedy or improve the situation? In recent years, environmental protection has become the in thing in the community. However, what do people really know about environmental protection? The answer is they know very little, let alone putting it into practice. Many people think that environmental protection just means cleaner streets and less rubbish. Many people also regard the so-called sustainable development as something that only academics and top officials talk about. In recent years, all suggestions to improve the environment by asking the people or polluters to pay a little bit more have met with opposition, such as increasing the penalty for smoky vehicles, levying sewage charge and advocating the use of cleaner fuel by taxis or public light buses. Thus, it is clear that people only talk about environmental protection but fall short of putting it into practice. They focus on the present only, rather than the long-term benefits. They do not give any thought to our future or our next generation, or even the entire earth. No wonder in dealing with the issue of environmental protection, the policy address does not omit emphasizing the employment opportunities and economic benefits that environmental protection would bring in an attempt to silence the short-sighted. Of course, it also has a lot to do with whether the Government has carried out adequate consultation. People have such a mentality because we have always lacked in-depth and extensive public education. The Government can hardly absolve itself of the blame.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) which is specifically tasked with matters in environmental protection has been in existence for 19 years. However, due to the lack of co-ordination among various government departments, this specifically tasked department can hardly fulfil its responsibility. One reason is because of the rigid culture of the Civil Service. More importantly, Hong Kong lacks a set of environmental protection policies and concepts which can be applied to all areas. As a result, the different environmental problems are dealt with in a piecemeal manner, with each department charting its own course, resulting in a so-called "compartmentalization". This word has often been quoted recently due to the Harvard report. There are numerous examples of this. As Mr LAW Chi-kwong said just now, the Transport Department and the EPD have different standards for testing smoky vehicles. We also know that the Water Supplies Department forbids the use of hydrocooling, thus resulting in a further waste of electricity. While second-hand smoke exhaled while smoking cigarettes is the major culprit of indoor air pollution, the Police Force fails to enforce the legislation on no-smoking areas actively. The Labour Department has also so far refused to ban smoking in the workplace and make it a requirement for a healthy working environment. Some departments only try their best to expand the road network to open up more land and seldom take the protection of the natural environment into consideration. Nor do they take into account the dark smoke and noise that vehicles will produce. There are many other examples. For instance, once there was an organization which came up with an idea for environmental protection, such as the use of electric buses. But since the department that it approached was not responsible for environmental protection, the suggestion was put on ice for years. Recently, the Government has been exploring the possibility of using the

concept of sustainable development as a unifying concept for environmental protection. While this is a right course to take, the Council for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Unit to be established must be given real powers. They must take precedence over various departments in order to break down the insular bureaucratic thinking and culture and play a co-ordinating role in implementing the environmental protection policies.

Due to the geographical conditions, many environmental problems in Hong Kong are closely linked with the Pearl River Delta. In recent years, the two regions have jointly conducted some studies and made a declaration on strengthening their co-operation in respect of environmental protection. While these are right steps, the pace seems to be too slow. In the face of pollution which is hardly bearable, both sides should implement the concrete measures for co-operation expeditiously.

Madam President, we could talk for days over this issue of environmental protection. I am sure many Members will speak on this topic during the policy debate next week. However, if we neglect the most fundamental issues of a unified policy and proper co-ordination, all proposals for environmental protection will be made in vain. I hope that we will not have to wait until the next generation to see the clear water and blue sky of Hong Kong again. Thank you, Madam President.

**MR HUI CHEUNG-CHING** (in Cantonese): Madam President, environmental protection is the question for the first motion debate in this Legislative Session as well as a major topic for the Chief Executive's policy address this year. The policy address has accommodated a number of recommendations made by various sectors of the community, including: the making of policies should adhere to the principle of sustainable development; working with the Guangdong provincial government to implement in specific terms such co-operative programmes as improving air quality and the quality of Dongjiang water; and reviewing the cost-effectiveness of the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme. All these illustrate that the Government and the public have reached a consensus on promoting environmental protection, in terms of the direction to be taken and major specific means.

Nevertheless, some people in the community still criticize the environmental protection programmes espoused in this year's policy address, despite being good proposals, for failing to help revive the economy and reduce unemployment for it is impossible for distant water to put out a nearby fire. What they imply is that environmental protection should not be taken as a key issue in the policy address. These criticisms have reflected not only their meagre awareness of environmental protection for they have rashly segregated the immediate needs of the public and their living and natural environments, but also the fact that the later environmental protection is implemented, the greater the economic and social costs will be. Even if environmental protection

is not able to revive our economy directly and dress the wounds of the people, we should not negate the urgent needs for protecting the environment for this reason.

In fact, several major problems plaguing Hong Kong at the moment, such as more and more people are suffering from respiratory diseases and diminishing desires of tourists, overseas entrepreneurs and professionals to visit Hong Kong because of our deteriorating living condition, are related to the worsening of our living environment. The promotion of environmental protection will to a certain extent reduce the public's spending on medical expenses, curb the expansion of the public medical services, enhance Hong Kong's attractiveness in providing leisure activities, as well as attracting capital and talented people to Hong Kong. It should be noted that environmental protection can provide a yardstick for measuring our living quality and the standard of our civic education. It also serves as an inevitable index if Hong Kong is to develop into a world-class city on a par with London and New York.

Environmental protection is basically an issue pertaining to public wealth. More often than not, it involves numerous legislative and public administrative arrangements and easily triggers off contradictions between the public and the business sector. Therefore, it is most ideal for the Government to take the initiative in promoting environmental protection effectively. It is indeed inappropriate for the Government to take belated action only after the business sector has made a joint appeal in pointing out in high profile that the pollution problems have reached an intolerable level, as well as presenting the various merits and demerits.

Being a member of the business sector, I certainly hope that the Government can provide us with investment opportunities through its various environmental protection programmes. For instance, can the Government provide preferential measures to encourage enterprises to explore innovative environmental protection technology? On the other hand, I definitely do not wish to see the imposition of a heavy burden on the business sector in an unreasonable manner for the sake of environmental protection. What is more, I do not want to see the Government's "environmental protection" measures lead to a sheer waste of money and energy, while not necessarily achieving the effects of protecting the environment. Because of the lack of a fair and reasonable charging mechanism, the trade effluent surcharge has long since triggered off discontent among the catering and dyeing industries. I am afraid the Government's plan to levy trade landfill charges will repeat the mistake again. My worry is even if the business sector agrees to the "polluter pays" principle and will be willing to pay, the imposition of landfill charges might still fail to encourage the business sector to reduce waste production.

Landfill charges will likely give rise to a problem of shirking waste disposal responsibilities. Moreover, the Government may need to spend enormous administrative expenses to ensure that the charging system is fair and reasonable. Has the Government considered that the imposition of

mandatory landfill charges might force enterprises to use every means possible to evade charges, rather than encouraging them to face squarely the cost of dumping wastes? Can the Government take more inducive measures, including the recovery deposit system as advocated by the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance in this Council early this year?

Although the business sector is generally aware of the fact that environmental protection will help raise productivity, it is at a loss as to where to go first, very much like "a rat trying to pull a tortoise". The Government should vigorously promote a set of standards for environmental protection management for compliance by the enterprises. The greater the number of Hong Kong enterprises being awarded certificates on quality management the greater degree of standardization of environmental protection management in Hong Kong. This will not only give better protection to local and overseas customers, but also raise the international reputation of Hong Kong enterprises. This will help Hong Kong develop into a cosmopolitan city which can balance environmental protection suitably against economic development.

Madam President, in order to abate environment pollution, we need more than government determination and new technologies. It is also equally important for the Government to put in place a flexible administrative co-ordination mechanism. This is because the entire cause involves a large number of departments, including the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau, the Environmental Protection Department, the Police Force, the Education Department, the Commissioner for Tourism and so on. Each of these departments should be aware of its own responsibilities. Regrettably, the Government has not made specific arrangements in this respect. I hope it can pay attention to it.

Madam President, I so submit.

THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, DR LEONG CHE-HUNG, took the Chair.

**MR CHAN KWOK-KEUNG** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, the question of environmental protection has, like a gust of whirlwind, aroused concern among various sectors of the community. The newly delivered policy address has also focused on environmental protection, illustrating that the Government has started to take environmental issues seriously.

In my opinion, the Government should attach importance to environmental industries, in addition to environmental protection. Moreover, it should adopt a new thinking by giving holistic consideration to policies falling into the scopes of environmental protection and employment. In modern societies, environmental protection and industrial policies are inseparable and there is no

contradiction between them. On the contrary, as a kind of newly-developed industries, environmental protection industries provide low-skilled workers of mundane work types with a lot of job opportunities. According to the findings of a survey conducted by *The Recycler*, there are more than 70 000 recycling manufacturers in the whole United States, employing more than 500 000 people.

The fact that the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) is advocating such industrial policies as developing high technology and Chinese medicine may in the long run produce highly satisfactory results. However, the Government is still unable to solve an imminent problem: With 1.6 million workers of below Secondary Three qualification, what should it do to provide job opportunities for these low-skilled workers with poor academic qualification and lesser competitiveness at the same time when it develops the hi-tech industries? If the Government could lend a helping hand to the environmental protection industries, then it may prove a good way out for this problem.

It is pointed out in the policy address that the Government has provided land to facilitate the operation of the waste collection and recycling industry. This is indeed not enough. Some waste paper recycling manufacturers have, on past occasions, pointed out that although the Government has set aside land in remote parts of the New Territories for their operation, there are no comprehensive transport facilities in the vicinity. Neither is there adequate water and electricity supply. How are they going to expand their business there?

At present, the environmental protection industries in Hong Kong are operating very much like a patch of quick sand. For instance, the waste paper recycling industry has presented its plight and asked for government subsidy in such forms as interest-free or low-interest loans, introducing waste paper recycling programmes similar to those implemented in overseas countries, levying lower electricity charges, exempting payment of public cargo working area charges and so on. However, the Government has been unwilling to subsidize the waste paper recycling industry, citing the reason that it is "inappropriate to intervene in commercial activities". For instance, the waste paper recycling industry was in serious trouble in November last year because of the closure of the Concordia Paper Company in Hong Kong. This incident has exposed the fact that the Government is totally helpless in dealing with environmental protection issues. The attitude held by the Government then was that even if no one was willing to recover the waste paper, the problem could still be solved by disposing of them at landfills. Nevertheless, it means enormous wastage if recyclable waste paper is dumped like refuse.

Environmental protection industries desperately need active support and assistance from the Government. In this respect, the Government should borrow the experiences of overseas countries.

In the United States, the Tennessee state government has set up a solid waste management fund to provide waste recycling projects with direct subsidy for such purposes as purchasing big scales and waste recycling machinery, building waste collection centres and so on, with the amount of subsidy ranging from US\$5,000 to US\$30,000. Furthermore, there are tax concessions and other assistance in terms of skills and resources. As a result, the environmental protection industries there are able to greatly reduce their operating burdens. Moreover, there has been an obvious increase in the amount of waste recovered for the whole city and improvement in depletion of resources.

The Government should model on European and American countries in providing a certain amount of subsidy to the local environmental protection industries which are working silently in spite of various difficulties. To start with, the Government should provide manufacturers with information and technical assistance to help them update and grasp the market and technical information on the recycled materials markets in China and overseas countries. Secondly, it should offer a range of tax concessions to manufacturers engaging in environmental protection industries. Furthermore, the Government should take the lead in using products produced by local environmental protection industries with a view to boosting and consolidating the industries.

Mr Deputy, I so submit.

**DR RAYMOND HO** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, only last Wednesday we received the policy address, which has a green cover and made environmental protection its focus of discussion. Now we are again in this Chamber, discussing motions related to environmental protection. I feel very pleased on the one hand but a bit helpless on the other. I am pleased because many other environmentalists in the community and I have been urging the Government to make more efforts in protecting the environment over the past 10-odd years. Now we finally hear a response. However, I feel a certain degree of helplessness because our environment has suffered serious damage due to our negligence of protecting it. Now we are faced with environmental problems of air pollution, noise pollution, water quality and waste disposal, all at the same time.

In the past, some people in Hong Kong held the view that we had to pay a price for economic development as environmental protection was only a luxury for advanced countries. As Hong Kong was then still in the process of economic development, this argument was convincing to a certain extent. However, if we analyse the argument carefully, we will easily find that it does not hold. Environmental protection is not an innovative or avant-garde theory. On the contrary, it is only a rule meant to be observed by us for survival on earth. In fact, there are similar viewpoints in our traditional philosophy which hold that man is part of nature and this has resulted in an attitude of advocating man to live with nature in a harmonious manner. In the book *Discourse on*

*Nature*, Xunzi states that "Heaven has its seasons; Earth its resources; and Man his government. This, of course, is why it is said that they "can form a triad"". He put man on the same footing as Heaven and Earth, and considered man a force participating in the transformation of the universe. Such participation is aimed at conforming to, assisting and facilitating nature, rather than opposing or conquering it. In other words, man should "assist the transforming and nurturing processes of Heaven and Earth". This is indeed a manifestation of the thinking that we should attach importance to the protection of nature's resources.

It is indeed imperative for us to face environmental protection squarely. In the course of economic development, we should at the same time pay attention to the importance of protecting the environment. The concept of sustainable development, which has been taken seriously in recent years, has gone a step further in stating the interactive relationship between economic development and environmental protection. It focuses mainly on protecting natural resources and the ecological environment, places emphasis on strengthening planning and management of resources to overcome the short-term behaviour of wasting resources for the sake of development, and utilizes and protects resources in a reasonable manner to ensure sustainable growth and utilization of resources. The Government must adhere to this principle in formulating the relevant development policies.

In order to promote environmental protection, the Government should take concrete actions to enhance public awareness of protecting the environment and understanding the importance of the pursuit on the one hand and, changing its past practice of making all decisions on its own in formulating environmental protection policies and instead encouraging the public, district bodies and relevant bodies and organizations to take part in the planning and formulation of environmental protection policies on the other. With public participation in the formulation of the relevant policies, it will definitely be easier for the Government to implement the relevant measures in future.

To put environmental protection into practice, we certainly need to put in place reasonable legislation and measures. The Government did put forward the "polluter pays" and "user pays" principles before. No doubt, these principle are reasonable and have my support too. However, it is not easy to enforce them. Moreover, the administrative costs involved might be quite high. Therefore, the Government should consider them in detail. I think the Government can take a more active approach by encouraging the business sector to adopt production methods which are more effective in protecting the environment.

On the other hand, the Government is obliged to encourage and push the development of the recycling industry. Of course, I am not asking the Government to give direct subsidy to individual recycling companies. But I think it can give the industry more room for development in Hong

Kong by way of different policies and by recreating a better business environment.

If we can promote environmental protection efforts in a comprehensive manner, we will be able to improve our living environment as well as raising our environmental quality, thereby enhancing our competitiveness and attracting more foreign investments to Hong Kong. This will definitely do us good than harm.

Environmental protection is a necessity, not a luxury. Mr Deputy, I so submit.

**MR SIN CHUNG-KAI** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, efforts in promoting environmental protection should not be confined to one Policy Bureau alone. Apart from the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau, other Policy Bureaux should also take part in such efforts. The Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau, for example, also has a certain extent of responsibility to bear. With the increasing popularity of computers and the Internet, the use of information technology to promote environmental protection is also an excellent method. The building of an electronic government, for example, can greatly help reduce the amount of paper used in various departments of the Government. The Federal Government of the United States has a law which provides that government organizations must limit the increase in the amount of paper used. This is a good idea. Now that the public can have access to government information through the Internet, can the Government use electronic mail to send the demand notes for rates to the public, thereby saving costs in paper and postage?

The Government can give thoughts to these ideas which I have just mentioned. As a matter of fact, many countries and places all over the world are implementing schemes of electronic government. Taiwan has a so-called "government reconstruction" plan under which the government computer network and the national information infrastructure are used to provide diversified services to the public. In this connection, our Government should not just think in the direction of going electronic, it should also think more in the direction of environmental protection. There should be more efforts in making the policy wholesome in all dimensions.

Apart from electronic government, I wish to talk about taxation policies in this connection.

As Mr LAW Chi-kwong has said, the proposal put forward by the Democratic Party embraces both reward and punishment.

Let me talk about rewards first, for they sound more attractive. Later on I will talk about punishment.

In terms of reward, what we have proposed do have some similarities with those proposed by other Honourable Members. The tax concessions which the Honourable LAU Kong-wah has mentioned are also found in our paper.

The tax concessions proposed by the Democratic Party include the following: to facilitate a speedy conversion into LPG, the vehicles first registration tax for taxis should be waived; to exempt owners of light vehicles of eight years of age or above and heavy vehicles of 14 years of age or above from first registration tax when they replace their fleet in order to encourage them to use new vehicles and to reduce exhaust emission; and the granting of a 100% instant write-off of highly efficient energy-saving equipment. The last measure is already practised in Singapore and is meant to encourage businesses to use environmentally friendly equipment. Currently the Government is giving a 100% instant write-off of hi-tech products such as computers purchased by companies because it aims at promoting a wider use of hi-tech equipment. Can the same measure be applied to the purchase of environmentally friendly products as a means to encourage the greater use of such products? Some kind of energy saving plans should be devised at the same time to encourage all public organizations and private sector companies to formulate energy saving measures to reduce power consumption. Lastly, the Democratic Party suggests that tax measures should be used to encourage manufacturers or retailers to recover materials which are of recycling value. All these are suggestions which come under the category of awards.

Some countries require commodities or products to be affixed a green label to let the public know that these are environmentally friendly products and encourage them to buy such products.

Insofar as environmental destruction is concerned, products can be divided into three categories: those which cause harm to the environment; those which are neutral; and those which are harmless. Products of the last category should be affixed green labels. Our intention is not to levy more taxes. What we are doing is to discourage the use of products which cause harm to the environment, and such products include compressed gases which can cause serious damage to the ozone layer and hence pose serious threats to the environment. For these products and those with environmentally friendly substitutes, tax should be levied.

The Democratic Party has the courage to bear the blame for proposing taxes. I hope the Financial Secretary can hear this outside the Chamber.

We think that this measure is not meant to increase public revenue. It is mainly aimed at narrowing the gap in competitiveness between environmentally friendly and harmful products, or those between environmentally harmful products and environmentally neutral products.

Just now I have cited a few examples. In some countries such as Belgium, if they find some

more environmentally friendly substitutes available in the market, they would levy tax on the non-environmentally friendly products. This is meant to make the manufacturers to be more concerned about the environment and also to encourage consumers to use products which are more environmentally friendly. I wish to emphasize that this is a kind of guided taxation. Belgium imposes very heavy taxes on batteries which severely damage the environment, disposable cameras and non-recyclable paper. Some Scandinavian countries levy tax on disposable drink containers. Italy levies tax on non-self-decomposing plastic bags at a rate of five times the cost of production. Germany imposes tax on disposable paper plates. Not all of these tax measures may be applied to Hong Kong. But what we can do is to start with a promotion of the general concept and to affix a green label to certain products as a specific measure. We may ignore those products which are harmless to the environment. For those which are harmful to the environment, environmental protection tax should be imposed.

The third part we wish to discuss is on the question of private sector participation. We wish to emphasize that the Government should encourage more private sector participation. Facilities such as pedestrian walkways should be built. Walking is an important means of transport. It can be used to replace many other means of transport. The Government should take proactive actions to encourage that. To speed up the progress of the LPG taxis scheme, the Democratic Party proposes that consideration should be given to build temporary LPG refilling stations in appropriate locations when necessary. The operation of such stations can be contracted out to private sector operators.

The recovery of waste materials should be speeded up too. Terms on recycling work should be added into contracts on the contracting out of sites for use as waste paper recycling factories. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong .....

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr SIN, your time is up. Please sit down.

**MR CHAN KAM-LAM** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, environmental protection efforts in Hong Kong have always been criticized for being compartmentalized. After the setting up of the Environmental Protection Department and the enactment of some legislation on environmental protection, various sectors in Hong Kong begin to grumble and suffer. Although the industrial and commercial sectors have paid their costs for environmental protection, the living environment of the people has not changed for the better. The industries and businesses which have paid the expenses in environmental protection fail to get any improvement in their business environment. We have had opportunities of meeting with some of the businessmen who relocated their factories into the Mainland in years past. They said that the Environmental Protection Department at that time

made a lot of requirements on them, without helping them solve their problems. They were unable to continue with their production and they had no choice but to leave the territory. It just stretches our imagination to see how environmental protection policies have driven away our industries. The root of the problem is that we do not have a set of environmental protection policies which is favourable to both the public and the businesses.

Let us just take a look at the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme which has developed into such a mess. Projects are delayed time and again, and there are possibilities that they will stop at any moment. Today we read from the newspapers that there are repeated rumours lately that the sewage disposal scheme may be dismembered. We have spent such a huge amount of money on the scheme, but none of the desired results can be seen yet. Today the Chief Secretary for Administration briefed us on the scheme. She said that those Honourable Members who were familiar with the technical matters of the first phase of the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme would realize the technical difficulties involved in building the tunnels. Then she went on to say that she was happy to inform Members that good progress was being made with the rest of the tunnelling works. I would like to ask, unless all the newspapers today are fabricating their stories, how are we to understand by this claim of making good progress?

Many countries when implementing environmental protection plans will certainly provide some cost-effective options of waste recovery or purification facilities for the relevant industries. The environmental protection industries will at the same time be given enormous assistance so that the pollution problem can be mitigated gradually.

Mr Deputy, I believe we can still remember the case of the closure of the Concordia Paper Company at the beginning of this year. The event triggered off a domino effect kind of closure of many waste paper recycling factories. Indeed, the trouble has been brewing for quite some time. The long-standing indifference on the part of the Government to the industry's value of existence is the cause of the industry's demise. The waste disposal strategy of the Government makes use of the landfills as the final stage of disposing waste. On the promotion of recycling and recovery, the Government's efforts are mostly empty words devoid of concrete action. They smack of publicity more than anything. Although the territory's industrial waste recovery rate is over 50%, it is entirely due to the waste recovery network built up by the private sector on its own initiative. On the other hand, the recovery rate for domestic waste is less than 10%. Such a disappointing situation is the result of the Government's waste disposal strategy which has made the public reluctant in recycling waste. This results in an increase in the cost of collecting waste for recycling and putting the recycling industry into a very difficult situation.

The long-standing indifference on the part of the Government to the social contribution of the recycling industry and the absence of any support given to the industry have invoked pressure from

various sectors in society in recent months. The Government has agreed at last to set aside a piece of land in Kai Tak to the industry as a midway centre. The piece of land is leased at a preferential rate. However, as there is insufficient power supply, and with the absence of government assistance, the industry finds the land quite useless. It makes people wonder whether the Government is really keen on helping the industry, or is it really just doing things half-heartedly to silence opposition.

Mr Deputy, the waste disposal policy of the Government has also scared away many investors who are interested in investing in the local recycling industry. Take the example of used machine lubricants, what the Government is doing now is to give subsidies to the industries in sending the used machine lubricants so collected to the chemical waste treatment centre in Tsing Yi for incineration. In 1997, the cost of incinerating used machine lubricants was \$34 million and the cost for 1998 was \$48 million. On the other hand, the waste treatment centre is able to collect used machine lubricants from garages and dockyards at very low costs in return for a great amount of subsidies from the Government. In the past, there were some local and foreign investors who were interested in investing in the conversion of used machine lubricants into industrial diesel oil. However, having learned of the existing waste disposal policy, they all retreated. The reason is that the waste treatment centre is subsidized by the Government and these investors cannot get enough used machine lubricants through fair competition channels for production purposes.

This is only one of the many examples we have. The biggest worry of the DAB is that when the large scale incinerator under planning is commissioned, the Government will continue to subsidize the incinerator operator. This will lead to a competition for wastes between the incinerator operator and those in the recycling business. The result will only be a further contraction of the recycling industry against a government-supported operator getting a great amount of recyclable resources for incineration.

Mr Deputy, we are not opposed to the use of government subsidies to dispose of waste materials. However, it should be done according to the principle of cost-effectiveness. The DAB thinks that the policy on waste disposal should be based on cost-effectiveness, and that taxation, land and even loans should be used to subsidize the recycling industry.

Apart from subsidizing the recycling industry, it is also very important to promote recycled products in order to ensure the industry's survival. Organizations in Hong Kong, including the Government in particular, have been pursuing the procurement policy of making purchases from the lowest price offered. Recycled products lose their competitiveness because of their higher cost of production. The DAB proposes an 150% tax write-off to encourage more purchase of environmentally friendly equipment and products. These will serve to help the recycling industry.

In addition, the Government should take the lead in using environmentally friendly products

and serve as a model in this respect.

We hope that Hong Kong can make good progress in the direction of environmental protection as proposed in the Chief Executive's policy address, so that we can have a better home in future.

Thank you, Mr Deputy.

**PROF NG CHING-FAI** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, Mr LAW Chi-kwong's motion and Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment today are both about sustainable development and environmental protection.

On 14 October last year, when I moved a motion debate on "sustainable development for Hong Kong", I only said that this topic should merit extensive discussions by the whole community. However, in his policy address this year, the Chief Executive has highlighted this topic; I am sure that this will certainly arouse community-wide concern and discussions. I also think that in the Motion of Thanks debate to be held next week, many Members will speak on this topic, too. So, in a way, the motion debate today can serve as a warm-up exercise.

I remember that when I spoke during the motion debate on "sustainable development" last year, I stressed that "sustainable development is a brand new development concept that has been gradually formed after years of exploration and study by the international community." I also requested the Government not to interpret sustainable development merely in terms of environmental protection, though I also said that the latter was certainly the most important part of the former. So, in my motion last year, I requested this Council to urge the Government to uphold "sustainable development" as its development strategy and fundamental policy objective when formulating public policies and development projects in the future, in the 21st century. My motion last year was able to receive the unanimous support of Members of this Council, and I thus felt very much honoured and encouraged. However, as our debate went on, I was so disappointed to notice that no government official was present, except the then Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen LEUNG, who looked so lonely and miserable in the seats for government officials. So, while I did sympathize with him, I could not help feeling, with much regret, that the high-ranking officials of the SAR were all lagging behind the times, as they were still looking at sustainable development as a general environmental issue. My viewpoint is well justified; the ways in which the Hong Kong Government handled the issues of strategic sewage disposal and harbour reclamation around the reunification all make us wonder whether the policy-makers concerned had any understanding of sustainable development.

Mr Deputy, with the above recapitulation, we can now look at the "study" on sustainable

development which the Chief Executive undertook to conduct in his second policy address, and we can then try to find out what results have been achieved over the past one year. I am pleased to see that after one year of study, some definite progress has been made. In the third policy address of the Chief Executive, sustainable development is stated as a new "development concept", and the Government also undertakes to require all bureaux to uphold the principle of sustainable development and conduct "sustainability impact assessments" when formulating any major new policy proposals in the future. Besides, the policy address also proposes the establishment of a Sustainable Development Unit. I think all this can show that the Government has indeed made some improvement in its philosophy of governance. I know that many environmental protection organizations are satisfied with the progress made in the policy address this year. However, they still doubt whether or not the proposed institutional framework can really enable the Government to put its new thinking into practice. Specifically, they have raised two points of concern. First, they query, while it is correct to require the Council for Sustainable Development to report to the Chief Executive, will the Sustainable Development Unit have sufficient powers to play a monitoring role? Second, these organizations hope that the Government can select suitable candidates to sit on the Council for Sustainable Development, with particular emphasis on extensive representativeness.

Mr Deputy, the first things to be done are the formulation of strategic principles for environmental protection and economic development as well as the establishment of the institutional framework required for the enforcement of these principles. After these things have been done, and with the principles thus formulated, we should then turn to deal with those specific issues which are equally important, including the prevention and control of pollution, control of consumption desire, "green" production of goods, clean energy, sustainable development of technologies, environmental protection industries, environmental protection in international trade, international co-operation in respect of environmental protection, environmental education and publicity and so on. We must encourage members of the public to take part, so as to raise their environmental awareness. Without their participation, we will not be able to solve all these problems. Mr Deputy, sustainable development is a long and difficult task of worldwide concern. I hope that this Council can pay more attention to it in the future.

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

**MR WONG YUNG-KAN** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, "you can save the environment". As the representative of the Agriculture and Fisheries Functional Constituency in this Council, I am duty-bound to show concern for the impact of marine pollution on the fisheries industry. In recent years the marine environment near the shore has been severely damaged due to large scale dredging for marine fill and dumping of mud carried out by the Government in Hong Kong waters. In addition

to deterioration in water quality, the seabed which is the habitat for marine species and a resource of the fisheries industry has also been damaged.

The Government has been carrying out reclamation works along the shore in decades close. Since the '60s, 3 600 hectares of land have been reclaimed in the Victoria Harbour. The natural washing ability of the Harbour has been diminished greatly. Added to the problem is the injection of large amounts of pollutants into the Harbour, making it heavily polluted. Other than the Victoria Harbour, the Government has planned or is carrying out reclamation or dumping projects elsewhere. For example, the dumping works at Pak Shek Kok in 1996 destroyed in one stroke the otherwise improved water quality at Tolo Harbour thanks to strenuous efforts made since the '90s. Fish farmers in the vicinity suffered great losses because marine life dwindled quickly, and many species of fish there vanished.

In Hong Kong, most reclamation works is conducted by "dredge and fill", in which sand is dug up from the seabed and used as fill material. This is extremely destructive to the seabed that forms the habitat of benthic biota. Polluted mud is dug up and dumped to other marine areas, thereby damaging the habitat and causing irreversible ecological destruction. The damaged seabed can only be expected to recover in 15 to 20 years. Heavy metals and pollutants released from the mud gravely affect the culture system and fish culture zones in Hong Kong. So, the production from marine capture is greatly reduced and the livelihood of our fishermen is greatly affected. Marine products are polluted in detriment to public health.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the damage done to the sea by dumping activities of the Government. The current government policy is putting the mud back into the crater where it comes from so that the part of the seabed which can otherwise recover is destroyed again. Mud contains a lot of bacteria, heavy metals and even toxic materials. It poses an enormous potential pollution hazard, causing irreparable damage to marine life. However, what the Government often does is to put it back into the crater on the seabed. Despite its low cost, the method is a most serious threat to the marine ecology as harmful materials in the mud may filter through. Last year, some 13 million sq m of mud was dumped at the crater to the east of Sha Chau, seriously threatening the ecology nearby.

Mr Deputy, the sea is the economic lifeline of the fishermen. If it was not well protected, the development of the fisheries industry will be hindered. The DAB urges the Government to formulate long-term policies for the protection of the ocean in its planning for development. Thus

the ocean environment can be improved and the livelihood of the fishermen preserved. Furthermore, the people of Hong Kong can thus enjoy clean seafood free from pollution.

Moreover, in order to increase fish production the Government has invested enormously in artificial reefs projects. Had the Government been aware of the immense destructive effect of reclamation works on the marine environment, the remedial actions could have been saved. "It is not too late to mend the fold even after some of the sheep has been lost." The DAB hopes the Government can limit reclamation, dredging and dumping activities to restore the seabed to its old state. On the other hand, we also urge the Government to demarcate areas where fishing is prohibited to protect the marine ecology. We especially need such areas in Sai Kung and Tolo Harbour at Tai Po. The Government can put fish fry there and develop marine sightseeing so that fishermen can culture fish instead of having to rely on catching for living. Thus, capturing is reduced and fishery resources can be recovered and preserved.

Mr Deputy, I would finally like to talk about the water quality at Deep Bay, which is situated at the border of Hong Kong and China. Pollutants come from both sides. But why did the relevant government department target at local livestock farmers for the poor water quality? Since the implementation of the Waste Disposal (Livestock Waste) Regulations by the Government in 1998, the farmers have been observing the guidelines laid down by the Government on livestock waste disposal, but why does the Government still consider them culprits for pollution? More than a decade into operation, the Regulations have made the number of livestock farmers diminish from 9 000 or 10 000 during its heyday to under 1 000 now. Is the Government trying to eliminate the farmers?

We must understand that pollution at Deep Bay originates from both Hong Kong and China. Even if all livestock farmers have vanished, the water there is still polluted without co-operation from the Mainland. I hope the relevant department can take active steps to hold talks with its mainland counterparts for a solution. I also hope that there can be enhanced communication with livestock farmers to help them solve the problem of sewage disposal. Thus the water quality at Deep Bay can improve at an early date without strangling the survival of livestock farmers.

Thank you, Mr Deputy.

**MR HOWARD YOUNG** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, for environmental protection work in Hong Kong to be successful, the Government must have the future in mind, set long-term and specific objectives, formulate omnidirectional policies and practically and realistically implement environmental protection while the public must make concerted efforts to reduce wastage and

protect our environment. In the past, the Government did not set long-term environmental protection objectives and most of the environmental protection policies it made were corrective rather than preventive. It sought solutions in a hurry when pollution problems became serious, but such "piecemeal" efforts can hardly improve our environment effectively.

The Liberal Party is of the view that to better protect our environment and improve the quality of life, the Government must formulate long-term environmental protection policies and set down a schedule of progress for environmental protection work, to promote environmental protection practically and realistically and improve the living environment of the public. The Liberal Party thinks that environmental protection policies should at least include five aspects:

First, the Government should formulate a "sustainable development" blueprint applicable to Hong Kong and make the concept of "sustainable development" the major factor for consideration in respect of social development. At present, many countries have implemented the concept of "sustainable development". China and Britain have respectively made national strategies, policies and specific measures for "sustainable development". As an international city, Hong Kong must immediately draw up a suitable "sustainable development" blueprint and implement the concept of "sustainable development". Moreover, the Chief Executive has indicated in his third policy address that when the Policy Bureaux make new important policy proposals in future, they must evaluate their impact on sustainable development. No doubt, the Government has made a big step forward. However, it will be more positive and straightforward for the Government to prescribe "sustainable development" as one of the important elements of social development and introduce the concept of "sustainable development" into the course of policy formulation rather than making "sustainable development" assessments after policies have been formulated.

Second, in the light of the actual situation, the Government should also set indices for defining environmental quality. Besides the existing air quality index, the Government can introduce standards of measurement for various environmental elements to let the public know the environmental quality. For example, it can set an index for reflecting the oxygen concentration in marine waters of the Victoria Harbour to accurately measure sea pollution. Moreover, it can also introduce various "environmental protection labels" on an extensive scale. Apart from "energy efficiency labels", the Government can also introduce other "environmental protection labels" such as "recyclable labels" and "recyclable material labels" and so on to let the public know more clearly about the extent to which products are environmentally friendly. "Environmental protection labels" can also encourage manufacturers to produce more environmentally friendly products.

Third, to enhance public awareness of environmental protection, the Government should implement environmental education and formulate omnidirectional environmental education policies. Recently, the tourism sector has conducted a survey on environmental protection, and

most of those in the sector think that, among the many measures for improving our environment, implementing environmental education on an extensive scale is extremely important. The Liberal Party thinks that the Government should make "environmental education" the thrust of school education and consider making comprehensive plans:

- (1) in the context of school education, working out an environmental education curriculum and incorporate the curriculum into the education framework to allow students to learn about environmental protection in a more systematic manner;
- (2) providing schools with additional environmental protection facilities to allow students to put environmental protection into practice; and
- (3) encouraging schools to set environmental protection indices, reduce paper use and waste and set specific objectives and progress of energy conservation for compliance by students and teachers.

Apart from promoting environmental protection in schools, the Government can establish an environmental protection exhibition hall to host regular exhibitions of sophisticated technologies for environmentally friendly construction, waste recycling and sewage disposal so that the public will know more about environmental protection technologies.

Fourth, the Government should also introduce environmental protection technologies into Hong Kong to upgrade our environmental protection technologies. As environmental protection technologies are developing by leaps and bounds, the Government should keep updating and upgrading existing technologies to keep abreast of the times and reinforce environmental protection. The Government should also keep abreast of the development trend of new environmental protection technologies and apply such technologies. For example, Los Angeles in the United States has recently succeeded in developing hybrid engines for vehicles to reduce vehicle exhaust emissions. The Government can introduce such hybrid vehicles into Hong Kong and study the feasibility of promoting them extensively.

Fifth, the Government must also enhance the co-ordination between departments as every dimension of environmental protection involves many different government departments and complicated bureaucratic procedures. The lack of co-ordination and communication between departments often becomes an obstacle for environmental protection policies. To clear away such obstacles, the Government must register a determination to promote environmental protection and set down a progress schedule. It should also make all Policy Bureaux and executive departments understand the Government's environmental protection policies and determination.

The policy address has proposed to set up a Council for Sustainable Development, but it has made up no mention of its composition. The Liberal Party thinks that the Council must comprise those in the business sector who have an overall idea of the concept of environmental protection.

The Liberal Party believes that long-term environmental protection policies can really mitigate pollution and enhance the people's quality of life. So in addition to consolidating the relevant environmental protection measures, the Government should formulate longer-term environmental protection policies in accordance with the concept of sustainable development, for this is the most elaborate and far-sighted approach.

Mr Deputy, I so submit.

**MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, I think no one will raise objection to discussions on environmental protection for our surrounding environment has been seriously damaged, directly affecting the lives and health of each and every citizen. Therefore, everyone will readily support actions to protect the environment.

But regrettably, while environmental protection is the theme of the Chief Executive's policy address issued last week, public response is not particularly enthusiastic. The community has shown lukewarm support for the Government's initiatives and many people have even expressed disappointment with them. Perhaps the reason is that in discussing the environmental problem, the Chief Executive and the Government are just repeating the words of others like parrots, echoing others' views on environmental protection without being genuinely committed to protecting the environment. As a result, the Government's policies or objectives are not considered beneficial or readily acceptable to the public.

The Government has focused on the concept of "sustainable development" in discussing the environmental issue. Regrettably, its concept of "sustainable development" is far different from the general perception of "sustainable development" in the environmental context. By "sustainable development", the Government broadly understands it simply as appealing to the public to reduce waste, to have regard for the well-being of our future generations and not to do harm to the environment of our neighbouring regions. But "sustainable development" is indeed not a concept as simple as that. In particular, the green ideology that prevails in Europe advocates not only the protection of the environment, but the fusion of environmental protection with human beings.

That the proposals on environmental protection in this policy address have been considered a gross fiasco and so unacceptable is due to the Government's failure to tie the environmental issue in with the lives of the people. This also explains why the proposals meet with so much public resentment and little support.

Moreover, the Government's policy in environmental protection features quite a number of contradictions. For example, while the Government is committed to tackling the problem of vehicle emissions, it endorses large scale infrastructure developments by expending over \$200 billion to construct roads. This will in turn directly encourage the public to use their cars and create yet another kind of pollution. Furthermore, the Government has plans to construct incinerators at a cost of \$20 billion. But before putting in place those incinerators, has the Government ever considered separating refuse by type for the purpose of collection? We all know that the incineration of refuse will produce excessive toxic gases that pollute the environment. What measures will the Government take to mitigate this?

Just now many Honourable colleagues spoke of the "Concordia" incident, taking the Government to task for not supporting the waste collection industry and sitting idly when the industry was on the verge of perishing. From this, we can see that while the Government appears on the surface to have done a good job over its environmental protection policy, it has failed to meet the demands of the public judging by the actual effects of its policies. More importantly, while the public is most concerned about unemployment, it is regrettable that the Government has failed to tie environmental protection in with unemployment. Environmental protection is not entirely unrelated to unemployment. As many colleagues said earlier, in discussing the protection of environment we may give more consideration to such issues as waste collection and recycling, with a view to creating a great many employment opportunities and hence bringing a piece of good news to the public. Nevertheless, the Government has not considered the matter from this angle, that is from the overall development of society, but focused only on restricting the use of fuels and so on.

Therefore, I think the so-called "sustainable development" principle upheld by the Government only smacks of sheer distortion and misrepresentation, and also a concoction of pretext on the part of the Government, hoping to silence public grievances by using such a neutral topic as its major policy objectives. However, it finally turns out that alongside with the absence of public grievances, there is also the absence of public support. In this connection, we should make reference to the Western concept of environmental protection in our discussion today. As I said just now, the Western concept underscores not just the protection of the environment. It also advocates that environmental protection should be considered together with the lives of the people. Apart from creating employment opportunities, it gives weight to the participation of people as well as democratization of the institutions,

and it also means decentralizing and devolving powers to the masses. These countries will take all aspects into account, instead of considering only one side of the issue. Therefore, in its appeal for environmental protection, the Government is only trying to deceive the people by sweet talk, saying that it has made great effort in this area of work but in reality, it has not brought any substantive benefits to the community as a whole.

Today serves as a good opportunity for me to tell Members that in discussing environmental protection, we must think long and hard about what environmental protection really connotes. Environmental protection means more than a reduction of vehicle emissions. Instead, it requires us to make in-depth consideration, to identify ways to facilitate participation by every member of the community in the environmental protection cause and to strive at same time for better safeguards for our lives. This is the true meaning of environmental protection.

Notwithstanding Members' input in this motion today, I very much hope that we can consider this issue thoroughly in our discussion. Do not think that the problem will be solved simply by educating the public on environmental protection. If the Government does not have a long-term objective for the promotion of sustainable development, and if it fails to fuse environmental or green concepts with the lives of the people, our discussion today will be grossly lopsided without actually achieving any effect at all.

Mr Deputy, I so submit.

**MISS CHOY SO-YUK** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, we can say that this is the "environmental protection year" of the SAR Government. The Chief Executive has made environmental protection the theme of his third policy address and the first motion debate of the Legislative Council in this Session is also on environmental protection. Many Honourable colleagues and I have been advocating to make environmental protection an important policy scope. Now, the Government has finally followed good advice and understood that "without sound environmental protection, Hong Kong will not have a bright future". This is heartening and worthy of our support.

Two other Honourable colleagues from the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance have expressed their views on air pollution, environmental protection and economic issues and I will focus on waste control, environmental education and co-ordination among government departments.

In respect of waste control, I always think that incentives work better than punitive charges. Collecting "recovery deposits" from the commercial sector is one of the feasible methods. In our debate on the "review of waste control policies" motion proposed by me in January this year, I proposed the collection of recovery deposits for the first time in this Council. Let me elaborate on the mechanism concerned. The Government will return the collected deposits to a producer or an agent who recovers useful waste it produced without sending it to the landfills; otherwise, the collected deposits will be allocated to the recycling fund. This will actively encourage producers to try their best to reduce waste and increase recovery in the course of production, from product design to packaging.

I do not support collecting landfill charges from the general public but I suggest collecting reasonable deposits from the commercial sector for a very simple reason. It is because while the "polluter pays" principle appears to be reasonable on the surface, it is actually extremely controversial. Let me give a simple example. When I buy a soft drink to quench my thirst, there will inevitably be one more empty bottle for the Government's treatment. If the Government charges me for that, it appears that the "polluter pays" principle works but it is actually penalizing me for having a soft drink to quench my thirst. However, I cannot help being thirsty. Is it fair to penalize me for that? On the contrary, we can better achieve the aim of environmental protection by charging soft drink manufacturers deposits to encourage them to recover such waste instead of dumping them in the landfills, or by giving them incentives to encourage them to manufacture soft drink bottles with decomposable materials.

The recovery industry is definitely very important in treating solid waste but it is equally essential to build large incinerators to treat waste that cannot be recycled in order to lengthen the life-span of landfills. All along, I have fully supported the Government in building incinerators but I hope the Government will note that adopting incinerators with the best economic results under the relevant plan will have enormous impact on the economic burdens to be borne by the public in future. Thus, before commencing the construction of these incinerators, the Government must be extremely careful and take into account the factors such as how incinerators will be built, the resources to be used, the types and sizes of incinerators and the choice of suppliers. Definitely, it cannot follow the same old disastrous road of the Economic Services Bureau that wrongly assessed the power requirements in the China Light & Power Company Limited fiasco and make the public suffer great economic losses again.

As regards environmental education, I feel that merely instilling environmental protection knowledge through formal education will achieve limited effects. I suggest that the Government should establish an "environmental education center" to instill into primary and secondary students environmental protection concepts through "live experience and participation". The education centre can allow all primary and secondary school students to live in the centre for a few days by

batches. Daily life in the centre is closely linked with environmental protection, including the use of recycled products and solar power generation, waste separation, and self-sufficiency in terms of food, to be coupled with suitable evaluation. For instance, how much energy students have saved during their time in the centre, and how many trees they have saved for the next generation and so on. I believe students will have a more positive perspective on environmental protection and a deeper impression of environmental protection which will enhance their awareness of environmental protection in their daily life.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the co-ordination among various government departments in respect of environmental protection. Although it is encouraging that the Chief Executive has made environmental protection the theme of his policy address, some officials still harbour conservative ideas and old time practices. Thus it is worrying if this will affect the promotion of environmental protection. As we all know, environmental protection encompasses an extensive scope and it almost involves all public sector organizations. However, facts show that many government officials have a weak sense of environmental protection, holding onto their old practices. Even though the Chief Executive says that he supports environmental protection, if the officials of the Environmental Protection Department declines to put it into practice or other government departments stick to their own ways, environmental protection policies will ultimately be of no avail. Some have remarked that if we want to promote environmental protection in Hong Kong, government officials will need "brain transplants". In my view, this suggestion does not apply to all officials but many officials certainly have such needs. I hope the Government will understand that it can take forward environmental protection smoothly only if it can change the long-standing practices and ideas of officials and make them become fully aware of their responsibilities.

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

**MR CHAN WING-CHAN** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, what is the meaning of environmental protection? There is a television advertisement which says that environmental protection is a lifestyle of simplicity. It includes things such as the use of furniture and utensils which may be outdated. These should never be discarded wantonly but to be used over a long period of time, for natural resources should not be wasted and so on.

I should like to talk about the issue of air quality. Mr Deputy, the quality of air in Hong Kong has deteriorated seriously over the past 10 years. This has affected not only the health of the public, but also our economic development. We must work in many areas in order to improve the overall air quality in Hong Kong. These include efforts directed against exhaust emissions, fuel quality, maintenance techniques, overall planning, traffic control, enactment and enforcement of legislation, technology and education in environmental protection and so on. I will speak on the

amelioration of the air pollution problem through the three areas of exhaust emissions, fuels and China-Hong Kong co-operation.

As Honourable Members have pointed out, the greatest cause of air pollution is diesel vehicles. The Hong Kong Government is determined to mitigate the exhaust emitted from diesel vehicles. A target has been set to make all newly registered taxis use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from the end of 2000, and all diesel taxis must use LPG by the end of 2005. There is still much work for the Government to make these a success.

First, the Government should provide some economic incentives to urge taxi owners to switch to LPG. The industry is of the view that the Government should provide interest-free loans to taxi owners to convert their diesel taxis into LPG taxis. According to the policy address, the Government will provide a subsidy of \$40,000 to taxi owners to convert their taxis into LPG taxis. However, the market for LPG taxis is presently dominated by the large motor car companies. Even if people in the industry wish to use LPG taxis, there is no more supply of LPG taxis in the market. They are worried that the \$40,000 per taxi cash assistance will only benefit the car dealers. For these dealers will willfully raise the price of LPG taxis so that taxi owners cannot actually be benefited. The Government should look into these problems and try to find some solutions to them.

Secondly, the Government should implement a comprehensive set of matching measures. The four temporary refilling stations have already proved inadequate during the trial period of the LPG taxis scheme. Recently, the Government has announced that five lots have been selected to build some mega LPG refilling stations which are expected to be completed on 1 January 2001. These stations will serve to refill as many as more than 2 600 taxis each day during the peak hours when taxi drivers start and end their shifts. The industry is of the view that these mega refilling stations are too concentrated and traffic congestion may be created during the peak hours. There may also be problems of determining the order of taxis refilling LPG. Therefore, I consider that these LPG refilling stations should be as much dispersed as possible.

Besides, the industry is also concerned about the location and number of maintenance and repair workshops for LPG taxis. They think that these workshops are located in areas which are too remote and near the rural areas, and question whether there are such facilities in the urban areas and how many there are. An inadequate number of maintenance and repair workshops and garages for LPG taxis will definitely affect the intention and speed of owners in converting their taxis into LPG taxis. It will present difficulties to the owners and drivers as well. Only when the Government has solved these problems can the promotion of LPG taxis, and LPG minibuses which

is being considered, be taken forward smoothly and extensively.

In the long run, the Government must formulate a policy on alternate fuels. I think that in addition to considering the "no-rail tram system" proposed by Mr Gordon SIU, the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands and the feasibility of adopting other electricity-driven vehicles, we must also study the introduction of other environmentally friendly fuels. In certain places in Europe, vegetable oil is being actively developed as a vehicle fuel. The Government should study into the possibility of using it in Hong Kong and whether or not the power generated by such fuel is sufficient to drive vehicles. Preferential treatment should be offered to make environmentally friendly fuels more competitive. In addition, government vehicles should take the lead in using more environmentally friendly fuels.

Mr Deputy, since air pollution knows no geographical boundaries, co-operation should be strengthened between Guangdong and Hong Kong with a view to formulating mitigation plans and policies. Currently, the two places are undertaking a study on the air quality in the Pearl River Delta, and the study is expected to complete by the end of next year. It is hoped that both parties can formulate a strategy and some proposals as soon as possible to solve the air quality problem so that we can truly have blue sky and clean air.

Mr Deputy, I so submit.

**MR MARTIN LEE** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, environmental protection is one of the subjects in this year's policy address of the Chief Executive. According to the Chief Executive, his objective is to make Hong Kong an ideal home and we should join hands to achieve what is known as "sustainable development". In this connection, the Democratic Party is glad to see that the Government has finally given up being an ostrich, and that it is willing to face the environmental issues of Hong Kong squarely. However, knowing where the problems lie is one thing, it does not necessarily follow that the right measures could be applied to resolve the problems.

In order to put into practice the concept of "sustainable development", the Chief Executive intends to set up a Council for Sustainable Development. Earlier on, the Waste Reduction Committee was established to help reduce waste production. These measures are indeed very much in line with the "condescending" attitude of governance to which the Chief Executive has always adhered. If this attitude should continue, the environmental protection efforts would very easily be reduced to nothing but "environmental slogans" or "environmental public relations" with only a beautiful facade supported not by any practical long-term measures.

In my opinion, what the Chief Executive needs to do is to abandon his practice of giving

"condescending" and paternalistic orders to get things done. Instead, he should make his best effort to encourage and mobilize the people to take an active part in the actions to improve the environment of Hong Kong. I believe both the Chief Executive and the government officials should adopt a modest attitude and listen conscientiously to the views of the environmental protection organizations as well as that of the people of Hong Kong. This is because their understanding of the environmental protection issues would most probably be much better than that of the Chief Executive or certain government officials.

The Democratic Party holds that one of the essential elements of "sustainable development" to inspire and give full play to the power of the people, in particular that of the affected sectors of the community. Given that their lives are directly affected by the government policies, they should have the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of the relevant policies.

Last Wednesday, the series of environmental protection policies published by the Chief Executive in his policy address have aroused much dissatisfaction from among the transport sector. This has served to reflect the lack of good communication with the sector on the part of the Government in formulating the relevant policies. As the sector is doubtful about the sincerity of the Government, naturally the confidence of its members in the Government will be undermined, and in turn impact on the progress of the environmental protection efforts.

The Democratic Party believes that the participation of the people is of the utmost importance. It is only after communicating and exchanging views with the local residents, the sectors concerned, the green groups, as well as the various political parties could the Government formulate policies that are more in line with the needs of the people, and implement them in a more effective manner.

Speaking of green groups, I hope that the Government will not deprive them of their living space. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of merits in promoting environmental conservation through non-government environmental organizations:

- (a) Environmental organizations are voluntary bodies, their enthusiasm in environmental protection is therefore beyond any doubt;
- (b) Being focused only on the environmental protection aspect, these organizations are able to master better the relevant information and materials;
- (c) With operating costs that are often lower than that of the Government, these organizations are able to get things done in a more cost-effective manner.

Regrettably, the role played by the Government has been so confusing that it has served to restrict gravely the development of the environmental organizations. On the one hand, the Government is playing the role as a resources distributor responsible for approving applications for environmental education and community action projects funding; on the other hand, in organizing various environmental activities, the Government is also competing with them for the limited resources.

Quite a number of environmental organizations have reflected to the Democratic Party that since most of the successful funding applications are those submitted for activities organized by the Environmental Campaign Committee under the Government, only very limited resources are left available to them. What is more, when environmental organizations appeal to the private sector for sponsorship, the Government will just follow suit, in which case the private sector would most probably prefer to sponsor the Government. Given the shortage of fund and other resources, naturally the development of the environmental organizations would be gravely restricted. In fact, if the Government should concentrate on its role as a co-ordinator and allow the various green groups to give full play to their strengths, it would be able to make far greater contributions to environmental conservation.

According to the first line of the "San Zi Teachings", men are born good. With respect to the issue of environmental conservation, however, I believe that "we are born clean". Indeed, nobody would love to live in a dirty and polluted environment — none of us would want to see Hong Kong (fragrant harbour) being turned into a flagrant harbour. As such, the people of Hong Kong have actually demonstrated a certain degree of environmental awareness in terms of their environmental quality expectations.

However, the problem remains that while the Government has never dealt with environmental issues in a serious manner, it has all of a sudden put forward various policies to urge the public to contribute to environmental protection, thereby causing certain sectors of the community to pay exorbitant prices for the cause. Worse still, there are no matching measures to support the various policies proposed. In the end, despite their desirable objectives, the environmental protection initiatives simply fail to win public appreciation.

On the waste reduction front, for example, even if the public should wish to recycle and reuse the waste paper and used glass bottles collected, comprehensive material recovery facilities are simply not available. And in areas where recovery facilities are available, the waste collected may not necessarily be recycled. In this connection, we have heard of schools secretly throwing away their waste paper simply because they could find no facilities to dispose of the collected waste paper.

As regards environmentally friendly products, so far an appropriate set of commodity labelling laws requiring products for sale in Hong Kong to indicate whether or not they are recyclable has yet to be enacted by the Government. As such, consumers who are environmentally responsible are just at a loss as to their choice of products.

Given that Hong Kong is wanting in even the most basic policies and measures, it is utterly impractical of the Chief Executive to expect Hong Kong to rise a status comparable to that of London and New York. What worries people most is that if the efforts of the Government should come out at the small end of the horn, the situation of Hong Kong would be no better than the Chinatowns in New York and London.

Finally, I must stress that the Democratic Party is in support of environmental protection, and it is for this reason that we believe the Chief Executive's willingness to address squarely the environmental problems of Hong Kong should be appreciated. However, in view of the fact that the policies are being implemented without consultation and sufficient transparency, and that neither the public nor the environmental organizations have been given any chance to participate in the formulation of the policies, we cannot but criticize the Government sternly. In my opinion, unless the Government abandons the condescending attitude it has been holding in administration, we can never truly achieve the objective of "sustainable development".

Thank you.

**MR JAMES TIEN** (in Cantonese): Mr Deputy, the Liberal Party attaches great importance to environmental protection. It has all along been our belief that if Hong Kong is to become a leading cosmopolitan city, it must undergo complete reforms in terms of its environmental facilities, economy and education system.

Environmental protection is a long-term social investment involving not only infrastructural facilities but also the day-to-day operation and maintenance efforts. In this connection, I believe the vast majority of both the commercial and industrial sectors and the public are in support of environmental protection, yet at the same time they are also concerned that the costs involved might be too high for them. In fact, they have good reasons to harbour such worries. On the one hand, the Government has all along been adhering to the "user pays" principle to require users and polluters to pay for the daily operating expenses of the environmental facilities; yet on the other hand, it has so far failed to put the operating costs concerned under effective control. More often than not, the unfair situation in which "the people have to foot the bill for the banquet hosted by the

Government" will be resulted.

One very good example is the Trade Effluent Surcharge (TES). At the very beginning, businesses and industries were assured by the Government that the TES would account for only 20% of the water bill and should be within the affordability of all users concerned. However, the businesses and industries are faced with a different story after the scheme has been put into operation, for the surcharge could amount to over 130% of the water bill. Another example is the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme. In regard to this environmental facility which costs us a fortune, not only were there plenty of problems when the facility was under construction, its operating cost upon completion has also soared way above the estimated level to as much as \$3 billion per annum. In this connection, even the Government has to admit that it could hardly afford to bear such a huge cost. Being faced with the series of new environmental facilities and initiatives to come, how could the commercial and industrial sectors and the public not worry about the heavy burden they have to bear in the future?

Mr Deputy, the Liberal Party is certainly in full support of the cause of environmental protection and raises no objection to the "user pays" principle. However, we hold that the Government must strive to ensure that the various expenses of the environmental facilities, in particular the recurrent operating expenses, should always come under stringent regulation and be in line with the principle of cost-effectiveness. In this connection, I should like to put forward three suggestions:

Firstly, the Government should give the public a detailed account of the financial arrangements of the various environmental facilities, so that the public and the commercial and industrial sectors could have an idea of the environmental expenses they need to bear.

Secondly, the Government should be responsible for more than the full construction costs of all the environmental projects. Instead of transferring the recurrent operating expenses to the public and the commercial and industrial sectors, the Government should bear part of those expenses as well. Given that it has to bear part of the recurrent operating expenses, the Government will control the relevant administrative costs and expenses with greater care. I suggest the Government bearing 30% of the recurrent operating expenses of the environmental projects, leaving the remaining 70% to be borne by users.

Lastly, the best method of controlling operating costs is to place as far as practicable the management of the environmental projects upon completion in private sector organizations in accordance with commercial principles. That way, the Government should be able to cut back many unnecessary administrative expenses. In this connection, I suggest the Government commissioning private sector organizations to manage the landfill sites and the proposed

environmentally friendly incineration plants.

Mr Deputy, I should also like to speak specifically on the issues of air pollution and water pollution mentioned in this year's policy address.

The Liberal Party supports the Government's initiative to assist as far as possible the owners of the 18 000 diesel taxis territory-wide to switch to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vehicles; besides, we also agree to the implementation schedule of this scheme. However, with regard to public light buses, the Government has tried to implement the trial scheme in April next year without consulting the sector beforehand, not even on the specific implementation arrangements. Therefore, we hope that the Government could give more consideration to the issues on this front.

As regards the Government's proposal to make a provision of \$1.4 billion for this, we consider the grant not enough to achieve the objective. In our opinion, even if the Government should provide subsidy for the public light buses and the other 70 000 diesel trucks and allocate more than \$1.4 billion for the purpose — since the grants will be spread out over a number of years, the sum is indeed not very large — the savings on the medical front as well as other aspects would be sufficient to cover the additional amount of money required. For this reason, we hope the Government could take the matter into further consideration as well.

Mr Deputy, with regard to water supply, I should like to talk about the source of water rather than the sewage disposal problems. According to the policy address, the quality of water from Dongjian River is very good, and so is the quality of water stored in our reservoirs. However, I believe the Government should investigate into the reason why so many households are complaining against the poor quality of tap water. Would the crux of the problem lies in the pipelines carrying water from reservoirs to the various households, bearing in mind that most of the pipelines have been in use for some 10 to 20 years without replacement? The Government must face up to the issue. Even if the Dongjian water is of very good quality and should remain so when stored in the local reservoirs, the public would still consider it unacceptable if the water supplied to households is polluted.

Last but not least, Mr Deputy, I should like to speak on the wording of the motion. In this connection, the wording of the amendment proposed by the DAB has suggested "collecting recovery deposits from the commercial and industrial sectors". The Liberal Party holds that it would be very difficult for the commercial and industrial sectors to define the ambit of recovery deposits. Earlier Mr LAU Kong-wah has also referred to the issue, only that he has not provided us with a full definition in this connection. As far as the wording of the proposed amendment is concerned, I am afraid the Liberal Party has found it unacceptable. We cannot but wonder under

what circumstances would recovery deposits be levied on plastic bottles and lunch boxes. Would it be cost-effective to do so? If the product concerned should worth as little as a few dollars, would manufacturers be willing to pay the deposits and then recover the used products? So, having regard to the wording concerned, the Liberal Party is unable to lend its support to the proposed amendment.

As regards the original motion of the Democratic Party, it has suggested the Government "adopting appropriate economic tools and taxation policies". Basing on our understanding in this connection, the Liberal Party supports the Government granting tax concessions to environmentally friendly products and services, rather than levying special fees on products or services that are not environmentally friendly enough or even environmentally unfriendly.

Mr Deputy, having considered the wording of the original motion and that of the proposed amendment, the Liberal Party has decided to support the original motion.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair.

**MISS CYD HO** (in Cantonese): Madam President, in very much the same way as some green organizations have criticized the Chief Executive's environmental protection policy, I would also say that both the original motion and the amendment, as they are worded, do in fact look upon environmental protection as a mere economic issue. So, from such an economic perspective, an economic issue must of course be solved by economic measures. However, it is disappointing to note that neither the original motion nor the amendment has made any mention of environmental education, at least as judged from how they are worded. I of course have to admit that Honourable colleagues did touch upon this when they spoke, but the fact is that they only talked about this very briefly, not at all in any in-depth manner. So, I will not talk anymore about economic measures. Rather, I will talk about environmental education and other related conceptual issues.

Where there is human habitation, there are bound to be depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution. As the population on earth increases incessantly, our natural resources will be depleted at an increasingly fast pace. The day will sooner or later come when all our natural resources are completely exhausted. Right now, Mr Earth has already started to find it hard to put up with the situation; it is now somewhat unable to completely absorb all the wastes produced by us. And, the advocacy of "green living" originates from a sense of crisis. I think the duty we must discharge today is to maintain the ecological balance. Although we human beings

have no alternative but to deplete our natural resources, we must, in the course of doing so, keep these questions in mind: How are we going to keep our natural environment clean? How can we enable the earth to recover in good time, so that it can avoid any perpetual damage caused by our rapid depletion of natural resources? I think all these are the issues we must deal with today. So, what we have to discuss today should not be the handling of wastes, because we must also stress that we should not use any chemicals which are not biodegradable. Besides, we must also make more use of reusable materials as much as possible. And, a more thoroughgoing solution will be to refrain from using too much resources, to avoid unnecessary squandering and luxuries.

Therefore, I now urge that while the Government considers how to improve air quality and deal with excessive vehicle emissions — beneficial to Hong Kong though they may be — all these efforts should not just be meant to retain talents in Hong Kong, or to boost the economy and attract foreign investments. We should not promote environmental protection simply for economic reasons; we should do so because environmental protection is an absolute necessity for all of us and for our future generations. Therefore, I urge the Government to promote environmental education.

Quite a number of Honourable colleagues also talked about environmental education a moment ago. We can actually incorporate environmental education into the curriculums of our primary and secondary schools; we can also introduce a green label law and organize some projects on a healthy city and healthy schools. That way, even those who are not at school will also develop a sense of crisis and thus begin to discharge their duties by refraining from wasting natural resources. I also want to urge our government officials to set a good example. For instance, I ask them not to use any driver service when travelling between Murray Building and the Legislative Council. If they use such a service, four car trips will have to be made each time. But if they travel on foot, the time required will just be three to four minutes.

Naturally enough, when we talk about enhancing our environmental protection efforts, we must inevitably talk about money, because once wastes are produced, they must be handled, and this will inevitably involve money. It is indeed very delightful to talk about environmental protection, about fresh and clean air. However, once money comes into the question, there are bound to be disputes, especially when it comes to the questions of who should pay and from whom to collect the money. Environmental protection is certainly good to society, but just who should be made to shoulder the costs? This is indeed a topic which requires our detailed discussions. My greatest worry comes from the "user pays" principle frequently mentioned by the Government these days. I am even more worried that the Government may use environmental protection expenses and charges as an excuse and try once again to impose a disguised form of "poll tax". This will add to the already heavy burden of the grass-roots and is something I hate to see most.

I appreciate the question raised by the Honourable James TIEN a moment ago: Should the industrial and commercial sector be made to pay all the expenses? This question needs further deliberation. I hope that when we discuss the issue of cost recovery, we can come up with a fair and equitable answer as far as possible. In any case, as pointed out by Mr James TIEN, it will be very useful if the Government can disclose all the relevant financial information. We of course have to realize that environmental protection is an investment that will not yield any direct, tangible returns. Having invested \$1 in an environmental protection project, we cannot possibly expect a return of \$2 from it. However, elsewhere, from reduced medical care expenses, from higher productivity, for example, we can actually notice the cost-effectiveness of our environmental protection investments. I remember that when we discussed the penalties for excessive vehicle emissions, some Members gave us some statistics on the number of people who suffered from asthma or shortened life-span as a result of poor air quality. Well, the total hospitalization expenses incurred by all these people can tell us what returns we can expect to get by investing in environmental protection. Although there may not necessarily be any direct causal relationship between the two, I still hope that our friends in the industrial and commercial sector can realize that such returns will benefit us all. I agree that we should devise some appropriate economic measures and impose charges on producers causing pollution, so as to meet the expenditure on wastes handling. But I also doubt whether it is at all feasible to collect deposits and landfill charges from the industrial and commercial sector. I agree that this is one of the possible measures, but this may not be entirely practicable. Therefore, I hope that we can continue to discuss the issue with an open mind and seek to work out a charging scheme which is fair and equitable to all.

There is one point in Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment which I especially appreciate. One day, during a private discussion, he and I both agreed that the co-operation between Guangdong and Hong Kong was indeed very important. We thought so, because the two places are so closely linked together, because the air currents from the Mainland can flow into Hong Kong in a matter of several hours, and because two of our daily necessities, water and food, come from the Mainland. Actually, non-staple food imported from the Mainland accounted for 30% of all the non-staple food consumed in Hong Kong in 1998. We know that many chemical insecticides are used in the process of growing these non-staple produce. And, we also know that hormones and asthma drugs are unnecessarily added to some livestock feeds in the Mainland. All this has not only polluted the environment, but also jeopardized our health. In this respect, I very much hope that the co-operation between Guangdong and Hong Kong can be enhanced. I also hope that the Hong Kong/Guangdong Co-operation Joint Conference can set up various different working groups under it and allow the free participation of Legislative Council Members. As we know, we Legislative Council Members do want to do something, but we do not have too many channels. So, I hope that the Government can assist us in joining these working groups. That way, those of us who want to do something for the cause will be able to do so through proper and formal channels.

Thank you, Madam President.

**MR NG LEUNG-SING** (in Cantonese): Madam President, with "Quality Home" as a theme, the third policy address of the Chief Executive seeks to promote the community's awareness of environmental protection and formulate a long-term policy on environmental protection. Today, this Council discusses a motion on environmental protection, showing that the community is placing more and more emphasis on environmental protection. The Government, the Legislative Council and the people of Hong Kong are now prepared to live up to their words and make concrete planning for the sustainable development of the Hong Kong community.

As the Chief Executive said in the policy address, the whole community, including the people, the business sector and all government departments, needs a change of mindset. They must start working in partnership to ameliorate the problem of environmental pollution in Hong Kong. This is I believe very important. Environmental protection should be the responsibility of every government department. There must be co-ordination and leadership. Each department must share the responsibility for the implementation of each relevant policy. I suggest that when the next policy address is delivered, the Progress Report of each Policy Bureau should include a report on the effectiveness of its work on environmental protection according to the actual circumstances, in order to show that the Government practises what it preaches. For the business sector and the people in general, environmental protection means not only a change of the traditional way of life and the habits of consumption and production, it also implies higher operating costs and a heavier financial burden. In this respect, the whole community must be prepared to pay according to use. In view of the recent development of the local economy, the Government must take into account the impact on operating costs and the financial burden of the people in introducing concrete environmental protection policies and plans, and implement them gradually and properly. It should give priority to development projects that can stimulate the local economy, create job opportunities and promote the environmental protection industry.

Madam President, in terms of implementing concrete environmental protection policies, the policy address proposes to formulate a new comprehensive transport strategy perceived in the context of environmental protection. In my view, this is certainly a right approach. However, I noted that its focus is on making modes of passenger transport more environmentally friendly. Actually, one should also consider freight transport. This point was already made in today's question time. For instance, we can consider building a freight transport network based on a railway system between the airport, container terminals and land crossing points and the locations of some major warehouses. Such a system can be linked to a certain extent with the existing passenger rail system. If proved feasible, this will achieve the aim of environmental protection in terms of freight transport, as well as improving the road conditions, thus killing two birds with one

stone. In order to carry out environmental protection work, Hong Kong must co-operate with its neighbouring regions. Co-operation means that we should not just clean up the sources of pollution in our own territory, but should help the other side to clean up its sources of pollution as well. For instance, with regard to the problem of water pollution, co-operation means that we cannot just ask or help the other side to confine pollution to its own territory. Since Hong Kong has an edge in terms of technology, capital and concept, it should take a greater initiative in helping others, thus benefiting from it in the end.

Madam President, in my view, the original motion and the amendment under discussion today are well intentioned and their aims are basically consistent. The amendment goes one step further by proposing more concrete policy directions in terms of promoting the environmental protection industries, strengthening the co-operation with the Mainland, stressing the cost-effectiveness of environmental protection work and so on, and deserve our support in principle.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MRS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): Madam President, environmental protection is one of the thematic highlights of Chief Executive, TUNG Chee-hwa's third policy address. The motion "Protecting the Environment" introduced by Mr LAW Chi-kwong today has undoubtedly advanced the debate on some of the contents of the policy address. In the debate on the policy address next week, I will comment on behalf of the my constituency on the relationship between transport and environmental protection in detail. Today, I would like to submit two principles on behalf of my constituency to ensure that the various environmental protection policies can secure the support of the general public, including the transport industry, so that they will be more effective in improving the environment.

In my view, two principles must be established in respect of environmental protection before people in various sectors can work together to further the cause. The first principle is co-operation, and the second shared commitment.

The first principle is co-operation. In various passages in the policy address, the Chief Executive stressed co-operation with people from all sectors and co-operation between the Government and the people, especially in terms of environmental protection. While these words are still ringing in our ears, the Government contradicts itself by unilaterally deciding to launch a half-year liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) minibus trial scheme starting in April next year, without consulting the trade. It also plans to ask the trade to switch to LPG minibus from 2001 onwards.

With such high-handed executive orders, how can the trade co-operate with the Government? Actually, the trade supports environmental protection and is prepared to work in partnership with

the Government to promote environmental protection. But what does the Government know about the operation of the minibus trade? What does the Government know about the fact that the trade still has doubts about LPG vehicles? Although the Government is oblivious to all this, the trade has always been co-operative. Over the past few months, it has had numerous meetings with government departments and has asked the Government to explore the feasibility of minibus switching to cleaner fuel. However, the Government has not given any response. Instead, it has drawn up plans behind closed doors, unilaterally formulating a plan and setting deadlines. In what way has the Government worked in a co-operative spirit and discussed with the trade beforehand?

This is just one example. There are numerous other examples of the arbitrary ways of the Government. If the Government hopes that the environmental protection policies will have the support of the general public, including the relevant industries, it must abandon its arbitrary ways and enter into real partnership with various sides starting from the formulation of policies, rather than asking the other party to co-operate after formulating a plan.

The second principle is shared commitment. Everyone should play a part in environmental protection, since everyone will benefit after the environment is improved. Therefore environmental protection is more than just a slogan. We should not just accuse others and put the blame of pollution on other people. Rather, everyone should put principles into practice. We should make an effort and a commitment to solving the problems of pollution with action.

We have to admit that pollution is the product of economic prosperity. While benefitting from the economic achievements, we have to bear the consequences brought about by the economy together. While we need modes of transport such as taxis, minibus, buses and trucks, many people ignore the question of how to deal with or reduce their emissions. They refuse to listen or understand the difficulties involved. They just apportion the blame to the owners and drivers, who should therefore bear all the costs.

In his policy address, the Chief Executive specifically raised a question and that is, who is to pay for the day-to-day operating and maintenance costs of the pollution mitigation facilities the capital costs of which have been paid for by the Government? I would like to ask a question too. After members of the trade have spent their life savings on the purchase of environmentally friendly vehicles, who is to pay for the extra day-to-day operating and maintenance costs, if they are higher than those for diesel vehicles?

As the Chief Executive said, it is everyone's responsibility to prevent and control pollution. Insofar as air pollution is concerned, vehicle owners cannot bear all the responsibility and costs on their own. Therefore, the Government should inject more resources into improving the air quality and share some of the responsibility. The general public can also share part of the responsibility,

such as by accepting higher fares. Members can share part of the responsibility by assisting the transport industry in dealing with problems of maintenance and repair. They should not take the simplistic view that vehicle emissions can be reduced and the problems of maintenance and repair can be solved, or that the high emissions of pre-Euro-standard diesel vehicles can be reduced by increasing fines.

Just now, I have proposed two principles on behalf of the Transport Functional Constituency to complement today's motion. I hope that government officials and Honourable Members will consider them carefully.

Madam President, I so submit.

**MRS SELINA CHOW** (in Cantonese): Madam President, just now I met Mr Peter WONG, Honourable Member of the former Legislative Council and senior member of the Liberal Party outside this Chamber. The Liberal Party has become increasingly concerned with environmental issues since the mid-1990s with Mr Peter WONG as our spokesperson. As we all know, Mr WONG has all along been very enthusiastic about environmental protection and devoted much time and effort to the cause, and his efforts have always been fully supported by the Liberal Party. To cite an example, we had all along been in full support of Mr WONG when he was negotiating with the Government in relation to the implementation of the "user pays" principle. So, from this Honourable Members can see that the Liberal Party has indeed attached considerable importance to the cause of environmental protection.

This year, I believe Members would most probably have heard of the "3E" policies of the Liberal Party, and one of which is: "Environment". In this connection, our "Environment" policy covers a scope far greater than the limited scope of environmental issues, for the conception we have is to beautify the environment as a whole. Nevertheless, environmental protection still constitutes a very important part of our policy. If Members should have kept an eye on the work of the Government on this front over the past eight to 10 years, I believe they would most probably agree with me in that the efforts made by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) at the beginning only served to agitate not only the people but also the heaven. This is because the EPD officers were always working behind closed doors and minding only their own affairs. They said they were to promote environmental education, but I am afraid nothing educational had been achieved on their part. Why? Because they have devised all the rules themselves and forced them on others, anyone not complying to the rules would be punished. What is more, the rules were applicable to not only the public but also government departments. Actually, they were treating the various government departments in very much the same way as they have treated members of the public. As such, even though the various government departments were not

opposed to environmental protection, they did harbour strong sentiments against the EPD. Given the non-accommodating attitude held by them then, EPD staff were unable to win the co-operation of others, not to say arouse the environmental awareness and environmental concern of the people. Fortunately, things have changed for the better now. With Mr Gordon SIU as Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, we can rest assured that a new broom sweeps clean. I hope that the new staff of the EPD will bring us new directions and good changes.

It is an undeniable fact the policy address published by the Chief Executive this year has indeed opened up new horizons for us on this front. Nevertheless, we still consider some of the attitudes adopted by the Government in this regard imbalanced. Just now Mr James TIEN and the Honourable Mrs Miriam LAU have also expressed their views in this respect. In my opinion, Mrs Miriam LAU has always been the aggrieved party. This is because people are always criticizing her for not doing enough work on this front when in reality she has indeed made a lot of contribution to the environmental protection efforts of the transport sector. Indeed, it should be the members of the sector she represents who have the responsibility to put in their best efforts. Members of the transport sector should indeed work hard on the economic front and on practical implementation to make the environmental protection measures a success. Yet why are they still airing such strong dissenting views? I believe the Government must be held responsible for that to a large extent, bearing in mind that the attitude adopted by most government officials are far from liberal. As a matter of fact, I have received representations from other sectors as well. With regard to metal salvage and scrap iron, for example, in order to dispose of the waste material, the EPD has formulated policies such as granting land to the relevant industries for the purpose. However, not only was the land granting method unacceptable to the industries concerned, the relevant policies have also failed to cater to their needs. But why? This is because the EPD has unilaterally formulated the rules behind closed doors without taking into account the needs of the industries. Should the industries fail to follow the rules, they would be punished. In other words, the EPD, being unable to identify the genuine needs, has resorted to punitive measures to achieve its purposes. Yet does it follow that we should do away with punitive measures? Certainly not! Given that the vast the minority of the sector are able to comply with the rules, the non-complying minority should be rightly punished. However, the Government should never resort to intimidating those people. On the contrary, it should try educating those people, and providing them with the necessary assistance in a friendly manner.

The commercial and industrial sectors are indeed pitiable. In the eyes of the Government, the payments for some fees and charges will not mean a thing to the commercial and industrial sectors; as such, businesses and industries always have to pay more in whatever circumstances. In reality, however, over 90% of the businesses and industries are small and medium enterprises. To these enterprises, keeping the business running is by no means an easy task. But because of the Government's conviction that fees and charges will not mean a thing to them, their operating costs

have increased, thereby making it more difficult for them to remain in business. So, is it not fair to say that the Government is in effect dealing a blow to our economy? Hence, the Government should cease separating the commercial and industrial sectors from the general public. Perhaps the Government has grown used to this divide and rule practice, but I still wish it would avoid employing this practice in the field of environmental protection. In fact, the purpose of the Government is just to justify its measures. However, regardless of whether it is the people of Hong Kong or the commercial and industrial sectors that the Government is trying to justify its policies to, as far as environmental protection is concerned, I just hope it would stop talking about the "polluter pays" principle. Otherwise, every person on earth would just be considered a polluter. As a matter of fact, under the existing arrangement, it is not the polluter but whosoever uses the facilities or services concerned who pays. The responsibility of the Government should be to justify to us that the measures adopted are completely cost-effective. Given its poor track record in this respect, the Government must make an effort to justify to us that the measures adopted this time around are truly cost-effective and fair.

In the past, there have been plenty of unfair cases on the environmental front. Restaurants and food premises, for instance, have been treated very unfairly. Yet I am not going to recap the details here, since a lot has been said already. Regarding the unfair systems and formulas, the Government should conscientiously review its past practices, with a view to coming up with measures that are genuinely fair. On the other hand, to give the public a more positive perspective on environmental protection, the Government should devote more efforts to greening Hong Kong and promoting the community environmental actions, so as to enable the people to witness and to benefit from the results of environmental programmes. Thank you, Madam President.

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

(No Member responded)

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr LAW Chi-kwong, you may now speak on Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment. You have up to five minutes to speak.

**MR LAW CHI-KWONG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, regarding Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment, let me remind Members that when I submitted my motion to the Legislative Council Secretariat, I also notified some Members of the contents of my motion. Actually, my primary concern is that this Council can approve a motion that supports environmental protection.

Therefore, I told other Members that they should let me know as soon as possible if they had any other views. That way, I could incorporate fellow Members' views as much as possible, thus making it unnecessary for them to delete words from my motion or to add words which qualify my original intent, as what Mr LAU Kong-wah has done. Had Mr LAU discussed the contents of my motion with me, we might be able to work out a mutually acceptable solution, and I would have found it easier to support his amendment. If he had done that, things would have been easier.

In fact, in my original motion, the expression "apart from strengthening the co-operation with the mainland authorities in promoting environmental protection work" was not found. This was because the Chief Executive had already mentioned this point, I thus did not want to deal with such a specific item in my motion. But a colleague told me I should mention co-operation with the mainland authorities, so, I added that part to the motion. Well, frankly speaking, if the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) opposes this motion, it will give the Democratic Party an advantage in the forthcoming District Councils Election. But that was not my aim. I just wanted a motion that can be passed.

Let me now talk about the amendment, and explain why we find it difficult to accept. The first strategy of the original motion, for example, reads: "attaching importance to factors relevant to environmental conservation and sustainable development in formulating various social and economic development plans". This was followed by a semicolon. However, Mr LAU replaced it by a comma and then went on to say "and specifying the targets for environmental improvement to ensure that the various environmental protection policies can materialize". This qualifies my original intent regarding social and economic development plans and narrows it down to the setting of environmental improvement targets, and their realization in environmental protection policies. But my original intention was to widen the scope. I do not oppose the wording of Mr LAU, but then he qualifies the scope, with the result being that certain things need not be studied or done anymore. This defeats the original intent of the motion.

Another part of the amendment that is hard to accept concerns the deletion of "using economic means such as introducing private participation and competition to expedite the implementation of infrastructural projects for environmental protection", for which Mr LAU offers no reason. Let us look at the Central-Mid-levels escalators as an example. Why does the Government have to run these escalators itself, instead of handing over their operation to a private contractor? Private operators may get profits from advertising along the escalators. The Government does not have to pay a cent for their operation, and it can even collect fees from the contractor. In fact, similar escalators can be built elsewhere. And I believe that if the industrial and commercial sector is allowed to advertise along these escalators, the Government may even be able to save the expenses for building them. Why do we not use economic means such as the introduction of private sector participation. However, he has proposed to delete this point, and this somewhat upsets me.

Another amendment proposed by Mr LAU concerns the deletion of the expression "economic tools and taxation policies" from the original motion and substitution by "using economic means such as collecting recovery deposits and landfill charges from the commercial and industrial sectors." The idea of collecting recovery deposits from the commercial and industrial sector is conceptually acceptable, and we can further discuss the detailed technicalities involved. However, the whole amended sentence does not seem to make good sense per se. Collecting recovery deposits and landfill charges all at the same time would mean double penalties. Landfill charges are usually collected from construction contractors. Why should they be collected from the commercial and industrial sector? How about the construction contractors?

So, having looked at the amendment, we feel that if he had only added to the contents of the motion rather than deleting words from it, there should be no problem at all. At the same time, I would like the DAB to note that in the original wording of my motion, there is no mention of a green tax. I hope Members can hold more discussions about how taxation policies can help the environmental protection cause. To conclude, the Democratic Party cannot support the amendment proposed by the DAB.

**SECRETARY FOR PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND LANDS** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I am very glad that the topic of environmental protection through sustainable development has been made the subject of the first motion debate held by the Legislative Council in the 1999-2000 Legislative Session. This encourages me greatly, because this shows that our direction of improvement is correct. Later on, I will talk about Mr LAW Chi-kwong's motion and the wording of Mr LAU Kong-wah's amendment.

Let me point out here that whatever the outcome of this motion debate will be, the SAR Government will still attach great importance to the valuable opinions of these two Members and all the comments made by each and every other Member during this debate; their opinions will be taken on board as the guiding philosophy of the SAR Government when it seeks to promote sustainable development in the future. So, I would say that the outcome of the debate is not important at all. What is most important is that we can all share one common direction.

Sustainable development does not follow one single path only. We cannot possibly say that once Hong Kong has reached a certain stage of development, it can then be regarded as having achieved the goal of sustainable development. What is involved is a very long process, and, like all other places or countries which pursue sustainable development, Hong Kong must do thinking on it constantly, every day. Sustainable development is a subject which requires "life-long"

exploration, and there can be no end to such exploration. So, the debate today, or the debate next week, or the debates to be held by the Legislative Council and all walks of life in the community in the days and years to come, will all assist us greatly in setting down a direction of sustainable development in the future.

Why are we faced with so many environmental problems now? Well, since the policy address of the Chief Executive has already identified very clearly all those areas which are currently plagued with environmental problems, I will not repeat all those points here. Suffice it to say that our environmental problems are caused by three factors. First, over the past four to five decades, in particular over the past 20 years, we have undergone a period of very rapid economic growth; and during the same period, our Asian neighbours also experienced very rapid economic growth, at a pace even faster than ours. So, to a certain extent, we now have to face the immediate problems brought about by our rapid economic growth. In the past, because of our preoccupation with economic development, we were unable to deal with some of the resultant environmental problems. However, we must now start to deal with them, because if they are allowed to further deteriorate, not only will our economic development come to a standstill, but our quality of life will also see dramatic deterioration.

Second, when we discussed the issue of new town planning in the past few days, Members gave us a lot of valuable insights. I must admit that some of our environmental problems are in fact the results brought about by our new town planning strategy. As far as the planning of a new town is concerned, the construction of road networks inside the new town has hitherto remained one of the major projects which requires huge investments. All these roads are invariably constructed on the very same piece of land where large numbers of 50-storeyed or 60-storeyed buildings are also erected. These very tall buildings are scattered apart, forming kind of a screen which traps all the vehicle emissions inside the area. It is thus small wonder that air pollution has become such a serious problem.

Third, Members have expressed a lot of views today. Perhaps, we might have failed to arouse full public awareness to the importance of moving in this direction. So, whenever people talk about environmental protection, they will think that it is the responsibility of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the responsibility of the SAR Government, the responsibility of the Legislative Council and so on. Precisely because of this, this time around, we aim not only to deal with future environmental problems, but also to promote sustainable development. In other words, we aim to strike a balance between economic development and the conservation of our natural environment; we wish to work out a direction of development by striking a balance between economic development and people's quality of living. So, we are not going to confine our attention to issues like air pollution, sewage disposal, treatment of wastes and water quality. Rather, when we study all these problems and try to work out solutions, we will also seek to design

a better living environment for our future generations; in terms of planning and infrastructure construction, we will seek to reduce as much as possible all those problems which our future generations may otherwise have to face. So, this time around, besides environmental protection, besides co-operating with the Guangdong province, we will also do more thinking on town planning, on urban renewal, so as to make sure that the future residents of what are now old urban areas do not have to face any similar environmental problems in the future.

Since so many environmental issues are covered in such great detail in the policy address, Madam President, please pardon me for not discussing each of these issues here, and, perhaps, for not responding to each and every point raised by Members as well. In the debate to be held next week, circumstances permitting, I may discuss some of the major points put forward in the debate today. Besides, on other future occasions, whether in the Environmental Affairs Panel or other panels on public works, I can also speak further on each of these individual issues.

Let me now comment briefly on the major issues contained in the original motion. The first issue concerns the objective of environmental protection. Mr LAW Chi-kwong suggests that when formulating economic and social development programmes, we must attach importance to environmental conservation and sustainable development. This point has in fact been given complete recognition in the policy address. So, in the future, when the Government formulates any public policy, it will adhere to the principle of sustainable development and give simultaneous consideration to both environmental and socio-economic factors. As pointed out by the Chief Executive, sustainable development is much more than simply environmental protection, and it is thus the common responsibility of all Policy Bureaux and government departments.

Members should have all read the document "Hong Kong Moving Forward" published by the Transport Bureau. And, I now quote one of the objectives set out in this document: "Transport infrastructure and services will be provided in an environmentally acceptable manner to ensure the sustainable development of Hong Kong". So, as Members can see, this already marks the first step towards achieving their desired objective.

Mr LAU Kong-wah says that specific objectives should be set down for improving our environment. In this connection, the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau and other Policy Bureaux have already laid down some specific objectives for air quality and other environmental matters, and some of these objectives have in fact been expounded in the policy address, one example being the objective of abating air pollution. As for what step should be taken next, I will work with my colleagues in my bureau and other Policy Bureaux, so as to set down some work objectives for such environment-related issues as air pollution. However, before such work objectives are set down, we will first discuss with the relevant advisory bodies and the various sectors affected, so as to make sure that all those belonging to different fields and sectors can seek

progress under one common objective.

If the Government wishes to achieve sustainable development, it must set a good example itself. In this connection, we have actually made a lot of efforts, only that we have not made them known to members of the public. One example is that the paper we are now using is recycled paper, and another example is that the paper purchased by the Government Supplies Department is all recycled paper as well. And, there is one more thing, perhaps. When I came here to give a briefing to Members a couple of days ago, I initially planned to bring with me a huge pile of documents and papers. But in the end, I decided not to do so, and gave a computer diskette to the Legislative Council Secretariat instead. By doing so, I hoped to save resources on the one hand. On the other hand, as Mr SIN Chung-kai said a moment ago, I hoped to achieve our administrative objectives with the aid of the latest technologies.

The second subject is naturally environmental conservation. Last week, I already promised that I would work out an integrated environmental conservation policy within the next few months. Here, I wish to thank all those who have worked so hard to lay a solid foundation for nature conservation, including those who have worked on the biodiversity survey, those who have submitted their views to the Environmental Impact Sub-committee under the Advisory Council on the Environment chaired by Mr Peter WONG and the researchers in different institutions and private bodies. We do know that many people may seek to hinder the cause of nature conservation in the name of development. Our objective is to bring forth a three-win situation in the future: First, allowing suitable room for development; second, achieving full-scale nature conservation in the course of development; and, third, benefiting the people directly through all these development and conservation strategies.

With respect to ecological protection, we have actually achieved some admirable success in quite a number of areas. However, as I said a moment ago, we might well have failed to publicize them as examples of our successful efforts. So, all that people can notice is severe damage to our natural environment, whether in private or public places. In the near future, we will certainly seek to reduce such damage and base our work objectives on our past success.

On economic tools and taxation, I wish to point out that I do not think that environmental protection is necessarily costly. I can actually cite an example from the commercial sector which can prove that sometimes, environmental improvement can indeed come hand in hand with economic efficiency. There is a major airline in Hong Kong which has succeeded in saving \$10 million annually by paying some simple attention to resource utilization and material recycling. And, there is also a major electronic components manufacturer who finds that the new process he has adopted to cut water consumption and operating costs has brought forward a reduction of pollutant emissions as a spin-off. All this serves to prove that environmental protection can reap

economic benefits.

Mr LAU Kong-wah urges the Government to adopt the most cost-effective methods to tackle environmental problems, and he also urges the Government to offer financial assistance and concrete policies of support to encourage the development of environmentally-friendly industries. The Government supports his broad direction. What we need to explore now is how we should work with the industrial sector in such a direction. There are still many technicalities which need to be discussed. In the case of the waste paper industry, for example, our assistance is in the form of land provision, but it may be possible for us to provide assistance in other respects. As long as we can explain to the whole trade beforehand, and as long as fair arrangements can be made, the Government is definitely prepared to offer the assistance required for the development of the industry.

In regard to private participation, the motion urges that private organizations should be allowed to take part and to compete, so as to step up the pace of environmental protection work.

Over the years, the participation of private organizations has remained a main feature of our environmental protection projects. We will consider the possibility of increasing the opportunities for private participation as much as possible; we will also continue to ensure that the relevant services are always introduced under fair competition, and that the existing regulatory framework can promote quality environmental protection services in a more effective manner.

On the "polluter pays" principle, Mr LAU Kong-wah refers specifically to the collection of recovery deposits and landfill charges for the purpose of encouraging the industries concerned to adopt more environmentally friendly modes of production. Others have also put forward many suggestions relating to implementing the principle.

There has been an increasing recognition in the industrial and commercial sector that such modes of production can serve as an important incentive to encourage the adoption of innovative technologies aimed at reducing material wastes and separating wastes, which will in turn increase the potential of recovery and reuse. The material recovery rate achieved by the industrial and commercial sector is now already higher than 50%, but we will not become complacent because of this rate. We still need to make more improvements in the handling of materials in the construction industry and in domestic wastes separation.

And, while we seek to increase the energy efficiency throughout Hong Kong, we also need to maintain environmental infrastructure and services. The fairest and most effective method will be to collect from users charges which are able to reflect the extent of the pollution and the quantity of wastes produced by them. I am pleased to see that Members have started to discuss this matter

again. In the days and months to come, I will continue to hold detailed discussions with Members, so as to find out how best to truly realize the "polluter pays" principle, and also to ascertain where to and where not to provide any government assistance.

On cross-boundary co-operation, Mr LAU Kong-wah lays particular emphasis on the cross-boundary partnership between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and he also asks for more transparency in this respect. As Members are aware, the Chief Executive and the Governor of Guangdong Province have already issued a six-point statement on this issue. So, it can be seen that Hong Kong and the provincial authorities of Guangdong do in fact share common objectives in respect of environmental improvement and sustainable development in the region. Recently, I have received an invitation from the provincial authorities of Guangdong; they very much hope that the people of Hong Kong can visit Guangdong to look at what they have done for environmental protection there. Having listened to Members' remarks, I have an idea. Perhaps, we can make some arrangements for Members to go with us to Guangdong to look at their environmental protection facilities. I cannot promise that all the 60 Members will be able to go, (*laughter*), however, for enhanced transparency, we can at least show that we are doing our utmost to let the people of Hong Kong (not just our colleagues in the EPD or the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau) realize our common objectives and what work has been done in Guangdong to protect the natural environment there. For the detailed arrangements, we can follow up and examine them.

While we seek to enhance our understanding of the present state of our natural environment, we also provide assistance to the various environmental protection research projects. It is hoped that members of the public can thus be enabled to know what kinds of research work on environmental protection have been conducted by industries and the academic community, whether in Guangdong or in Hong Kong. I also have the intention of inviting Guangdong provincial officials to attend some of the public seminars to be held in Hong Kong in the future.

Lastly, I wish to talk about how some common people react to the treatment of environmental protection and sustainable development in the policy address. Last week, a telephone opinion survey was conducted by the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies. A total of 807 people were successfully interviewed. The interview actually touched upon many issues dealt with in the policy address, but I am going to talk about four of the questions only. One question reads: Are you supportive of the idea that "sustainability impact assessments" of major new policy proposals must be carried out, so as to achieve sustainable development and environmental protection in Hong Kong? Five options were offered: Very Supportive, Quite Supportive, Unsupportive, Very Unsupportive and No Idea. The findings reveal that 95% of the respondents chose "Very Supportive" and "Quite Supportive". A breakdown of this 95% shows that 12.4% chose "Very Supportive" and 83.4% chose "Quite Supportive".

The second question reads: Are you supportive of the idea that measures should be taken to speed up the banning of diesel vehicles causing serious air pollution? 83% of the respondents chose "Very Supportive" and "Quite Supportive". The third question reads: Are you supportive of the idea that wastes, including domestic refuse, should be reduced and recycled? 97% of the respondents chose "Very Supportive" and "Quite Supportive". The fourth question reads (there were in fact many more questions, but I do not want to take up too much of Members' time here): Are you supportive of the idea that the Government should give priority to the development of those modes of public transport causing less pollution, such as railways? 90% of the respondents chose "Very Supportive" and "Quite Supportive".

In the past few days, I attended some interviews on the radio, and I disclosed my office telephone number to a certain representative of the affected trade. Initially, I thought that only this representative would ring me up. However, as it turned out, besides this representative, other members of the public also rang me up, saying that they wanted to say a few words to me. And, while I was walking on the streets, some passers-by also went up to me, asking, "Mr SIU can I just say a few words on the environmental protection policy of the SAR Government?" Their message is very clear: The approach of the Government is correct, but it must keep up its efforts. This is most encouraging, not only to me and my colleagues in the Bureau, but to all those other colleagues in other government departments who have been working in this direction over the past few decades. This is also a greatest enlightenment to us all.

Thank you, Madam President.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Mr LAU Kong-wah to Mr LAW Chi-kwong's motion, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

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

(Members raised their hands)

Mr LAU Kong-wah rose to claim a division.

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

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

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Before I declare that voting shall stop, 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 LEE Kai-ming, Mr Ambrose CHEUNG, Mr HUI Cheung-ching, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr CHAN Wing-chan, Dr LEONG Che-hung, Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr Timothy FOK, Mr FUNG Chi-kin and Dr TANG Siu-tong voted for the amendment.

Mr Kenneth TING, Mr James TIEN, Mr Edward HO, Mr Michael HO, Miss Margaret NG, Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr Ronald ARCULLI, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Mr Howard YOUNG, Mr LAU Wong-fat, Mrs Miriam LAU and Mr LAW Chi-kwong voted against the amendment.

Geographical Constituencies and Election Committee:

Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr Gary CHENG, Mr Jasper TSANG, Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr David CHU, Mr NG Leung-sing, Prof NG Ching-fai, Mr MA Fung-kwok, Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung, Mr Ambrose LAU and Miss CHOY So-yuk voted for the amendment.

Miss Cyd HO, Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Wing-tat, Mr Martin LEE, Mr Fred LI, Mr James TO, Dr YEUNG Sum, Miss Emily LAU, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr SZETO Wah and Mr HO Sai-chu voted against the amendment.

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

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 25 were present, 11 were in favour of the amendment and 14 against it; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections and by the Election Committee, 25 were present, 13 were in favour of the amendment and 11 against it. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, she therefore declared that the amendment was negated.

**PRESIDENT** (in Cantonese): Mr LAW Chi-kwong, you may now reply and you have two minutes and 57 seconds.

**MR LAW CHI-KWONG** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I am indeed very grateful because one third of the Members have spoken. I also wish to thank the Government for spending nearly half an hour on giving such a positive reply. In particular, I must also thank the Government for its reply that it may arrange exchange visits to the Mainland for Members of this Council, including those from the Democratic Party. Though we have discussed environmental protection many times before, it is still a very good thing for the Legislative Council to discuss this topic again during its first debate in this Legislative Session. We should be allowed to go to the Mainland to exchange views on environmental protection.

I must remind the Secretary of one point: While we do agree that policies on natural resources and the protection of the ecology must be laid down, we also hope the Government can at the same time consider whether it is necessary to lay down a comprehensive legal basis for such efforts. This is not just a policy issue. This is also a legal issue.

I want to focus on the issue of taxation now, because I am worried that colleagues from the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong are still against the original motion. I stressed that only products causing damage to the environment should be taxed. This point, I believe, is incontestable. Take batteries as an example. Batteries contain lead and mercury, which damage the natural environment. So, we can actively consider the imposition of taxes. In my original motion, I did not mention any environmental protection tax. Do we have to pay any tax for the carbon dioxide we exhale, given the fact that carbon dioxide is harmful to the environment and every one of us has to breathe? Of course not. So, several principles have to be considered when we are tackling the issue of tax. The first principle relates to whether toxic materials are really produced, and whether there are any negative effects on living organisms? If yes, we must actively consider the imposition of taxes. The second principle concerns the biodegradable ability of the toxic wastes in question. If the toxic wastes concerned are highly biodegradable, there should not be any big problem. If the opposite is the case, we should actively consider the tax aspect. In addition, two other factors may help us decide when not to levy taxes. First, the availability of substitutes. If a certain thing has no substitute, it will not do users or

manufacturers any good if taxes are forcibly imposed. Second, necessity. One example is air. We all need air and so we should not levy any taxes for that. The rationale behind this is that things that are required as absolute necessities in our day-to-day living should not be taxed at all.

To sum up, the motion today does not require Members to hold discussions on any specific issues. I just hope that we can set down a principle and do more thinking on how best we can assist in protecting the environment. I hope Members can support the original motion. Thank you, Madam President.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

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