

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 30 October 2002

The Council met at half-past Two o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT:

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE MRS RITA FAN HSU LAI-TAI, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH TING WOO-SHOU, J.P.

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

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

THE HONOURABLE CYD HO SAU-LAN

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT HO CHUN-YAN

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

THE HONOURABLE LEE CHEUK-YAN

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LEE CHU-MING, S.C., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ERIC LI KA-CHEUNG, J.P.

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

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

THE HONOURABLE NG LEUNG-SING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARGARET NG

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

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TO KUN-SUN

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG MAN-KWONG

THE HONOURABLE HUI CHEUNG-CHING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUEN-HAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE BERNARD CHAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KAM-LAM, J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG YIU-CHUNG

THE HONOURABLE SIN CHUNG-KAI

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

DR THE HONOURABLE PHILIP WONG YU-HONG

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

THE HONOURABLE HOWARD YOUNG, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE YEUNG SUM

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

THE HONOURABLE LAU CHIN-SHEK, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU KONG-WAH

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

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

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

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

THE HONOURABLE CHOY SO-YUK

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW CHENG KAR-FOO

THE HONOURABLE SZETO WAH

DR THE HONOURABLE LAW CHI-KWONG, J.P.

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

DR THE HONOURABLE TANG SIU-TONG, J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE LI FUNG-YING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HENRY WU KING-CHEONG, B.B.S., J.P.

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

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL MAK KWOK-FUNG

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT CHAN WAI-YIP

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

DR THE HONOURABLE LO WING-LOK

THE HONOURABLE WONG SING-CHI

THE HONOURABLE FREDERICK FUNG KIN-KEE

THE HONOURABLE IP KWOK-HIM, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU PING-CHEUNG

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

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, J.P.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

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

THE HONOURABLE WONG YUNG-KAN

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

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING:

THE HONOURABLE DONALD TSANG YAM-KUEN, G.B.M., J.P.
THE CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION

THE HONOURABLE ANTONY LEUNG KAM-CHUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY

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

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

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

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

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

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MR RICKY FUNG CHOI-CHEUNG, J.P., SECRETARY GENERAL

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

MR RAY CHAN YUM-MOU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

TABLING OF PAPERS

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

| Subsidiary Legislation/Instruments | <i>L.N. No.</i> |
|--|-----------------|
| Karaoke Establishments (Licensing) Regulation | 153/2002 |
| Karaoke Establishments (Fees) Regulation | 154/2002 |
| Aviation Security Ordinance (Replacement of Schedule 1) Order 2002 | 155/2002 |
| Shipping and Port Control (Amendment) Regulation 2002 (L.N. 117 of 2002) (Commencement) Notice 2002..... | 156/2002 |
| Patents (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Rules 2002 | 157/2002 |

Other Papers

- No. 11 — Environment and Conservation Fund
Trustee Report 2001-2002
- No. 12 — Audited Statement of Accounts and Auditor's Report for
the Fish Marketing Organization for the year ended 31
March 2002
- No. 13 — Audited Statement of Accounts and Auditor's Report for
the Vegetable Marketing Organization for the year ended
31 March 2002
- No. 14 — Marine Fish Scholarship Fund Trustee's Report for the
period from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, and Audited
Statement of Accounts and Auditor's Report for the Fund
for the year ended 31 March 2002

- No. 15 — Agricultural Products Scholarship Fund Trustee's Report for the period from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, and Audited Statement of Accounts and Auditor's Report for the Fund for the year ended 31 March 2002
- No. 16 — Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund Report of the Board of Trustees for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002
- No. 17 — Ocean Park Corporation
Annual Report 2001-2002
- No. 18 — Hongkong Post
Annual Report 2001/02

ADDRESS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Address. Mr Henry WU will address this Council on the Ocean Park Corporation Annual Report 2001-2002.

Ocean Park Corporation Annual Report 2001-2002

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): Madam President, I table before the Legislative Council the Ocean Park Corporation Annual Report 2001-2002.

I am pleased to report to you that Ocean Park celebrated its 25th Anniversary Year with a nominal return to operating surplus after four years of losses, lead by a 23% jump in attendance over the previous year. Ocean Park was strongly supported by our local community with local residents comprising 60% of the overall 3.38 million total attendance this financial year. Mainland Chinese tourists to Hong Kong have also significantly increased and Ocean Park's continuing "icon" reputation in China was well illustrated by a strong increase in mainland tourists to the Park.

After the world acclaimed successful artificial insemination of Pacific bottle-nosed dolphins by the Park's zoological staff with close collaboration from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Sea World USA over a year ago and the resulting birth of two healthy calves, Ocean Park has seen further landmark achievements. In September 2002, Ocean Park received full accreditation from

the American Zoo and Aquarium Association making it the only accredited animal park in Asia. The Park's zoological staff continue to build Ocean Park's reputation as a leading marine and animal facility.

Ocean Park has, over the years, achieved the goal of being an equal opportunity employer by taking active measures to employ the handicapped so that they are able to fulfil their potentials. The Park was gratified to have received the Enlightened Employer Award by the Labour Department in November last year. It shows that the Park's goal and long-term policy is well recognized and appreciated.

Education and community programmes continue to be developed by Ocean Park. In 2001-02, more than 38 000 Hong Kong students visited the Park participating in a wide variety of programmes. Ocean Park, as a full partner in the International Day of Disabled Persons activities, hosted over 3 000 disabled citizens to the Park in November last year.

The Park's 25th Anniversary Year was also one in which it seriously began the process of transformation. In spring, the Ocean Park Board's Task Force met with the top levels of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government to lay out the challenges facing the future of the Park. The response was immediate and positive with the Government setting up its own new Task Force on Ocean Park and Tourist Attractions in Aberdeen. This is a great opportunity for Ocean Park, which is ready to play a pivotal role in the Aberdeen Tourism development.

In the meantime, Ocean Park continues to work very hard, through singleness of purpose at all fronts, to meet its mission of providing quality family recreation, education, animal care, as well as conservation to local citizens and tourists. The Board and the executive management believe that with the support from this Council and the public, along with patience and confidence, the Park will emerge stronger.

The Park still faces tremendous challenges ahead. In making this annual financial report to this Council, the Board wishes to acknowledge that the success of the Park this year owes much to the focus, hard work and flexibility of the staff in making this possible, and their efforts are profoundly appreciated.

Thank you, Madam President.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Questions. First question.

Traffic Arrangements for Stanley

1. **MS MIRIAM LAU** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, as a major tourist spot in Hong Kong, Stanley attracts many local and foreign visitors for sightseeing and shopping. However, the roads leading to Stanley and the roads in the district are narrow, resulting in heavy traffic congestion on public holidays. To cater for tourism development in Stanley, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *it has any specific road infrastructure programmes as well as long and short-term traffic measures to improve the traffic in Stanley and the traffic to and from the district; and*
- (b) *it has any plan to construct piers in the district for promoting sea excursion tours so as to reduce the traffic flow on land; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, Stanley is linked up with the urban areas of Hong Kong Island by two main roads, Tai Tam Road in the east and Repulse Bay Road in the west. These roads accommodate two-lane-two-way traffic with a capacity of over 1 000 vehicles per hour. As Stanley is a major attraction for tourists and local residents, vehicular traffic on the road network leading to Stanley is busier on weekends and public holidays.

During peak periods on weekends and public holidays, about 600 vehicles travel to the Stanley area in an hour, well within the capacity of both Tai Tam Road and Repulse Bay Road. Traffic projections show that the existing road network should be able to meet demand up to 2011. We have hence no plans for new road infrastructure projects at the moment.

To improve traffic flow, short-term traffic arrangements are in place to cope with the traffic demand during peak periods. No-stopping restrictions are

in force along Tai Tam Road and Repulse Bay Road. Roadside laybys are provided for temporary holding of slow vehicles. Road opening restrictions are being imposed to prohibit lane closure along the roads leading to Stanley on weekends and public holidays.

Additional traffic improvement measures have also been planned to meet future traffic demand in the Stanley area. To accommodate the increasing number of vehicles going to Stanley Main Street, a turn-around facility will be provided in early 2003 at the junction of Stanley Market Road and Stanley Main Street. To improve traffic circulation at the junction of Stanley Village Road, Stanley Beach Road and Stanley New Street near the Stanley Market Bus Terminus, a new right-turn lane will be added on Stanley Village Road in 2004.

To further promote Stanley as a tourist attraction, there is a plan to build a public pier under the Tourist District Enhancement Project for the Stanley waterfront championed by the Tourism Commission. The construction of this pier is for pleasure boats and pleasure crafts and is designed to accommodate berthing of sea-bound tour vessels operating in the market. Subject to funding approval, construction of the pier will commence in 2004 and is expected to be completed in early 2006. With the provision of this public pier, it is expected that there will be more sea excursion tours run by commercial operators and the number of visitors travelling to and from Stanley by sea will increase.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it is stated in the main reply that roads leading to Stanley accommodate two-lane-two-way traffic. I would like the Secretary to elaborate on this. In fact, many sections along these two roads are limited to one-lane-two-way traffic, in particular the section of Tai Tam Road over Tai Tam Reservoir Dam, where only a single lane is available for two-way traffic. According to the Secretary's reply to my written question on 16th of this month, the dam will not be widened. Would the Secretary provide supplementary information that in view of the development of Stanley into a tourist spot, whether other options will be considered, such as rebuilding or thickening of the dam, to change the two access roads to two-lane-two-way roads as the Secretary claimed?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam President, the section of Tai Tam Road over the dam is actually a one-lane-two-way road, which cannot allow large vehicles to run in

opposite directions at the same time. We are aware that sometimes there is traffic congestion along that section, however, the traffic volume to the present capacity of that section is actually 0.85 vehicles. We hope that we can do much better in traffic control. We do not want vehicles running in opposite directions to meet in the middle of the dam, hence we will set up more traffic control arrangement. But we do not have plans to widen the dam at the moment.

MR JASPER TSANG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said that actual traffic flow on weekends and public holidays was far below the capacity of the roads leading to Stanley. However, as I reckoned, many sightseeing tours have given up the idea of visiting Stanley worrying that they may be stuck by congestion. As stated in the main reply, there is much room for development of tourism in Stanley. On saying that the existing road network should be able to meet demand up to 2011, what is the expectation of the Secretary on the development of tourism in Stanley in the coming years? In fact, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) has submitted some proposals on the development of the local tourism of Stanley. If those proposals are to be implemented, demand on the road network will be much higher than the existing one. Has the Secretary taken this into account when she made the estimate?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works reply this question?

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, we certainly have in place a set of rules for the estimation of traffic flow. Projected growth in tourism is certainly based on the studies conducted by the industry and the Economic Development and Labour Bureau, while traffic flow is calculated according to the information available in the territory. As to the accuracy of such estimate and whether there will be discrepancies, we will surely make constant improvement, and will follow up the issue when more information is available.

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I am pleased to hear from the Secretary that a public pier will be constructed and be completed in 2006 if funding is approved. In fact, the public pier is something that the shop*

tenants of Stanley have seriously wanted for a long time. I would like to bring to the concern of the Secretary a pressing problem faced by the catering operators in Stanley. They told me recently that road works to be carried out would greatly hamper the popularity of the business of their open air cafe. May I ask the Secretary if road works at shop fronts can be completed within a short period of time? Today, the weather is not very good, otherwise the cool and dry weather during this season is favourable to open air cafe business. Will the Secretary consider postponing such road works beyond the high season for operating open air cafe, that is either after November and December or after January and February when the undesirable wet weather sets in?

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Tommy CHEUNG, the theme of the main question is about traffic congestion, but your supplementary is on road works. Please explain in what way is this related to the main question? *(Laughter)*

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I may need to rephrase my supplementary question. As road works may lead to traffic congestion, will the Government consider deferring such works beyond the peak season for operation of open air cafes to the period after Lunar New Year?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam President, road works are carried out to improve the environment at Stanley with a view to promoting tourist industry. I will discuss with Mr CHEUNG and the catering operators on the co-ordination of such works among various trades so as to minimize the impact on their business. Moreover, the entire road maintenance project will be completed as soon as possible. By the way, I have recently visited Stanley and found that Chung Hom Kok Road and Cape Road can be used to access the Stanley Plaza. One may park the car at the carpark and then walk straight to the waterfront. Members may take this route instead of the Beach Road, where traffic congestion is serious, if they go to Stanley.

DR YEUNG SUM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, quite a number of shop operators at Stanley told me that many traffic problems are caused by the one-*

lane-two-way traffic constraint over the dam of the Tai Tam Reservoir. Should there be any traffic congestion or accident, the traffic of the entire road will be paralyzed. The Secretary said that the Government will not consider widening the section over the dam or constructing an additional road, which I think this may be due to the technical problems involved. However, will the Government consider installing a traffic display unit, so that drivers approaching Stanley will know the traffic condition there should there be accidents or serious congestion, and may take another route as soon as possible? I think the Government could consider this suggestion.

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I have to thank Dr YEUNG Sum for his proposals. We are considering and processing the issue along this line as well.

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the information the Secretary just provided may be supplied to her by her subordinates, I do not know if the Secretary understood what Mr Jasper Tsang had said. In fact, there is no need for the Secretary to explain but to listen to the traffic report on radio during weekends which advise the public not to drive to Stanley as carparks there are all full. She will then know that many people basically will not visit Stanley again. Such a state of affairs will hinder the growth of tourism. May I ask if the Secretary knows that Stanley has waited for 13 years to have a carpark constructed? On the one hand, the Government said it would allocate funds, but on the other hand, it said it have to identify private contractors. Now the Government said that if funding is approved, the construction of the public pier will commence in 2004 and is expected to be completed in 2006. Many have been pursuing the construction of the pier for years but in vain. Could the Secretary guarantee that the pier will be completed by 2006? Will she consider inviting tender in respect of the operation of the pier from the private sector in order to take in some commercial elements? The Secretary, of course, may consider that this should fall within the purview of Economic Development and Labour Bureau, but I think the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau will have the final say. May I ask the Secretary if open tender will be offered?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which Secretary will reply to this supplementary question? Secretary for Economic Development and Labour.

SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR (in Cantonese): Madam President, I thank Mrs Selina Chow for her question. The Architectural Services Department is now conducting a technical feasibility study on the pier, indicating that we will proceed with the project is in full swing. It is very important that the funding proposal could be approved when it is submitted to this Council, thus I hope that Members will support the proposal. If funding is approved, construction of the pier will commence in 2004 and will be pursued in full gear. However, even so, we still have to wait until early 2006 for the pier to be completed. We have already listened to the views presented by Members just now, and we will ensure that the project be completed as soon as possible.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mrs Selina CHOW, has your supplementary question not been answered?

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I do not mind which Secretary would answer my question, but I think my supplementary question has not been answered. Will the Government consider outsourcing the construction work of the pier to private contractors, so that the project may be expedited and be cost-effective?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which Secretary will reply this supplementary question? Secretary for Economic Development and Labour.

SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have in fact already answered the question. I said that I have taken note of the views of Members. We will consider that view and decide on it later. *(Laughter)*

MR IP KWOK-HIM (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the DAB has put forward the proposal on the construction of a pier in Stanley to the Government. I am glad to hear from the main reply of the Secretary today that a pier, catering to the needs of various kinds of pleasure boats and pleasure crafts, will be completed by 2006 subject to funding approval. The Government expected that*

the existing road network should be able to meet demands up to 2011, but I think it is in fact inadequate. Will the Government consider increasing marine traffic, such as harbour taxi, to link up Stanley, Central and Repulse Bay so as to co-ordinate the development and tourist industry of the entire Southern District? Has the Government made such a consideration?

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which Secretary will reply this supplementary question? Secretary for Economic Development and Labour.

SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR (in Cantonese): Madam President, I thank Mr IP for his question. In fact, marine traffic services are already available at Stanley now, but the frequency, which is demand driven, is low. For example, on Sunday, there is a route from Aberdeen to Po Toi Island which has stop en route at Stanley, but it runs only two times a day and the patronage is low. There is another route linking Aberdeen and St. Stephen's Beach but the demand is also low. I do agree to the construction of the pier, and we have already drawn up the plan. In fact, we are working on it and this is not only empty talk. I hope that with the completion of the pier, commercial operators will run more sea excursion tours, and should there be demands for harbour taxi, we will surely give such a consideration.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has already spent more than 15 minutes on this question. Last supplementary question.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the main reply is somewhat contradictory. It is stated that the Government has no plans for expanding or improving transport facilities, as the existing road network should be able to meet demands up to 2011. But, on the other hand, it is said in the third paragraph that short-term traffic arrangement, including road opening restrictions, has to be put in place to cope with the traffic demand during peak period. It is also stated in the fourth paragraph that additional traffic improvement measures have been planned. All these indicate that there is a problem. Will the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works inform us of the number of weekends and holidays during which road works requiring lane closure are carried out in each of the past six months?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I do not find my main reply contradictory. The traffic in the territory, to a certain extent, is running smoothly, but there may sometimes be congestions, and the acceptable degree of congestion varied. During weekends and holidays, when traffic is busier, we have to make additional traffic arrangements to alleviate congestion. However, it does not mean that the problem is insurmountable. With regard to the data relating to road works carried out during weekends and holidays in the past, I will provide a written reply to Dr HO. (Appendix I)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second question.

Wastage of Potable water

2. **MISS CHOY SO-YUK** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it has been reported that the United Nations has warned that two in three persons in the world would face water shortage by the year 2025 if the world continued to consume water at the current rate. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *it has assessed the wastage of potable water by Hong Kong people every year; if so, of the quantity of water wasted and its value based on the unit price of water supply;*
- (b) *it has any plan to encourage water saving by the public; if so, of the details and whether it will offer financial incentives as an encouragement; and*
- (c) *it has any plan to implement waste water recycling; if so, of the implementation timetable?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I totally agree with Miss CHOY So-yuk that the issue of water resources is an important global issue. If the world population keeps increasing without corresponding developments in water resources, the problem of water shortage will definitely occur.

- (a) Local water resources are inadequate in Hong Kong and we have to import raw water from Guangdong to meet approximately 80% of the fresh water demand. Promotions on water conservation and prevention against wastage of potable water have been the important tasks of the Water Supplies Department (WSD).

If citizens waste water, for example, by allowing damaged pipes to leak and not replacing them, they first have to pay expensive water charges. Besides, upon discovery of such circumstances, the WSD will issue repair notice requiring the building owner to repair the damaged pipe pursuant to section 16(2) of the Waterworks Ordinance. In the last 12 months, about 3 600 repair notices have been issued for such cases. Most building owners have carried out the repair works. Those who fail to comply may be subject to a suspension of fresh water supply in order to minimize wastage. Water supply will be resumed upon completion of the repair works.

Upon discovery of cases involving wastage of potable water, the WSD will take immediate and preventive action. As there are some 2 million registered customers in Hong Kong, the WSD is unable to fully monitor the use of water by each customer in private areas. Therefore, the WSD has not kept any statistics on wastage of water. However, in terms of daily per capita consumption of water, Hong Kong and other major Asian cities are of similar levels. It is believed that wastage of water has not been serious.

- (b) Encouraging people to save water is one of the objectives of the Government. "Save water" is a prime publicity campaign of the WSD. To ensure every customer receives the message, the WSD has published various types of save-water posters, stickers and pamphlets for distribution to the public in related events and with the water bills. Water saving practices are provided on the WSD's web site for reference by the public and the trade consumers.

To promote the concept of water saving to the public especially to the youngsters, the WSD receives about 8 400 citizens and students every year for visits to the water treatment works. The WSD has also set up the WSD Ambassador programme, with senior departmental staff including engineers and chemists delivering free

talks and answering queries on the operation of the WSD, responsibility of maintaining supply system by building owners, and water treatment in Hong Kong. Since early 2001, the Ambassadors have visited 78 schools and mutual-aid committees and talked to more than 17 000 people. The WSD will continue this type of publicity work in the coming years. In July this year, the WSD also launched the Fresh Water Plumbing Quality Maintenance Recognition Scheme to encourage people to strengthen the maintenance water supply services in buildings. This Scheme will help reduce wastage due to leakage of pipes in buildings and ensure that customers can enjoy quality water at the taps. To ensure students have a better understanding on water supply in Hong Kong, the WSD has also provided information to publishers of textbooks of the primary and secondary curriculum.

At present, the Government provides subsidies amounting to more than a half of the water charges. Citizens have not therefore realized the real value of water. The Government will carry out a comprehensive review in order to offer the most effective financial incentives and to encourage water saving by the public.

- (c) The Government is actively investigating the feasibility of the use of recycled effluent striving to establish it as a strategy of water resources in future. Although the costs of recycled effluent is higher than the purchase price of Dongjiang water, we will keep in view of the technological advancement in effluent treatment and the possible trend on the reduction on its unit costs. Where sewage treatment works are extended, consideration will be given to the possibility of effluent recycling and the concurrent implementation of the associated infrastructure including advanced effluent treatment plant and dedicated supply network. In order to further investigate the possibility of implementing effluent recycling in Hong Kong, the Government will establish an inter-departmental working group to carry out studies on this issue and to collect relevant information for detailed consideration.

The Government has also actively implemented a trial scheme for recycled effluent in Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Works at Lantau. The treated sewage effluent will be used for flushing, irrigation and

other purposes. The scheme, together with the Ngong Ping Cable Car project, will be implemented in 2005. We will acquire relevant experiences and where feasible implement other similar projects.

I would like to add that in Hong Kong, sea water is used for flushing and this accounts for 20% of the water used. Although using sea water for flushing can directly reduce the demand for potable water, the resultant effluent also contains sea water, thus posing problems for the recycling process and the technological requirements have to be even higher, hence leading to higher costs. Therefore, we have to strike a balance between the two.

MISS CHOY SO-YUK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I am very glad to hear the Secretary said in part (c) that the Government will establish an inter-departmental working group to carry out studies on the possibility of effluent recycling. The Secretary also pointed out clearly that if sea water is used for flushing, the cost of treating the effluent will even be higher. The Government has already begun to carry out urban renewal, but the Secretary has said just now that "the Government will establish an inter-departmental group to collect relevant information for detailed consideration". In that case, if the group were left to conclude its work, will it be already too late to put in place a dedicated supply network in many of the urban renewal projects? Moreover, the cost of recycling is related to the volume recycled. I would like to know whether, even if the project will be "implemented" more quickly, the study which would cause so much delay will still make it impossible to implement what is originally intended because the study cannot keep up with the renewal projects?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, what Miss CHOY So-yuk meant is that we should simultaneously implement some of the projects at the same time when the study is being carried out. Take the Ngong Ping project as an example, we have already included effluent recycling as one of the items. We have to understand that the effluent must be treated up to secondary standard before recycling is possible. However, at present, many of the sewage treatment works can only treat water up to the primary standard or even below this standard, therefore it is not possible for the effluent to be recycled because the

difference in costs is too great. Concerning the water treatment works at Ngong Ping, since it is possible to treat the water up to the tertiary level, which is but a small step from the standard fit for recycling, it is possible to make use of this item immediately as a trial scheme. As regards the new Shek Wu Hui Sewage Treatment Works, I have immediately taken the policy decision to refrain from using sea water for flushing purposes for the time being, since doing so would mean losing the chance to use recycled water. In addition, I have also included many private or large-scale development projects, such as the South East Kowloon Development, as items in which effluent recycling will be considered in the study on overall water supply. In advanced countries, it is necessary to legislate on the recycling of effluent because it will involve the establishment of three water supply networks, that is, those for potable water, effluent and recycled water. However, at present, we have not yet established any recycled water supply network. Therefore, a lot of paperwork or deskwork has to be done in carrying out the study before recycled water can be used on a large scale.

DR LUI MING-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, water supply will be a common problem and many countries and places in the world have to face the threat of water shortage. I know that some countries have commenced studies on treating fresh water by means of nanotechnology so that it can be converted to usable fresh water. I would like to know if the Government has any plans to carry out studies on the desalination of sea water by means of nanotechnology or other technologies to provide another source of potable water?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam President, I am glad to hear a Member mentioning nanotechnology because this is what I am most interested in exploring, but I think we do not have time to discuss it today. *(Laughter)* Years ago, the means by distillation was used in the Lok On Pai Desalter plant, but this would definitely not be used again because the cost is far too high. In recent years, the most effective method is the technique of using osmosis membranes and many countries have made a number of breakthroughs on this. As regards nanotechnology, I believe it is still being researched and this water treatment method is still not yet mature. In sum, nanotechnology can be used in everything and the use of this technology will help save energy, so it is considered a breakthrough of this century.

MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said that in terms of per capita consumption of water, Hong Kong and other major Asian cities are of similar levels. I would like to know whether our per capita consumption of water has been on the increase or decrease over the past three years and what are the reasons?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, on average, the daily per capita consumption of water in Hong Kong is 400 litres, which is comparable to those of Tokyo and Singapore. Over the past three years, this figure has been very stable and there is not any major change.

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary pointed out in part (c) of the main reply that the Government will consider adopting the technology of effluent recycling. Several months ago, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr GOH Chok-tong, said that treated water tastes even better and more exquisite. Will Hong Kong consider sharing the experience of Singapore and introducing the relevant technology into Hong Kong?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I can go on for days on this subject because this is precisely my work in the past. Regarding the remarks of the Prime Minister of Singapore on drinking recycled water, the water in question has been treated to a very high standard. In the past, when I carried out an analysis for them, I had to analyse the water for several hundred types of chemicals, many of which have not even been included in the relevant standards of international health organizations. However, if effluent is to be re-used as drinking water, many mental hurdles have to be overcome. One issue which has to be considered in Singapore is that Muslims are forbidden to drink water which has been consumed by pork-eaters. Resolving this problem is already difficult enough. Up to now, Hong Kong has not yet reached the stage at which effluent has to be used for drinking purpose, and it will be adequate for us to turn effluent into water just for other purposes.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Council has spent more than 15 minutes on this question. Last supplementary.

MR HUI CHEUNG-CHING (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary pointed out in part (c) of the main reply that the costs of effluent recycling is higher than the purchase price of Dongjiang water. Since the established principle of the Government is "user pays", I would like to know whether the public has to shoulder higher sewage charges if the plan is to be implemented?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, the "'user pays' principle" should in fact be adopted at all times. At present, the cost of treating Dongjiang water is \$4.5, and this includes the purchase price and the subsequent cost of treatment. As regards recycled water, the cost is \$5.3. However, if we are to treat the effluent until it reaches the secondary passing standard, so the cost will already be 80% of this \$5.3, and we will need only to add in the remaining 20% of the money to upgrade the effluent to the standard of recycled water. Therefore, this unit cost is not spent merely to recycle the water. It is only necessary to treat all effluent up to the international standard and then spent a little more to turn the water into effluent plus usable water, at a total cost of \$5.3. Finally, I would like to point out to Members that we will definitely take into account the water charges. If we finally decide to recycle effluent, not only would we bear in mind the conservation of resources, we would also consider how affordable the charges will be to the public.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third question.

Healthy Diet for Children

3. **MR BERNARD CHAN** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, regarding healthy diet for pupils, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *in view of the decision made by the Board of Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District in the United States at the end of August this year to extend the prohibition of the sale of soft drinks in primary schools to secondary schools within the same school district in order to prevent obesity in children, whether it has examined implementing such measure in all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that;*

- (b) *of the extent of observance and effectiveness of the stipulation that tuckshops in schools should not sell items of cooked food which may easily be contaminated, such as fish meat balls, rice rolls and rice dumplings, as stated in the "Guidelines on Meals Arrangements in Schools" issued to schools by the Education Department (ED) in May this year; and*
- (c) *of any other measures to enhance pupils' awareness of a healthy diet?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese):

Madam President,

- (a) Obesity is caused largely by excessive caloric intake and insufficient physical activity. To prevent obesity in children, it is important to promote balanced diet and regular exercise among them. Merely prohibiting the sale of a specific product will not produce lasting and significant results. At present, the ED and the Department of Health (DH) promote healthy living among children by encouraging them to develop healthy living habits and attitudes through good eating habits and ample physical exercise.
- (b) In order to safeguard the health of pupils, in May this year the ED issued to schools for their reference the "Guidelines on Meal Arrangements in Schools" ("Guidelines"), which recommend schools to consult parents on the food items to be sold. It is estimated that over 90% of the schools do not sell food items which are easier to be contaminated (such as fish meat balls, rice rolls and rice dumplings). Schools that sell cooked food items have already consulted parents on the sale of such items. Moreover, officers from the DH also visit schools from time to time, providing advice on school hygiene.
- (c) The Government will encourage pupils to pay attention to healthy diet through the following school education and related activities:

(i) *Strengthening the school curriculum*

In the present General Studies curriculum for primary schools, "healthy eating" forms part of the curriculum content which aims at developing pupils' good eating habits and attitudes. In addition, secondary school subjects such as Biology, Social Studies and Home Economics also place emphasis on the importance of a balanced diet. There will also be in-depth discussion on the issue of obesity in the newly developed Science and Technology curriculum for Secondary Four and Secondary Five.

In the current curriculum reform, schools are advised to adopt the new strategy of Life Event Approach to promote health education through which teachers can use real life experiences to engage pupils in meaningful discussion and to lead them to reflect on their own values and attitudes.

(ii) *Participating in health education programmes and related activities*

The DH provides free health assessment and health education for secondary and primary school students, with counselling and follow-up services for obese students. Since the beginning of 1999, the DH has launched three programmes related to healthy eating for pre-school children, primary and secondary school students respectively. Relevant teaching kits and educational materials have been distributed to every educational institution to assist teachers in carrying out such activities in schools. To widen students' learning experiences, the ED encourages schools to bring in health education programmes offered by other organizations and to encourage pupils to participate in various health education programmes so as to develop a healthy eating habit.

(iii) *Production of ETV programmes and learning resources*

Schools can make use of ETV programmes and other learning resources during classroom teaching or through other form of

activities to encourage school children to pay attention to healthy eating.

(iv) Parent Education

Through the promotion of parent education activities, the ED also assists and educates parents on how to develop school children's good eating habit and healthy lifestyle.

MR BERNARD CHAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it was mentioned by the Secretary in part (b) of the main reply that 10% of all schools, that which sell easily-contaminated food items, did consult the parents; so it can be seen that schools would act in such a democratic manner by consulting parents to ascertain if they were supportive of the sale of cooked food items. Will the Secretary also consider consulting parents on the sale of soft drinks in schools?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as I understand it, the Guidelines encourage schools to discuss with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) about what food should be sold in tuckshops. The Guidelines also explain in detail the importance of balanced eating, as well as setting out food and drinks considered to be relatively healthy. In general, PTAs are constituted of both parents and teachers. They will discuss what food items should be sold in tuckshops.

DR LO WING-LOK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I very much share with the Secretary that, in order to ensure school children to develop a healthy eating habit, parent education is of great importance. This is because school children usually eat at home. In particular, members of families often gather together to have their meals at home on Sundays and public holidays. In this connection, may I ask the Secretary what specific measures the DH or the ED is prepared to take to educate parents with the ultimate aim of enabling school children to develop a healthy eating habit?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, insofar as balanced eating is concerned, the ED has organized a series of parent education programmes. As for the details of the programmes, I would like to seek your permission to reply to Dr LO's question in writing. (Appendix II) The DH would, on different occasions, impart knowledge on healthy living to the public, including balanced eating and so on. In activities organized by Maternal and Child Health Centres or the DH, emphasis will often be placed on the importance of balanced eating.

MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, most primary and secondary schools order lunchboxes for their students. In this connection, will the Secretary inform this Council what has been done to ensure balanced nutrient intake among school children?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, in the Guidelines issued to schools, the ED has stated clearly how lunchbox suppliers should be selected and what should be done to address issues relating to balanced eating and health.

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, as regards healthy diet for school children, Mr YEUNG mentioned a moment ago that quite a number of schools have the practice of ordering lunchboxes for their students. Apart from having limited varieties, the lunchboxes often fail to provide sufficient nutrients. Will the Secretary consider providing schools with more information or data, such as suggestions made by dieticians on balanced eating, for the schools' reference when ordering lunchboxes?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, this proposal is absolutely feasible. It has already been stated clearly in the Guidelines issued to schools that the ordered lunchboxes must comply with the nutritional requirement of students. For instance, the lunchboxes should provide lean meat, skinned chicken, abundant supply of fruits, vegetable and low-fat food and, at the same time, avoid fried and deep-fried food as far as possible. Nonetheless, I will request the DH to further consult the schools on what assistance can be rendered to enrich their knowledge of lunchbox nutrition.

DR PHILIP WONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, while food is crucial to children's health, it is also very important for children to be taught in schools ways to distinguish health food. Nevertheless, if teachers themselves are obese or eat unhealthily, how can they convince their students to eat healthily? May I ask the Secretary what means will be used to convince the students to believe in their teachers' advice?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, Dr WONG has raised a very interesting supplementary. Health education is not as simple as it appears to be. It is not simply confined to the provision of a certain information for school children to follow. Many other elements are involved as well. As Dr WONG mentioned a moment ago, if teachers do not act according to the information conveyed to their students, the possibility of their students being convinced is likely to be low. Furthermore, as Dr LO mentioned earlier, school children will actually be influenced by their parents, such as their parents' habits of eating at home or eating out, and so on. As such, all parties have to make an effort insofar as school children's healthy diet is concerned. The DH will discuss with schools and look into improved ways of delivering information.

I believe it is not easy to change one's eating habit. Earlier on, Dr WONG raised a point concerning the problem of obesity faced by some teachers. It is relatively difficult to change one's long-term eating habit. At the same time, it is difficult for us to demand that every teacher maintains his or her figure at a standard size so that their students can take after. In fact, we do not necessarily need to do so in order to teach the students. Of course, if the messages conveyed by teachers are shared by their students, the effectiveness of the messages will definitely be enhanced.

MR BERNARD CHAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the supplementaries I heard Members raise earlier shifted from the soft drinks problem raised by me to a lunchbox problem, though lunchboxes are equally important.*

Madam President, soft drinks and certain beverages have a high sugar content. It was indicated by the Secretary that school children were encouraged to pick their own food. I wonder if they actually know that besides soft drinks, fruit juices would also be quite unhealthy since some of them have an even higher sugar content than soft drinks. What will the authorities concerned do to get

these messages across to school children? School children in general have the impression that fruit juice is supposedly healthy. However, numerous brands of so-called health beverage available in the market at the moment are not necessarily good for health.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese):

Madam President, the composition and nutrient content of different food items are set out in the Guidelines. As for the point raised by Mr CHAN concerning sugar, this substance is in itself a regular ingredient. However, excessive intake might pose a threat to health since it will bring about high calories. For instance, a cup of Coca Cola or other soft drink provides only 100 or so calories, whereas people in general require 2 000 to 3 000 calories a day. Therefore, I see no problem in occasional intake of soft drinks; only excessive intake will cause problems. Attention should instead be focused on a balanced diet. Now that Mr CHAN has raised this question, I will request the DH to look into the Guidelines again to see if they can ensure that schools would get the correct messages across to students. Such information and messages will be conveyed by the DH under the School Medical Service Scheme. I believe the eating habit of students can be effectively improved if schools can enhance their knowledge in this area.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fourth question.

Efforts Against Persons Taking up Employment Illegally in Hong Kong

4. **MR ABRAHAM SHEK:** *Madam President, regarding the Government's efforts against persons who take up employment in Hong Kong illegally, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the number of illegal workers arrested at construction sites last year; and*
- (b) *whether it will consider introducing amendments to the Immigration Ordinance to impose heavier penalties for breaching conditions of stay and remaining in Hong Kong without permission; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President,

- (a) In 2001, 260 illegal workers were arrested at construction sites.
- (b) We have put in place a comprehensive legal framework, targeting both employees not lawfully employable and their employers, as part of our combat against illegal employment.

Insofar as employees not lawfully employable are concerned, under section 41 of the Immigration Ordinance (Cap. 115), any person who contravenes a condition of stay applicable to him (for example, a visitor taking up employment) commits an offence and is liable to a fine at level 5 (that is, \$50,000) and imprisonment for two years. There is no sentencing tariff for breach of condition of stay. The penalties imposed in 2001 included fines between \$50 and \$5,000, and custodial sentences ranging from suspended prison terms to imprisonment for six months.

For illegal immigrants found at places of work, they will be prosecuted for illegally remaining and will be liable to a fine at level 4 (that is, \$25,000) and imprisonment for three years under section 38(1)(b) of the Immigration Ordinance. The sentencing tariff is imprisonment for 15 months for a plea of guilty and where there are no aggravating factors such as previous unlawful entry or use of a forged or other person's identity card to obtain some particular benefit. For defendants pleading not guilty but convicted after trial, the sentence can go up to imprisonment for 21 months and can be further enhanced in the case of a repeated offender. The penalties imposed in 2001 ranged from suspended prison terms to imprisonment for 15 months.

Insofar as employers are concerned, under section 17I of the Immigration Ordinance, any person employing those not lawfully employable commits an offence and is liable to a fine of \$350,000 and imprisonment for three years. The sentencing tariff is imprisonment for 15 months. The sentences imposed in 2001 included fines between \$3,000 and \$25,000, and custodial sentences ranging from suspended prison terms to imprisonment for 15 months.

Besides, construction site controllers are liable to be prosecuted under section 38A(2) of the Immigration Ordinance if it is proved that illegal immigrants are found on the construction site, or under section 38A(4) if it is proved that any person not lawfully employable has taken employment on the site. The maximum penalty for the offences is a fine of \$350,000. There was no conviction in 2001.

The current statutory scheme is comprehensive and generally effective in supporting our fight against illegal employment. We do not consider it necessary to raise the level of statutory penalties applicable to illegal employment for the time being. In the majority of cases, the Courts tend not to mete out penalties that are at or near the upper end of the current scale of penalties.

MR ABRAHAM SHEK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary pointed out in the last paragraph of part (b) of her main reply that the current statutory scheme is comprehensive; and the Secretary said in part (a) of her main reply that there were 260 such cases in 2001. Is the Secretary satisfied with the figure of 260 cases?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, illegal workers involved in these 260 cases included both mainland visitors and illegal immigrants, in which most illegal workers were mainland visitors and one illegal worker was a Vietnamese. As regards such kind of cases, in 1999, 600 people were prosecuted; last year, 260 people were prosecuted; and this year (as at September), 137 people have been prosecuted. Such figures reflect that the number of illegal workers presently working at construction sites, be they illegal immigrants or visitors, has dropped. We believe one of the reasons for the decrease is that amendments made by the Government to this Ordinance are effective. Mr Abraham SHEK may also be aware that initially only illegal immigrants were prosecuted, but later it was discovered that mainland visitors are also involved, that is, passports and two-way permits holders. So, the Government amended the Ordinance to provide that any person employing those not lawfully employable is liable to be prosecuted and subject to a fine of \$350,000 and imprisonment for three years and those unlawfully employed is also liable to very severe punishment. We think that since the passage of the

amended Ordinance, the problem of illegal workers at construction sites has become less serious in recent years.

MS LI FUNG-YING (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in part (b) of the main reply, the Secretary clearly said that construction site controllers are liable to be prosecuted under the Immigration Ordinance if it is proved that illegal immigrants are found on the construction site, or it is proved that any person not lawfully employable has taken employment on the site. In 2001, 260 illegal workers were arrested at construction sites but no construction site controller was convicted. Is this due to the fact that no prosecution was made by the relevant department or were there any other reasons? I hope the Secretary can provide a detail answer to this supplementary question.*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, the Government had prosecuted employers employing illegal workers and construction site controllers. According to figures at hand, in 2001, two construction site controllers were arrested because illegal immigrants were found on construction sites. Construction site controllers would be prosecuted if illegal immigrants were found in their construction sites. However, due to the different nature of construction sites, sometimes, it is difficult to find out which controller is responsible for employing the workers.

Furthermore, the authorities acting under section 38A(4) of the Immigration Ordinance (by proving that persons not lawfully employable have taken employment on a construction site) arrested seven construction site controllers in 2001, but the number of construction site controllers prosecuted was zero; one of the reasons being, though construction site controllers were arrested, sometimes no prosecution could be made for a lacking in sufficient evidence.

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said earlier that the situation in which illegal workers were found on construction sites was not very serious. Is this either because more frequent enforcement actions have been taken by the Government or because some illegal workers do not work on construction sites but have instead taken up decoration works or domestic work, thus making it harder for them to be discovered? Has the Secretary got any information on this?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, in fact, Mr TAM Yiu-chung's presumption is correct. One of the reasons for the decrease in the number of illegal workers prosecuted for working in construction sites is the enhancement of the law; and the other is the increase in the number of prosecutions and raid operations. For example, this year, the Immigration Department (ImmD) conducted nine joint operations with the police in raiding illegal workers and arrested 85 people in total. As for the other reason, this is certainly due to the increase in other categories of illegal workers in Hong Kong at present. Regarding the figures, in 2001, there were 600 illegal workers in construction sites, including both illegal immigrants and mainland visitors, while there were 7 386 illegal workers engaged in other types of work, including people who are suspected to be engaged in prostitution. Most of these illegal workers were suspected to be engaged in prostitution, while others worked in factories, restaurants, cooked food stalls, vegetable markets or even funeral parlours, monasteries, temples or homes for the aged. To target at the problem of these illegal workers, during the period from the beginning of this year to 22 October, the ImmD has conducted more than 2 800 raids.

MR SIN CHUNG-KAI (in Cantonese): *Madam President, as regards the main question raised by Mr Abraham SHEK, may I ask the Secretary whether the number of illegal workers has increased in the past three years? Mr Abraham SHEK only asked for the figure in 2001. I do not know why he did not ask about the situation in 2002 or 2003. Is there an increasing trend? If so, we should regard this as a sign of warning and make more efforts in this aspect.*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have some figures on illegal workers engaging in different types of work at hand. For example, as regards illegal workers working in construction sites in 1999, 785 were arrested; in 2000, 356 were arrested; in 2001, 260 were arrested, out of which 259 were from the Mainland and one of them was a Vietnamese. As at the end of September this year, 272 illegal immigrants were arrested. Therefore, the number of illegal workers working at construction sites has decreased. This may be due to the fact that the infrastructure development or construction industry of Hong Kong is not as prosperous as before and there has also been less news about the airport construction works or the Disney theme park construction works in Hong Kong. If there were such news, then it might

attract many Vietnamese to come to work in Hong Kong. As for illegal workers engaging in other types of work, especially those who are suspected to be engaged in prostitution, in 1999, 2 715 people were prosecuted; in 2000, 3 894 people were prosecuted; in 2001, 5 228 people were prosecuted and during the first nine months of this year, 5 906 people have already been prosecuted. Therefore, the number of illegal workers at construction sites has really decreased but the number of other categories of illegal workers, no matter whether they are involved in prostitution or work in restaurants, temples, homes for the aged, factories or retail shops have really increased.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I believe it is very easy to take action against illegal workers working in public place mentioned earlier by the Secretary, such as construction sites, restaurants or factories or even against illegal workers engaged in prostitution. However, some illegal workers are now illegally employed as domestic helpers. How can the authorities combat such activities effectively and is this situation serious?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, as regards the issue of domestic helpers, I do not know whether Mr Michael MAK is referring to legal visitors, regardless of whether they are from the Mainland or other places, who have taken illegal employment in Hong Kong such as taking care of children or elderly people in residential units. As regards this category of people, it is very difficult for the authorities to take prosecution actions because this is related to domestic work and the authorities need to gain access to the residential units in order to conduct searches or make investigations. Honourable Members may also be aware that gaining access to residential units is a very sensitive issue; and this is different from gaining access to an office because an office is a workplace while gaining access to other people's residence is an intrusion on their privacy. This is a very sensitive issue and we cannot lightly ask for such powers. Therefore, as regards cases where visitors are illegally engaged as domestic helpers, we have to rely on the public to make reports. In fact, among similar cases handled by the authorities, the majority is reported by members of the public. If they notice that their neighbour's visitor have started to take care of children or elderly people on a regular basis, I hope they would report such cases to the ImmD or through the hotline of the Labour Department.

MR JAMES TO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, among other categories of illegal work, prostitution is certainly a major category, but members of the public are generally more concerned about the type of work that would affect their employment opportunities, for example, interior decoration work, which Mr TAM Yiu-chung referred to earlier. On the basis of the trend witnessed by the Government, may I ask whether it will target at certain types of work when it urges members of the public to report illegal workers? I am saying this because when we meet members of the public on the streets, many of them would tell us about the special circumstances of certain trades, therefore, many Honourable Members might have received similar information. If the Government also collects such information, then can it target at certain trades such as interior decoration and try to encourage affected workers to report on contractors who employ illegal workers? Asking workers to make reports is a more direct approach and their information is more accurate. Will the Government consider these suggestions?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, we would certainly consider good suggestions, but sometimes, it would not be easy for the public to recognize or identify mainland visitors, illegal immigrants and new immigrants among workers whom a contractor brings along to work. But anyway, we agree that apart from gathering intelligence, searching premises, making prosecutions or conducting investigations at some commercial premises, it is also necessary to step up publicity against the employment of illegal workers. Therefore, in the area of on-air publicity, starting from 15 October this year, the ImmD has already broadcasted a 30 seconds API on the two wireless television stations against the employment of illegal workers through the Information Services Department. It has also printed many publicity leaflets to remind employers that they should not employ illegal workers. Furthermore, the Labour Department has also printed some pamphlets on publicizing against the employment of foreign domestic helpers and posted those pamphlets to the mutual aid committees of 9 500 housing estates and owners' corporations to remind them to keep an eye on the situation of illegal workers. We are willing to continue to look into these issues, employ effective measures and step up publicity in this respect.

MR NG LEUNG-SING (in Cantonese): *Madam President, may I ask the Government whether it has assessed the losses of local workers in terms of employment opportunities, resulting from the illegal labour problem in recent years; if not, will it consider making similar assessments in the future?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as I understand, the Government has never made such assessments. However, I would in co-ordination with the officers of various government departments, including the Labour Department and the Government Economist, look into the possibility of making assessments to find out the impact of illegal workers on the employment opportunities of local workers.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council has already spent more than 16 minutes on this question. We shall now move onto the last supplementary question.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the number of illegal workers arrested has been on the rise, but it seems that not many employers were arrested for employing illegal workers. May I ask the Secretary, has this situation arisen from the absence of a target in the law enforcement actions of the authorities or is it due to the fact that employers are protected under the relevant Ordinance, thus making it difficult for the authorities to effect arrests? Has the Government adopted any remedial measures in this area?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Madam President, employers can be divided into two categories. As regards construction site controllers or employers, the number of prosecutions made by the authorities is not high because certain restrictions are laid down when the relevant Ordinance was passed to prevent the abuse of power and people from being wrongly accused. As for the other category of employers, such as those who employ domestic helpers to perform unauthorized work, that is, employing domestic helpers to work in offices or some other workplaces, or perform unauthorized driving duties, the number of prosecutions made in this relation is also quite significant. In 1999, 393 employers were prosecuted; in 2000, 305 were prosecuted; in 2001, 310 were prosecuted; while during this year, 269 have been prosecuted.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fifth question.

Charge for Accident and Emergency Services at Public Hospitals

5. **DR LO WING-LOK** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it has been reported that the Hospital Authority (HA) is planning to levy a charge for Accident and Emergency (A&E) services at public hospitals at a rate of \$100, starting from the end of this year. In this regard, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:*

- (a) *the HA's purposes of introducing the charge, and whether the HA has evidence to show that the charge can achieve such purposes;*
- (b) *how the HA will assess the effectiveness of the charge in order to ascertain if the intended purposes have been achieved; and*
- (c) *the categories of persons who are exempted from the charge and the criteria for determining their eligibility?*

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

- (a) The review of the fee structure of our public health care services is one of the strategic directions proposed in the Health Care Reform Consultation Document. The purpose of this review is to ensure that our finite public funds can be targeted to provide the appropriate level of subsidies for the different types of medical and health services. The review examines how the relative priorities of services provided may be reflected in the subsidy level and how inappropriate use and misuse of services can be minimized. Following the review and any subsequent revisions of the fee structure, the level of charges will continue to be affordable. We will also build on our fee waiver system to assist those who have insufficient income or who have difficulty to pay for even the heavily subsidized services because of serious or chronic illnesses.

A&E service is designed for patients with emergency and life-threatening conditions, and is therefore very different from other out-patient services by nature. A&E service provided without a use charge serves as an incentive for misuse for non-emergency conditions which are more appropriately treated in primary care clinics. The total number of attendances in A&E departments has increased from 2.08 million in 1996-97 to 2 523 000 in 2001-02, a growth of 21% in five years. Of the 2 523 000 attendances in 2001-02, some 75% were classified as semi-urgent or non-urgent attendances.

Most developed economies have introduced a user charge for A&E service, and Hong Kong is a very rare exception to this practice. International experience also indicates that imposing a user charge for A&E service could discourage inappropriate use and reduce the total utilization by about 15% to 25%. At the same time, there is no evidence that such a user charge would lead to delayed health seeking by patients or higher eventual costs as illnesses have become more serious.

- (b) Upon implementation of new charges for A&E service, the HA will make use of the existing mechanism, which classifies A&E users into five different categories according to the seriousness of patients' illnesses, to closely monitor and evaluate the effects of the new fee charges. Specifically, the HA will evaluate the impact on utilization rate and usage pattern.
- (c) We are committed to upholding our long-held policy of ensuring that no one is denied adequate medical care because of insufficient means, and that appropriate assistance will be given to the lower income groups, chronic patients and the older persons with limited resources. After the introduction of A&E charge, the existing mechanism, designed for patients who have difficulty to pay for even the highly subsidized services because of serious or chronic illnesses to seek financial assistance from Medical Social Workers (MSWs) stationed in the public hospitals, will continue to apply.

DR LO WING-LOK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not mentioned anything about the financial situation of the HA in his reply to the part of the question on the purposes of introducing the charge. Can the Secretary assure us that the A&E charge is introduced not because the HA has to get some extra revenue due to its fiscal deficits?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, I have pointed out on different occasions that our new fee charging policy and the fiscal deficits of the HA are two different issues. The HA is entirely funded by the Government, and the Government would decide the amount of funding allocation to the HA in the light of the scope and quality of service acceptable to the public. When we work on the amount of subsidy to be granted to the HA, we would first deduct the fees we think the HA should charge the public before deciding on the actual amount of funds to be allocated. The present fiscal deficits were caused by other factors, which have no connection with the charges. It is an entirely different issue.

MR ERIC LI (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in part (c) of the main reply, the Secretary mentioned that chronic patients and lower income group may apply for fee waiver. As far as I understand it, the A&E charge is relatively low, could be only \$100 or so. If they have to go to the MSWs at the hospitals to go through a lot of administrative procedures before being granted a waiver, is it really worthwhile for them to apply for it? I wonder whether the Secretary would consider adopting some summary or more lenient methods to enable people such as recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) to get the waiver in a simpler manner?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, in fact, I have mentioned how the fee waiver system would be designed in parts (a) and (c) of the main reply, and the Consultation Paper has also touched on whether a secondary safety net should be set up in future. Under the present waiver system, there are still 30% of people who cannot afford to pay the existing charges. Of the 30% of people, about 60% are patients receiving CSSA. Generally speaking, they can be granted a waiver as long as they have the verification from social workers. For the remaining 40%, about

80% of them belong to other lower income groups. They generally have a lower income and they have some other burdens such as the need to provide for old people living in homes for the elderly. Therefore, though their incomes may not be as low as CSSA recipients, their spending could be greater than ordinary families. So, depending on their actual financial situations, social workers may decide whether partial or full waiver of the charge should be granted. Apart from the financial conditions of the patients, their medical conditions are the secondary criterion the social workers may have to consider. If the patients are suffering from chronic illnesses, they may have to stay in the hospital for a longer time. Although a patient is only charged \$68 a day in a public hospital, a prolonged stay of several years, 10 years or 20 years in the hospital will lead to a huge cost which they cannot afford to pay. So the social workers will make the decision according to the medical conditions of the patients. The third criterion that the social workers may consider is the relationship between the patient and his family. Even if a patient comes from a well-off family, should his relationship with the family be bad one, the latter may not be willing to pay a higher charge. Therefore, basing on the above criteria, the social workers will then decide whether a partial or full waiver of the charge should be granted.

I also agree with Mr Eric LI that A&E charge is a specific charge, so it is unnecessary to design an additional waiver system. However, as we shall focus on subsidizing the lower income group in future, we have to tighten the waiver system and design a simpler method of enforcement. We are now studying the issue.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Honourable Members, as there are still 13 Members waiting for their turn to raise supplementary questions, so please keep your questions as concise as possible.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, after listening to the reply of the Secretary, I think in fact we may just be using the existing waiver system, that is, relying on the assessment of social workers and only some of the people will be exempted. However, some of the people would fall into the category of borderline cases. They might not be so desperate, but if they have to go through so many procedures, they might not wish to be bothered with it*

because they would find it too troublesome and time-consuming. The Secretary said in the main reply that no one would be denied adequate medical care because of insufficient means. But conversely, after the introduction of the A&E charge, would there be people falling into the status of having insufficient means as a result of seeking medical treatment at the A&E departments? Today there is a press report which says that \$100 is a full week's living expenses for an old lady

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Lee, please raise your supplementary question direct.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): *Will the Secretary consider implementing a comprehensive waiver system without "taking away rice from a beggar's bowl"?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, there are in fact many ways to help those in the lower income group. Be it CSSA, medical charges or school charges, there are various ways to help people in the lower income group. But, of course, there are certain limits to the help being offered and we have to find out how the procedures involved could be simplified. As far as the A&E charge is concerned, as the treatment provided by the A&E departments is a kind of specific treatment, ordinary people would not go there for treatment every day, and if they do so, they are actually misusing the service. In fact, they can use other medical services. Therefore, one of the purposes of introducing the A&E charge is to reduce the number of cases of misuse of A&E service. People of the lower income group may go to other ordinary out-patient government clinics to seek treatment. In view of this, the people's livelihood would not suffer as a result of this measure. People who have insufficient means may seek help from social workers. According to my estimation, an ordinary person may not go to the A&E departments even once in their lifetime. Of course, some patients of chronic illness would go to the A&E departments for treatment, but they would not approach the social worker to apply for exemption and get financial assistance just because of the A&E charge. Now there are a lot of old people, people with little property or chronic patients who have already applied through the social workers for fee waivers.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the issue has aroused a lot of discussions in society recently. Although the introduction of the A&E charge or the increase in medical charges does not require the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, but by convention, government officials would usually come before the panels of the Legislative Council to explain to us issues of concern to society, such as the secondary safety net. Why does the Secretary not arrange a meeting with the relevant panel of the Legislative Council to discuss the issue?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, we have repeatedly discussed in the panel the long-term strategy of medical financing and the fee charging concept. We have promised in the relevant panel meeting that we shall make a briefing in the latter part of this year. We shall conduct internal analyses in the Government and arrive at decisions, and we would also discuss the issue in the meeting of the relevant panel.

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

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, by convention, the relevant Policy Bureau of the Government would come before the relevant panel of the Legislative Council to hold discussions on the issue before a policy decision is made. So far, the Secretary has not made any such arrangements. May I ask the Secretary to tell us the reasons for not doing so?*

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

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, I believe I have already answered it. All along, we have been discussing the fee charging policy and the financing policy in the meetings of the relevant panel.

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, has the Secretary considered that, though the purpose of introducing the A&E charge is to discourage inappropriate use of A&E service, however, to patients who really have to use A&E service, is this charge unreasonable? And if patients of acute conditions are hospitalized, they will have to pay the \$68 daily hospital maintenance fee on top of the A&E charge. Is this a case of double charging and unfairness? Will this violate the original intent?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, the whole fee charging policy and structure serves not only one objective, actually there are four objectives. Irrespective of the time, public funds are always limited. So we have to decide which services should charge a higher fee. Another objective is to use the fee charged to influence the utilization rate. These two objectives are implemented in such a way that they would complement each other. Therefore, it is not our objective to levy charges on those who really have to use A&E service.

There are two objectives in the introduction of the A&E charge, one of which is to decide how we should subsidize general services with priority. We think that we should subsidize A&E service partly, but not on a 100% scale. We think this is reasonable. The people do not use A&E service all the time. So the charge on a one-off service will not cause a great impact on the people. However, if it is a service used by the people on a more frequent basis, fee charging will have a greater impact, for example, the hospitalization services. Sometimes, the patients may need a longer time to recover. So though the hospital maintenance fee is not high, only \$68 daily, a stay of 100 days could mean a very heavy burden on the people. As this one-off service charge will not cause a great financial burden on the people, the charge levied is justified.

We also have another view. A&E service includes treatment and inspection, so the costs involved are higher. The average cost per visit of a patient is over \$500. As for some more urgent services, the cost is even higher, therefore we have to recover part of the costs. However, hospitalization is another issue. The patient attends the A&E departments to receive treatment, but he is hospitalized for follow-up treatment. So this is a two-part medical care. In view of this, it is reasonable to introduce the A&E charge.

MISS MARGARET NG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, my supplementary question is also on the level of the A&E charge. How the A&E charge of \$100 is determined? Madam President, I know the relevant panel has discussed the issue. Unfortunately, I have not followed up this issue very closely. However, I heard the Secretary say that, even for those who are really in life-threatening conditions and are not abusing the service, the Government will still charge them \$100. Has the Government considered that how many people will be affected by this charge which may stop them from using A&E service?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, in fact, we still have not made any decision on the amount of the charge. Presently, people in the community speculate that the fee would be \$100. I have said on more than one occasion that, our study indicates that an acceptable level to most people would be between \$80 and \$120. We may use this as reference and estimate that once the A&E charge is introduced, what level of charge will be generally acceptable to the public. So the speculated \$100 charge is spread around in this manner. However, the Government still has not decided whether the A&E charge should be \$100, \$80 or \$120. \$100 is just one of the indicators under consideration.

As for the A&E charge, I have just explained that, relevant data in other countries and territories show that the A&E charge will impact on the utilization rate of A&E service. However, there is no evidence indicating that the introduction of the A&E charge would affect the lives or the medical conditions of patients. Presently, we would generally grant fee waivers. Even if fees are charged, the fee would usually be collected after the patients have received treatment. Therefore, there is no question of patients not getting A&E service just because they do not have any money. I must say that people seeking treatment at A&E departments may not be really suffering from urgent illnesses. Of the attendances at A&E departments, 75% of them are non-urgent or semi-urgent attendances. Only 25% of them are really urgent attendances.

MISS MARGARET NG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered my supplementary question. Will the level of the A&E charge affect or stop patients from using A&E service, and is this reasonable?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, I do not see any evidence showing that the introduction of the A&E charge would stop people from seeking treatment at the A&E departments.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has maintained that this is not the only objective. In the first and third paragraphs of part (a) of the main reply, the Secretary stressed that the introduction of the charge could discourage inappropriate use or misuse and reduce the total utilization by about 15% to 25%. In fact, the HA presently is operating a triage system: the first, second and third categories are urgent cases, whereas the fourth and fifth categories are non-urgent cases, in which patients may have to wait for three hours. In fact, the Secretary could solve the problem by only focusing on the fourth- and fifth-category patients. Why should he also levy charges on patients of the first to third categories?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, in fact, I have mentioned in part (a) of the main reply that, the introduction of the A&E charge is just a part of our review of the fee charging system of our entire public health care service. The purpose of our review is to examine how we can pool together our public funds in the fee charging system of our public health care service to provide the appropriate level of subsidies for the different types of services. Therefore, the introduction of the A&E charge is not aimed at solving the misuse problem alone. As explained earlier, the ordinary people will not use the A&E service all the time. As for patients of chronic illnesses or the old people who suffer from multiple illnesses, some of them have already applied for partial or full waiver of fees. So the introduction of the charge will not affect them. Regarding the use of A&E service by the general public, as the cost of service is relatively expensive, so an appropriate fee should be charged. In future, as we have to reflect relative priorities, so fees would be charged for expensive services. Besides, after implementing the charge, we can convey a message to the people, that A&E service is not a general service — it is a valuable service which should not be misused.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): We have spent more than 20 minutes on this question. I would allow one last supplementary question from Members.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary replied that the charge is introduced to reduce inappropriate use and misuse. Has the Secretary considered or studied why the people would use A&E service inappropriately or misuse it? As far as I know, and the Secretary may clarify that, actually it is because the out-patient clinic service is inadequate — especially the out-patient clinics do not provide night service, and that there is no service during weekends and public holidays. As a result, the people are forced to use A&E service. This is not misusing the service. Can the Secretary clarify this point? And even if a charge should be levied, can it be introduced only after the out-patient clinic service has been improved?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, I would like to stress that, the introduction of the A&E charge is only one of the aspects under consideration in the review of the fee charging system of our entire public health care service, and the charge is introduced not just for the sake of collecting A&E charge. There are many factors leading to the misuse of A&E service. Just as Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has said, some of the cases are caused by the absence of out-patient clinic service during that particular period of time. However, when we look at the peak hours of the A&E departments, out-patient clinic service is usually available. For example, the periods of time between 9 am and 12 noon, as well as between 7 pm and 10 pm in the evening are the busiest time of the A&E departments. But out-patient clinic services are available during these periods of time. And the quotas of these clinics are usually not taken up fully. At the moment, many private clinics provide 24-hour out-patient clinic services. So it is incorrect to say that the people do not have a choice. They are just opting not to use those services. As the A&E departments are more convenient and also they are usually better equipped, so the people would usually opt to seek treatment there. We did not say that the patients had abused the service, because that is the choice of the patients. However, we cannot provide the service completely free of charge. If no charge is levied, more and more people will be encouraged to use the service due to the greater convenience of the A&E departments. International experience has proved this point, and also highlighted the fact that the introduction of the A&E charge could affect the utilization rate, and will make the people use A&E service in an appropriate manner.

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

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, I asked the Secretary whether it is possible to introduce the A&E charge only after the out-patient clinic service has been improved. The Secretary said that during the daytime when out-patient clinic services are available, the people still use A&E service. Can the Secretary tell us whether the utilization rate of daytime out-patient clinics is very high? Is there a situation that there are people who cannot receive treatment because they are unable to receive treatment within the daily quotas?*

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

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as I understand it, the appointments within the daily quotas are not 100% taken up in the out-patient clinics. On average, the utilization rate of the daily quotas is quite high. But there are individual clinics with appointments untaken. I have mentioned in the main reply that we are reviewing the fee charging system of our entire public health care service, not just A&E service. We think that a charge must be levied on A&E service and that we must enhance the quality of our out-patient clinic service. Presently, we are stepping up the training of doctors of family medicine with the aim of improving the quality of our out-patient clinic service and upgrading its effectiveness.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Last question.

Fare Differences Between Air-conditioned and Non-air-conditioned Buses Plying Same Routes

6. **MR LAU KONG-WAH** (in Cantonese): *Madam President, regarding the fare arrangements for franchised bus routes served by a mix of air-conditioned (A/C) and non-A/C buses, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the factors for determining the differences in full journey fares between A/C and non-A/C buses plying the same routes;*
- (b) *of the average, maximum and minimum percentage points by which the fares of A/C buses are higher than those of non-A/C buses plying the same routes; and*
- (c) *whether it will request various bus companies to undertake a comprehensive review on whether there is room for downward adjustment of A/C bus fares; if it will not, of the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, in determining fares of franchised bus routes, including the fares of air-conditioned (A/C) and non-A/C buses operating on the same routes, bus companies take into account factors such as the operating conditions, journey distance, service nature, the bus type to be deployed and operating costs, passenger demand pattern and the fares of other similar public transport services.

At present, only the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) and the New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (NLB) have routes operating with a mixed fleet of non-A/C and A/C buses (mixed routes). As at end September this year, the KMB and the NLB operated 99 and six mixed routes respectively. The fare differential between the two types of bus is between 21% and 49% with an average of 37%.

We will examine the question of A/C bus fares from an overall perspective. As I said in my speech during the motion debate on public transport fares in this Council last Wednesday, we have already encouraged franchised bus companies to reduce their fares or offer fare concessions as far as possible after taking into account their own operating conditions. I hope they will consider the question of A/C bus fares in the context of the overall fare issue. The KMB has also indicated that the existing fare differential between A/C and non-A/C fares will be reduced when the mixed routes are converted into A/C bus routes in future. We will continue to discuss the relevant details with the KMB and urge the company to have the programme implemented.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, we can see from the second paragraph of the main reply that the fare differentials between the two types of bus are between 21% and 49%, so the disparities are in fact very great. For this reason, there is indeed room for a fare reduction insofar as this type of bus is concerned. Specific to these A/C buses charging excessive fares, may I ask the Secretary whether there is any measure to bring the fare level down? Furthermore, does the Secretary agree that there is room for downward adjustment of the fares?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, the fares of A/C buses are approximately 30% to 40% higher than that of non-A/C buses, according to the information compiled in 1998. In the meantime, the fuel costs of A/C buses are approximately 30% higher than that of non-A/C buses. Of course, that is not the only factor affecting the overall upward adjustment of operating costs. However, we understand that to a certain extent, the operating costs of A/C buses are higher than that of non-A/C buses. As to the question of whether the fares of A/C buses should be reduced, we have been discussing the issue with various bus companies all along. Mr LAU has reflected the case to me, and we are working on the issue continuously. As to whether there is room for a downward adjustment of A/C bus fares, I think the answer is positive.

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

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, perhaps the Secretary has misapprehended my supplementary. My supplementary was not about the fare differentials between A/C buses and non-A/C buses. The second paragraph of the main reply indicated that the fare differential between the two types of bus was between 21% and 49%. In view of the fact that the fare differentials of some routes is as high as 49%, there is certainly room for a fare reduction. Given the costs are the same, the fuel costs are the same, the costs of the vehicles are the same; the fares being charged are not the same at all. If the Secretary agrees that there is room for downward adjustment, what practical action can be taken?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, Mr LAU has pointed out that the fare differential of some routes is higher than other routes. I have discussed the matter with the relevant bus companies and learnt that there are different factors determining the fares of different bus routes. If we keep on arguing with the bus companies, they may argue that since the costs of non-A/C buses are on the low side, therefore the fares can be set at a lower level, or they may even argue that the age of buses does matter. I clearly understand the concerns of Mr LAU and I will follow up the matter.

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the third paragraph of the main reply mentioned that the KMB had indicated that the existing fare differential between A/C and non-A/C fares would be reduced when the mixed routes were converted into A/C bus routes in future. May I ask the Secretary, by the time the mixed routes are converted into A/C bus routes, if there will be only A/C buses operating? If yes, how can the fare differential be possibly reduced?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, in the course of converting non-A/C routes into A/C routes, some of the buses may still be non-A/C, therefore the fare differential still exists. We hope bus companies will reduce the fare differential gradually.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, in fact, bus fares are approved by the Transport Department (TD). Why does the TD approve the fare with a differential as high as 49%? Why is the average fare differential as high as 37%? Although the Secretary explained earlier that the fuel costs of A/C buses were 30% higher than that of non-A/C buses, and the costs of purchasing A/C buses were 30% higher than that of non-A/C buses, the service life of a bus is no less than 10 years, and the fuel costs just make up a fraction of the total costs. In fact, it is possible to estimate the difference purely from the costing perspective. However, why did the TD approve fares with a differential as high as 49%? Can the Government take immediate action against this? Actually, the average fare differential of 37% is unreasonable.*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, as far as the differences between the two types of bus are concerned, besides their prices, the rate of depreciation is also a very important factor. Old buses, which are mainly non-A/C buses, can be accounted for full depreciation since they are older, therefore the costs are lower. On the other hand, since A/C buses are newer, their costs are higher; consequently, there is a fare differential from 21% to 49%. As to the question of whether there is room for downward adjustment, I have listened to the opinions of Honourable Members on that and we are striving to bring the gap down.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary has not answered my supplementary. I really want to know what the actual costs are after calculation. Is the fare differential of 49% too excessive? My supplementary is by what percentage the fares are higher than the actual costs.*

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

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, just now I have answered that it depends on the age of different vehicles. Since the years of service of each bus are not the same, the costs are therefore different. Consequently, there is a fare differential ranging from 21% to 49%.

MR TAM YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, just now the Secretary mentioned that the fuel consumption of A/C buses was higher than non-A/C buses by 30%. I wish to ask the Secretary to verify some information in this respect. According to sources from the industry, the basis for calculating the fares of A/C buses was determined by the A/C system, which was powered by a separate engine. Except the NLB, the A/C systems on all A/C buses are now powered by the main engine, thus the fuel consumption would be significantly reduced as opposed to those powered by a separate engine. If that is true, will adjustments be made according to the new circumstance?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, we do not have the information, perhaps Mr TAM may provide us with the exact report. Since we do not have the information on separate engines and combined engines respectively, I am therefore unable to answer the supplementary of Mr TAM.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, at present, the KMB is still operating 99 mixed routes. However, if my memory has not failed me, the KMB commissioned the City University of Hong Kong to conduct a survey in 1996 in order to find out whether or not the public had a preference of A/C buses over non-A/C buses. The result of the survey showed that over 90% of the respondents supported the idea of purchasing more A/C buses. Yet six years have passed, the KMB is still operating 99 mixed routes. Should the Government encourage the KMB to continue with this mode of operation, or should it ask the KMB to reduce the number of either of the two types of bus? Does the Government think that fares should be determined by bus companies, or should the Government standardize the ratio between A/C buses and non-A/C buses?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, the TD has formulated a timetable to gradually convert non-A/C buses into A/C buses. In fact, each route has a different timetable of conversion. At the present stage, we have conducted consultations at the district level and learnt that some people hope that non-A/C buses of lower fares will continue to run. Therefore we have to strike a balance. Nevertheless, on the whole, we have drawn up a timetable for the conversion of buses.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the fare differentials between A/C buses and non-A/C buses are very great, and the average is 37%. Many poverty-stricken people will choose to take non-A/C buses due to the fare consideration. Has the Government formulated any guideline to ensure bus companies will not reduce the frequency of non-A/C buses with a view to increasing the revenue, and to ensure no inconveniences will be caused to those who want to travel on non-A/C buses?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, the frequency of bus trips is determined in accordance with the circumstances of different routes. As to the frequency of the bus trips of A/C buses and non-A/C buses, we would conduct consultations at district level before deciding the number of buses for a certain route.

MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Cantonese): *Madam President, just now the Secretary said that there was room for a downward adjustment of bus fares and she would try her best to achieve that objective. As winter is drawing near, the disgruntlement of the public will escalate if they have to take A/C buses. It is because the commuters' need for A/C would reduce in winter times, however, bus companies just wish to charge more by providing A/C service. May I ask the Secretary if she will achieve some results before winter arrives?*

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(in Cantonese): Madam President, under different weather conditions, the operation of buses and the needs for A/C would differ. Besides controlling the temperature, the A/C system on A/C buses may also help to control the humidity and airflow. I agree with the view of Mr LAU that buses would consume less fuel in winter. In this connection, we will discuss it with bus companies.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Last supplementary.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary mentioned earlier that there were two different practices regarding mixed routes. That is, some routes would operate with A/C buses while other routes would not, and a government guideline was in place. May I ask whether there is any difference between the guideline regulating cross-harbour routes and the guideline dealing with non-cross-harbour routes of the KMB? What is the relevant ratio?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, is Dr HO questioning the ratio of A/C buses and non-A/C buses operating on cross-harbour routes? Am I right? Or Dr HO wishes to ask

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr HO, please repeat your supplementary.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the KMB is operating two types of mixed routes, namely cross-harbour routes and non-cross-harbour routes. Just now the Secretary said that there were guidelines for the ratio of A/C buses and non-A/C buses. Is there any difference between these two types of routes? What exactly is the difference?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, insofar cross-harbour routes are concerned, almost all buses are equipped with A/C systems. The major reason is that the buses are usually crowded and the air quality in the tunnels is by and large poor, therefore A/C buses are selected to provide cross-harbour service.

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

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Secretary said almost all of them were A/C buses, that means not all of them are A/C buses. I would like to know the exact ratio.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, will you provide Dr HO with a written reply?

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, I will answer the issue of the relevant ratio in writing. (Appendix III)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Question time ends here.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**Hospital Authority Taking over General Out-patient Clinics of Department of Health**

7. **MR MICHAEL MAK** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the scheme for the Hospital Authority (HA) to take over all the General Out-patient Clinics (GOPCs) of the Department of Health (DH), will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) of the financial and staffing implications of the take-over scheme on the HA, and whether the scheme will lead to the implementation of further enhanced productivity programmes by the HA;*
- (b) of the details of the conditions of service to be offered to the clinic staff who opt to take up the HA's employment; how the authorities concerned will ensure that these staff will all be employed by the HA with salaries and fringe benefits no less favourable than the existing level; and*
- (c) whether it will introduce voluntary retirement scheme or early retirement scheme for those clinic staff who are not offered employment by the HA; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

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

- (a) To better integrate our primary and secondary levels of medical services in the public sector and to promote the wider practice of family medicine, the management of the GOPCs will be transferred from the DH to the HA in the second half of 2003. To implement the transfer of these clinics the Government has approved a special one-off grant to the HA. These resources will cover the initial setup cost of the GOPCs after the transfer and the additional

operating cost during and in the immediate transfer period to enable a smooth transfer of services. In addition, we are now working out the recurrent resources which the Government will transfer from the DH to the HA to operate the GOPCs. The implementation of enhanced productivity initiatives is an ongoing process in the entire Government and all its subvented bodies including the HA. This has no specific relations to the GOPC transfer exercise. As to staffing, due to the introduction of family medicine, the mode of operation of the GOPCs under the HA would in the long run be different from that under the DH, hence necessitating changes in the staffing structure. The full staffing implications can only be finalized after the current resource for transfer has been finalized.

- (b) It is the policy that, the transfer of GOPCs should not jeopardize the legitimate claims of all affected GOPC staff as civil servants. The Government will first endeavour to redeploy them in the DH or other government departments. Staff who cannot be absorbed or redeployed within the Civil Service in the first instance will continue to work in the clinics as civil servants working in the HA until they are eventually absorbed by the Government or leave the Civil Service due to retirement or other reasons. For those departmental staff from the ranks of Senior Medical and Health Officer, Medical and Health Officer, Enrolled Nurse, Senior Dispenser and Dispenser who are not absorbed by the DH in the first instance, they will be given a period of two years to consider between two options, either as civil servants working in the HA or give up civil service status and take up the HA's employment. Staff taking up the HA's employment will be converted to a comparable HA rank on a point-to-point basis. The salary of all staff accepting the HA's employment will not be reduced by the conversion process. In addition to the basic salary, staff accepting the HA's employment will also, in accordance with the HA's current employment condition, receive a monthly allowance, which will be based on the salary point of the staff and the pension arrangement they have chosen.

- (c) As it is our objective that all GOPC staff will either be absorbed by the DH to its other operations or, continue to work in the clinics after the transfer (either as civil servants working in the HA or as the HA's employees), currently there is no plan to introduce a separate Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) just for the staff affected by the transfer exercise. However, if the Government decides later to introduce a new round of VRS service-wide, we will consider from an overall manpower point of view whether these grades should be included in the new round.

Delayed Opening of "Sheung Wan Gala Point"

8. **DR DAVID CHU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, the Financial Secretary raised the idea of promoting the development of the local community economy when presenting the Budget for the current financial year. Thereafter, the government departments concerned launched various projects throughout the 18 districts in the territory for promoting such development, and the first project launched to this end is the restoration of the former "Poor Man's Nightclub" in Sheung Wan. However, not only was the opening of the project delayed, but the facilities therein were also the subject of complaints from the stall holders. In the connection, will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the reasons for the delay in the opening of this project, and whether it was attributable to the fact that approvals from a dozen government departments were required for the project; and*
- (b) *the measures to prevent the recurrence of the problems encountered in launching the above project, so as to ensure that other projects for promoting the development of the local community economy will be implemented smoothly?*

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Chinese): Madam President, my reply to the above question is as follows:

- (a) The "Sheung Wan Gala Point" provides a public venue for shopping, eating and entertainment. As such, the design and construction of, and the use of materials for its stalls and ancillary facilities must comply with fire safety, hygiene and public safety requirements. For the implementation of this project, it also requires a number of permits and licences, including those from public utilities bodies for the installation of water, electricity and gas facilities, the "Consent on Commencement of Building Works" and "Occupation Permit" from the Buildings Department (BD), the "temporary food factory" licence and "temporary places of entertainment" licence from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), and so on. While this involves a dozen of organizations and departments, the government departments concerned, such as the BD and the FEHD, have made efforts to provide "one-stop" service for the applicant. To help the contractor start business as early as possible, the Central and Western District Office has played a co-ordinating and facilitating role to expedite the approval process. In fact, from the handover of the site on 1 August to the completion and trial operation of the Gala Point on 13 October, it took the contractor only about two and a half months' time to make the necessary preparations. As regards the complaint against the postponement of the opening date, we believe that it mainly resulted from the over-optimistic estimation of the contractor that the project could be open on 15 September and not from delays in the approval processes.
- (b) We will draw a lesson from this project and seek to further enhance communication with contractors in organizing similar projects in future. In addition, the District Officer of the respective district will continue to assume his role as a co-ordinator and facilitator so as to ensure the smooth commencement of the project concerned.

Surplus of Permanent Teachers in Establishment

9. **MR CHEUNG MAN-KWONG** (in Chinese): *Madam President, as there has been a decreasing trend in the number of school-age children in recent years,*

some schools have to reduce their classes due to insufficient intakes, resulting in a surplus of permanent teachers in the establishment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the respective numbers of government and subvented primary and secondary schools and special schools whose classes were reduced resulting in a surplus of teachers in each of the past three school years, together with the numbers of these schools by school districts;*
- (b) of the respective numbers of surplus primary school teachers who were provided with vocational counselling by the Education Department in each of the past three school years, with a breakdown by the subjects they used to teach and their years of service at the time they became surplus teachers;*
- (c) of the following figures, based on the latest population projections in various districts, in each of the next three school years in every school district:*
 - (i) the numbers of students in each grade from Primary One to Secondary Seven;*
 - (ii) the estimated numbers of classes to be reduced and surplus teachers; and*
 - (iii) the number of government and subvented primary and secondary schools and special schools affected; and*
- (d) whether it has assessed if the problem of surplus teachers will aggravate; if it will, of the measures to provide proper and equitable arrangements for the employment of the surplus teachers?*

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

- (a) Statistics of primary, secondary and special schools in the government and aided sectors, which have experienced reduction of classes due to movement of population, lowering of the birth rate, parental choices, and so on, in the past three years, is at Appendix 1.
- (b) Statistics of the subjects taught and the years of experience of the redundant teachers who have taken the placement service provided by the Education Department in the past three years is at Appendix 2.
- (c) (i) In the coming three years, the projected distributions of primary school age children (six to 11) breakdown by district and school age are at Appendix 3. The projected distribution of secondary school age children (12 to 18) by school age is at Appendix 4. As the planning of secondary school places is on a territory-wide basis, the projected distribution of secondary school age children by district is not available.

(ii) and (iii)

The situation of reduction of primary classes and the number of redundant teachers in different districts depend on a number of factors including the number of school age children, school facilities and parental choices. Overall speaking, as the number of secondary school age children is in an upward trend, there will be an increase in the total number of secondary classes.

- (d) The actual number of redundant teachers of each year will be determined by factors such as the number of classes of individual schools to be operated for the next school year, the wastage of the serving teachers, and so on. The Education Department is now reviewing the placement service. It is expected that detailed arrangement can be worked out in early 2003.

Number of Schools with Reduction of Classes in the Past three years

| <i>Districts</i> | | <i>Secondary Schools</i> | | | | | | <i>Primary Schools</i> | | | | | | <i>Special Schools</i> | | |
|------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | <i>Government</i> | | | <i>Aided</i> | | | <i>Government</i> | | | <i>Aided</i> | | | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
| | | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> |
| Central | and | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Western | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wan Chai | | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Eastern | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Southern | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Islands | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Yau Tsim Mong | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Shum Shui Po | | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kowloon City | | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Wong Tai Sin | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Kwun Tong | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sai Kung | | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kwai Tsing | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Tsuen Wan | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tuen Mun | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Yuen Long | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Tai Po | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 8 | 13 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| North | | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Sha Tin | | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 1 | 2 | 4 | 38 | 27 | 28 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 91 | 60 | 140 | 6 | 6 | 11 |

Appendix 2

Statistics of Redundant Teachers in Aided Primary School
Having Taken the Placement Service

Table 2A : Breakdown by years of continuous teaching experience

| <i>Year of receiving the placement service</i> | <i>Year of continuous teaching experience</i> | | | | | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| | <i>five or below</i> | <i>six to 10</i> | <i>11 to 15</i> | <i>16 to 20</i> | <i>21 to 25</i> | <i>26 to 30</i> | <i>Over 30</i> | |
| 2000 | 149 | 47 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 18 | 15 | 259 |
| 2001 | 104 | 20 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 148 |
| 2002 | 243 | 70 | 20 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 6 | 375 |

Table 2B : Breakdown by major subjects taught

| <i>Year of receiving the placement service</i> | <i>Major Subjects Taught</i> | | | | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>Chi or Chi+ Math+ Gen</i> | <i>English</i> | <i>Music</i> | <i>PE</i> | <i>Putonghua</i> | <i>Others</i> | |
| 2000 | 75 | 69 | 20 | 39 | 3 | 53 | 259 |
| 2001 | 39 | 35 | 16 | 19 | 6 | 33 | 148 |
| 2002 | 120 | 84 | 24 | 45 | 11 | 91 | 375 |

Projected Distribution of Primary School Age Population
(Aged six to 11), 2003-05

Table 3A : Breakdown by district

| <i>District</i> | <i>Year</i> | | |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> |
| Southern | 18 410 | 17 690 | 17 000 |
| Central and Western | 14 440 | 13 950 | 13 650 |
| Wan Chai | 7 540 | 7 200 | 6 920 |
| Eastern | 37 280 | 35 330 | 33 040 |
| Islands | 9 200 | 10 720 | 11 620 |
| Kowloon City | 23 260 | 22 710 | 21 670 |
| Yau Tsim Mong | 15 950 | 16 360 | 16 650 |
| Sham Shui Po | 22 400 | 22 190 | 22 360 |
| Wong Tai Sin | 31 110 | 29 660 | 27 670 |
| Kwun Tong | 39 390 | 38 440 | 37 370 |
| Sai Kung | 30 470 | 31 790 | 30 790 |
| Sha Tin | 42 750 | 40 530 | 38 010 |
| Tai Po | 22 810 | 21 120 | 19 360 |
| North | 26 730 | 25 570 | 25 130 |
| Kwai Tsing | 33 850 | 33 730 | 33 410 |
| Tsuen Wan | 18 690 | 18 390 | 18 520 |
| Yuen Long | 54 050 | 52 970 | 51 000 |
| Tuen Mun | 42 030 | 39 150 | 35 960 |
| Total | 490 400 | 477 500 | 460 100 |

Notes: (1) Figures are derived from the 2001-based projected population distribution by District Council district provided by the Working Group on Population Distribution Projections of the Planning Department in August 2002.

(2) Figures in each district are rounded to the nearest ten while figures for all districts are rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus, figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

Table 3B : Breakdown by single age

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Year</i> | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> |
| 6 | 70 600 | 62 800 | 59 500 |
| 7 | 77 200 | 72 600 | 64 900 |
| 8 | 82 800 | 79 500 | 74 900 |
| 9 | 84 700 | 85 400 | 82 100 |
| 10 | 87 200 | 87 800 | 88 500 |
| 11 | 87 800 | 89 400 | 90 100 |
| Total | 490 400 | 477 500 | 460 100 |

Notes: (1) Figures are derived from the 2001-based Population Projections provided by Census and Statistics Department in May 2002.

(2) Figures in each age are rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus, figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

(3) In general, students at the age of six to 11 will be studying Primary One to Primary Six respectively.

Appendix 4

Projected Distribution of Secondary School Age Population
(Aged 12 to 18), 2003-05

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Year</i> | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> |
| 12 | 86 700 | 89 300 | 91 000 |
| 13 | 88 300 | 87 900 | 90 600 |
| 14 | 91 000 | 88 900 | 88 600 |
| 15 | 86 600 | 91 100 | 89 000 |
| 16 | 83 200 | 86 600 | 91 100 |
| 17 | 84 400 | 83 900 | 87 300 |
| 18 | 84 800 | 83 900 | 83 400 |
| Total | 605 100 | 611 500 | 621 000 |

Notes: (1) Figures are derived from the 2001-based Population Projections provided by Census and Statistics Department in May 2002.

(2) Figures in each age are rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus, figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

(3) In general, students at the age of 12 to 18 will be studying in Secondary One to Secondary Seven respectively.

Operating Environment of Public Markets

10. **MR TAM YIU-CHUNG** (in Chinese): *Madam President, in view of the economic downturn, weak consumer sentiment of the public and the operational difficulties experienced by tenants of public markets, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) whether it will implement measures to reduce the operating costs of the public market stall tenants when the rent-freeze period for public markets expires at the end of this year, thereby reducing people's daily expenses; if it will, of the details;*
- (b) whether it will lower the rentals of public market stalls, in particular those for commercial premises and stalls in old markets; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (c) of the measures in place to improve the operating environment of public markets?*

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

(a) and (b)

Stall rental is only one of a number of elements that make up the operating cost of public market stall tenants. There are other non-premises related operating expenses incurred by the tenants which are outside the control of the Government.

In 1998, the rentals of public market stalls were reduced by 30%. Since then, the stall rentals for markets managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) have been frozen at the 1998 level. As a result of the 30% rental reduction and the freezing of rental since then, the current rentals for most public market stalls are far below the corresponding market rents, which the Rating and Valuation Department has assessed with due regard to the general drop in market rentals since 1998.

The Administration is subsidizing the operation of the FEHD-run markets at a rate of over \$100 million per annum. We do not consider it appropriate to increase the subsidy beyond its current level which is already very significant by any standard, particularly in view of the forecasts of government revenue and expenditure.

(c) Apart from maintaining public markets in good conditions, the Administration carries out capital improvement works in a number of markets every year with a view to enhancing their operating environment. In 2001-02, a total of nearly \$100 million was spent on such capital works. The scope of improvement works covers:

- upgrading of fire safety installations;
- improvement to electrical and mechanical installations such as lifts and escalators;
- improvement to ventilation systems;
- enhancement of illumination facilities in public areas notably market entrances and major passageways;
- replacement of floor tiles and/or lime-washing of internal walls and ceilings;
- face-lifting of market entrances and external walls,
- retrofitting of facilities for the disabled;
- refurbishment of toilets; and
- improvement to surface drainage systems.

The actual list of improvement works items depends on the specific conditions and constraints of individual markets.

On top of the above improvement works, a Market Manager Scheme has been implemented in four markets since March 2002.

Under this Scheme, the FEHD recruits well-qualified and experienced property managers from the private sector to take charge of the day-to-day management of public markets. These managers are tasked to identify and implement measures to improve the operating environment of markets in consultation with the tenants concerned. The FEHD will keep the Scheme under review and consider extending it to more markets as necessary.

We regard environmental improvement to public markets as a joint responsibility of the Government and incumbent stall tenants. By keeping their stalls clean, hygienic and tidy as well as enhancing the competitiveness of their goods and services in keeping with changing customer needs and behaviour, stall tenants can contribute significantly to improving the operating environment of public markets.

Outsourcing of Crowd Control Work at Boundary Control Points

11. **MR AMBROSE LAU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it has been reported that the Immigration Department has contracted out the crowd control work at the boundary control points at Hung Hom, Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok to a private security company in early October this year in order to release resources for setting up additional immigration counters. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) of the numbers of security guards of the contractor deployed to each of the boundary control points;*
- (b) of the amount of money saved per year through the above contracting-out arrangements, and how the savings will be deployed; and*
- (c) since the security guards of the contractor are not government officers and do not have law enforcement powers, whether the authorities have assessed if the contracting-out arrangements will undermine the quality of crowd control service or incur enforcement problems; if they have, of the outcome?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) In order to achieve more effective deployment of resources, the Immigration Department has been engaging a private security company to undertake crowd control work at four boundary control points since early October this year. At present, the company deploys a total of 17 staff at the control points at Sha Tau Kok (six persons), Man Kam To (four persons), Hung Hom (four persons) and Lok Ma Chau (three persons).
- (b) The contract-out arrangement above is made on a trial basis for three months. If implemented on a long-term basis, we estimate that about \$3 million can be saved every year. Savings thus achieved can, for example, be used to create about 10 Senior Immigration Assistant posts so as to provide additional counter staff at boundary control points to cope with the ever-increasing cross-boundary passenger traffic.
- (c) The scope for contracting-out is limited to crowd control duties inside and near the Immigration Arrival and Departure Halls. Since staff of the private security company so engaged must have crowd control expertise and training, the quality of crowd control services would not suffer. On the other hand, execution of powers and duties under any immigration-related legislation, such as detention and escort, will continue to be performed by disciplined staff of the Immigration Service. We therefore do not expect any problem in law enforcement.

Concessionary Rent-free Periods Offered to Cyberport Tenants

12. **MS AUDREY EU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it is learnt that the Government has offered concessionary rent-free periods to companies leasing offices at the Cyberport. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the total number of tenants at the Cyberport who have been offered concessionary rent-free periods, as well as the average duration of the rent-free periods, the total floor area and the total amount of exempted rents involved; and*

- (b) *whether it is an established practice for the Government to offer rent-free periods to private companies that lease government property; if so, of the rationale for such a practice; if not, the criteria adopted and considerations involved in exceptionally offering rent-free periods to tenants at the Cyberport?*

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

- (a) The Government has set up the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, a private company wholly owned by the Financial Secretary Incorporated (FSI), to implement, operate and manage the commercial portion of the Cyberport. The Company operates on market and commercial principles. Given the limited number of tenants who have currently signed up with the Company, that the Company has to keep the information in the lease documents signed with its tenants confidential, and to avoid unnecessary speculation in this respect, the Government is unable to provide the requested information.
- (b) In cases where commercial principles are adopted in leasing government properties, the Government follows the normal market practice and can offer appropriate rent-free periods to tenants from private enterprises. The offer of rent-free periods by Cyberport is not exceptional.

Service Contracts of Government IT Projects

13. **MR SIN CHUNG-KAI** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the service contracts of government information technology (IT) projects, including outsourcing contracts, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the statistics on the service contracts outsourced to local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in each of the past three years, including the number of contracts, the contract sums and the ratio of contracts outsourced to foreign companies in Hong Kong;*

- (b) (i) *of the average percentage of the manufacturing processes performed outside Hong Kong (including the Mainland) among all the manufacturing processes stipulated in the service contracts concerned in each of the past three years;*
- (ii) *whether it will consider stipulating the ratio of the manufacturing processes to be performed outside Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (iii) *whether it has formulated measures to ensure that the bulk of the manufacturing processes stipulated in the service contracts are performed in Hong Kong, so as to improve the employment situation of the local IT industry and ensure that local IT companies can truly benefit from the government expenditure on IT projects; and*
- (c) *whether it has stipulated entry requirements for employees of service contractors, such as requiring that some positions in the contracts can only be filled by degree holders and not by non-degree (such as higher diploma) holders, even if the latter have received relevant professional training in post-secondary institutions and have had many years of relevant working experience; if so, of the details of such entry requirements and the reasons for stipulating such requirements; and whether it has considered if the stipulation will deprive non-degree holders of employment opportunities?*

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

- (a) Up to June 2002, outsourced government IT projects were mainly implemented under two service contracts previously signed by the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD). The contracts were awarded by open tender to two foreign multinational companies registered in Hong Kong. Over the past three years (from October 1999 to June 2002), the two contractors have undertaken 700 IT projects for the Government with total contract sums of about \$483 million. Six local SMEs, as sub-contractors, have worked with the two contractors on the IT projects. Since the

actual division of work between the contractors and their sub-contractors on individual projects is a matter of their own business co-operation arrangement, we do not have detailed information.

The ITSD introduced the Information Technology Professional Services Arrangement (ITPSA) in late June 2002 to replace the two previous service contracts. Under the ITPSA, the ITSD awarded a total of 23 service contracts to 12 companies which can bid for various government IT projects during the contract periods of 30 to 48 months. Of these agreements, eight were awarded to local SMEs, one to a local and large enterprise and 12 to foreign multinational companies registered in Hong Kong. The ratio of local SMEs to foreign multinational companies is 1:1.5.

Under the ITPSA, seven government IT contracts with total contract sums of about \$2.6 million were awarded to local SME contractors, and 18 contracts with total contract sums of about \$21 million were awarded to foreign multinational companies registered in Hong Kong during the period from 27 June to 30 September 2002. In terms of the number of contracts awarded and contract sums, the ratios of local SMEs to foreign multinational companies are 1:2.6 and 1:8 respectively.

- (b) (i) The information provided by the contractors shows that during the period from October 1999 to September 2002, the manufacturing processes of all the 726 IT projects awarded either under the two previous ITSD service contracts or the ITPSA were conducted locally in Hong Kong.

(ii) and (iii)

According to the information provided in (i) above, all the manufacturing processes of government IT projects outsourced under the abovementioned contracts have been conducted locally in Hong Kong. For the time being, the Government has no intention to impose any restriction on the proportion of manufacturing processes to be conducted outside Hong Kong. However, depending on the actual needs of individual projects, we may require the contractors

to station staff in Hong Kong to manage the projects and provide related professional services. In such cases, the related work will be carried out locally in Hong Kong.

- (c) The requirements in respect of employees of government IT contractors as stipulated by us in the abovementioned service contracts depend on the needs of individual projects, and the requirements are set on the basis of relevant skills and working experience rather than the academic qualifications of the employees.

Tunnel Surcharges Imposed by Mobile Phone Service Providers

14. **MR NG LEUNG-SING** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding the lawsuit filed some time ago by a mobile phone user against his mobile phone service provider for collecting tunnel surcharge from him, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *it knows the criteria adopted by mobile phone service providers for determining tunnel surcharges; if it does, of the details; and*
- (b) *there is any mechanism in place to regulate the tunnel surcharge to ensure that the form of collection and the amount of fee charged are fair and reasonable to mobile phone users; if there is, of the details?*

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

- (a) At present, we have a total of 11 networks run by six mobile service operators, none of which is dominating the market. Our mobile market is one of the most competitive in the world. Subject to the fair competition provisions and based on the premise that consumer interest will not be adversely affected, mobile service operators are allowed to determine their charging principles or methods, including whether to collect tunnel surcharges and the level of charges, in accordance with market forces. In these circumstances, the Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) will not intervene in, nor require the mobile service operators to notify it of, the charging principles or level of charges.

- (b) The OFTA does not regulate the mobile phone tunnel surcharges. However, mobile service operators must be in strict compliance with sections 7K to 7N as added by the Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance 2000 which prohibit them from engaging in any anti-competitive practices such as price-fixing agreements. Besides, the OFTA issued a voluntary Code of Practice for Mobile Service Contracts in October 2001 to enhance the transparency of charging methods and ensure the fairness of operator practice. Operators, for example, have to make the key contents of the service contract clearly visible, or display them under special marking, and have to give at least 30 days prior notice before any tariff change.

Applications for One-way Exit Permits on Grounds of Reunion with Spouses

15. **MR JAMES TO** (in Chinese): *Madam President, regarding applications by Hong Kong people's spouses in the Mainland for One-way Permits (OWPs) for settlement in Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *whether it knows which authority in the Mainland is responsible for the standardized handling and assessment of applications for OWPs submitted via the Exit and Entry Administration Department of the Public Security Bureau in various cities or counties;*
- (b) *whether it is able to approach the relevant authority in the Mainland to enquire about the nation-wide number of applications for OWPs on grounds of reunion with spouses that are waiting for vetting and approval; if it is able to do so, whether it has made the enquiry and the number obtained; if the number may not be published, the reasons for it; if it is unable to make enquiries with the relevant authority, the reasons for it; and*
- (c) *among holders of OWPs who entered Hong Kong in 2000, 2001 or the first six months this year for reunion with their spouses, of the respective numbers who had been married for a period of "less than five years" or "five to less than 10 years" when they arrived?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Chinese): Madam President,

- (a) According to information announced by the mainland public security authorities in the Mainland, mainland spouses of Hong Kong residents applying OWPs to settle in Hong Kong should submit applications to the Exit and Entry Administration Department of the Public Security Bureau in the city or county where his/her household is registered (if the applicant is registered in large or medium-sized cities, he/she should approach Public Security Sub-offices). After processing, the relevant authorities will send the processing results to the Exit and Entry Administration Department of the Provincial Public Security Bureau for vetting. In accordance with the quota specified for different categories of applicants and the prevailing Points System, the Provincial Public Security Bureau will arrange for the applicants to go to Hong Kong for settlement.
- (b) According to the latest information provided by the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration of the Public Security Ministry in the Mainland, as at the end of November last year, about 160 000 applications from mainland residents for entry into Hong Kong for settlement were under processing by various provinces and cities in the Mainland. There was no breakdown of the number of applications under the category of "separated spouses". It should be pointed out that the order for entry into Hong Kong of these applicants is determined according to the length of separation of the couple, not the timing of submission of applications. In consequence some mainland residents under the category of "separated spouses" choose to lodge their applications only when they have obtained the requisite points.
- (c) Based on the information furnished on arrival by holders of OWPs entering Hong Kong for settlement in 2000, 2001 and 2002 (January to June), the numbers of entrants who had been married with their spouses in Hong Kong for a period of "less than five years" or "five to less than 10 years" are set out below. These figures are compiled strictly on the basis of information provided by OWP entrants upon their arrival in Hong Kong. In addition, although some entrants have provided information relating to their marriages

with Hong Kong spouses, they might have secured their entry into Hong Kong through categories other than "separated spouses".

| <i>Period of Marriage</i> | <i>2000</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002 (January to June)</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Less than five years | 403 | 392 | 154 |
| Five to less than 10 years | 11 946 | 14 522 | 11 409 |

Promotion of Local Artistic Creation

16. **MR ALBERT CHAN** (in Chinese): *Madam President, at present, artistic works and sculptures are displayed at public places, such as the airport, roadsides and parks, for landscaping purposes. In connection with the selection and purchase of artistic works, as well as the promotion of local artistic creation, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) of the information pertaining to the artistic works purchased in each of the past five years for display at public places, including their quantities, costs and places of origin;*
- (b) whether it has concrete plans to display more works of local artists in public places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (c) of the measures and policies adopted for promoting local artistic creation and public support for such creation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS (in Chinese): Madam President, my replies are as follows:

- (a) The information regarding the artworks acquired by government departments and displayed at public places in the past five years is provided below:

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Quantity</i> | <i>Amount (HK\$)</i> | <i>Place of Origin</i> | <i>Remarks</i> |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) | | | | |
| 2000 | 11 | 5,074,080 | Hong Kong | Including public artworks purchased by the Provisional Regional Council in 1999. |
| 2002 | 6 | 2,230,000 | Hong Kong | |
| Architectural Services Department | | | | |
| 1998 | 1 | 500,000 | Hong Kong | |
| 1999 | 11 | 1,600,000 | Hong Kong | |
| 2001 | 3 | 950,000 | Hong Kong Mainland China | 2 pieces 1 piece |
| Housing Department | | | | |
| 1997 to 2002 | 26 | 8,178,583 | Hong Kong | Completed 16 pieces of the artworks were acquired in collaboration with the LCSD. |
| | 15 | 4,600,000 | Hong Kong | Estates concerned under planning/construction. |
| | 2 | 1,100,000 | Hong Kong preferred | Estates concerned under planning/construction. |
| Total | 75 | 24,232,663 | | |

The above information has not covered the public artworks purchased by public bodies such as the Airport Authority and MTR

Corporation Limited (MTRCL), or minor purchases of artworks for decoration of public areas made by various government departments.

- (b) As the responsibility for the promotion of local art mainly lies with the LCSD, an Art Promotion Office was set up under the department in March 2001 with the aim to promote public and community art by working with local artists and art promotion organizations through various channels. The Office, in collaboration with the Housing Department, has organized the "Public Art Project — Installation of Public Artworks at Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung", which involves commissioning local artists for the production of 29 pieces of artworks to be displayed along the Art Path in Yat Tung Estate. The project was launched in 2001 and will be completed by 2003. In 2002, the LCSD launched the "Public Art Scheme 2002" open competition. The winning local artists will be commissioned to produce six pieces of artworks for display at the department's six cultural venues. Public art schemes of this kind will be organized regularly. In addition, the Office provides professional advice on display of public artworks, and encourages other departments and organizations to acquire artworks from local artists. Such departments/organizations include the Highways Department, the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation and MTRCL.

Apart from acquiring public artworks directly, the LCSD also joins hands with various organizations to promote display of artworks at public areas. Through the implementation of programmes such as the "Mobile Art Gallery", "Artists in the Neighbourhood Scheme", "Art Care" and "Airport Cultural Displays Project" with New World First Bus Services Limited, MTRCL, Art in Hospital organization and the Airport Authority respectively, works of art have been/will be put on display for short periods on buses, inside MTR stations, hospitals and the airport for public appreciation.

Other government departments also contribute to the promotion of local art. For example, the Office of the Telecommunications Authority will organize the "Art Space", which will display new media artworks by Hong Kong artists, in late 2002 to tie in the ITU

TELECOM ASIA2002, while the Territory Development Department is planning to put up some local/overseas artworks along the waterfront promenade and open space adjacent to the cruise terminal in their South East Kowloon Development project.

The LCSD also noted that many other government departments, such as the Government Property Agency, Trade and Industry Department, Highways Department, Planning Department, Housing Department and Architectural Services Department, are prepared to consider adding artistic elements to or displaying artworks at properties or projects within their purview. Radio Television Hong Kong is also considering display of artworks at the Broadcasting Museum in their new headquarters being planned in Tseung Kwan O.

- (c) The Administration's cultural policy is to provide an environment in which the pursuit of artistic and cultural enrichment forms part of the everyday life of Hong Kong people. We also aim to foster professionalism and expertise in the cultural field, and to nurture creativity in the arts.

The Government performs its role in promoting and encouraging the development of arts and culture mainly through the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (ADC) and the LCSD.

The ADC promotes arts and culture through the implementation of proactive projects involving different arts forms and the provision of one-year/three-year grants and project grants to local artists and arts groups. Meanwhile, the ADC has commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a "Research on Public Arts", the findings of which will shed light on how the Government should promote public art in future.

The Art Promotion Office and the Hong Kong Museum of Art of the LCSD regularly organize large-scale programmes to promote art creation, such as the "Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial", "Artists in the Neighbourhood Scheme" and "Public Art Scheme". These programmes offer opportunities to all local artists through open competitions, and there will be presentation of awards,

sponsorship of the production of artworks and organization of exhibitions of artists' works. As regards the promotion of public support for local art creation, the LCSD, besides providing professional advice, also proactively approaches other departments, organizations, groups and communities, with a view to forming partnerships to enhance the public's awareness of and support for local art creation.

Improvement to Service for Elderly Tenants of Housing for Senior Citizens

17. **MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN** (in Chinese): *Madam President, I have learnt that an elderly tenant of the hostel-type Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) provided by the Housing Authority (HA), whose memory was deteriorating with age, had failed to turn up at the office of the Social Security Field Unit (SSFU) at the specified time to complete the formalities required for continuous release of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payments, thus resulting in the SSFU concerned withholding his/her CSSA payments for a period of time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *whether it has measures to improve the existing service to prevent recurrence of similar incidents; if so, of the details;*
- (b) *whether the health condition of elderly tenants of HSC flats is kept in view by any government department or non-governmental organization (NGO); if so, of the responsible department or organization; if not, whether resources will be allocated for the provision of such service; and*
- (c) *of the duties of wardens of hostel-type HSC?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD (in Chinese): Madam President, given the limited information available to us regarding the case mentioned in the question, we are not in a position to comment on the specifics of the case. We will therefore give a general reply to the various parts of the question.

- (a) CSSA cases are required to be reviewed regularly so as to establish the recipient's continued eligibility for assistance. Reviews are normally conducted at intervals of six months to three years, depending on the nature of the case. As the case nature of single elderly recipient is normally quite stable, these cases are not subject to a regular review. Instead, an annual random check of such cases will be conducted. In the course of the random check, if an elderly recipient cannot be reached by telephone, further efforts would be made by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) staff to contact the recipient through home visits. The CSSA payment will only be stopped when it is clearly established that the recipient cannot be contacted. The SWD reviews internal procedures both in the light of experience and periodically so as to improve the existing service.

For vulnerable elders, the SWD's social workers will, upon referrals, for example, by the Housing Department or the SWD's SSFUs, or through the elders' own approach, visit them (including those living in HSC), contact their family members or relatives, arrange an assessment of the elder's needs and devise an individual care plan. In the event that the elder is identified to have symptoms of senile dementia or other psychological problems, a social worker will arrange for him/her to receive psychiatric assessment and appropriate follow-up treatment. For those elders applying for CSSA who are certified by medical officers to be unfit to complete the necessary application procedures, the social worker will assist in recommending a trustworthy relative to act as the elder's appointee. Where no such person can be identified, a social worker can act as the appointee for the elder, complete the application procedure, and subsequently manage the elder's CSSA payment to meet his/her daily living needs pursuant to the Director of Social Welfare Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1096).

- (b) The SWD and NGOs provide a wide range of support services to elders, including those living in HSC, to meet their needs. Such major services including the following:

(i) *Elderly Service*

- Various kinds of elderly support and care services, including home help/home care/enhanced home and community care, carers' support service, day care centres, social centres/multi-service centres for the elderly; and
- The support teams for the elderly (STEs), through outreaching and referrals, provide services to vulnerable elders living alone, with limited social network, in poor health or with financial difficulties. Vulnerable elders will receive emotional support, introduction to community resources and simple personal assistance by the STEs. If necessary, needy elders can be referred for formal services. As at September 2002, 37 STEs operate throughout the territory.

(ii) *Family Service*

- There is also an extensive network of 66 family services centres/integrated family service centres, which serve the welfare needs of local residents, including elders residing in HSC. Social workers in these centres can also arrange for appropriate care services, for example, residential care and community care services, for the elders according to their assessed care needs.

- (c) HSC is provided with warden service to look after the management of the shared facilities in the hostel, and to maintain a satisfactory living and social environment for the tenants. A warden's main duties include ensuring the effective management and cleanliness of the shared facilities, and the satisfactory functioning of building services systems. He is also expected to pay attention to the tenants' general well-being and their adaptation to the living environment. Where necessary, the warden may also provide advice to tenants on their medical and welfare service needs, and assist in dealing with emergencies and accidents (see Annex).

Annex

Description of Main Duties of Warden of Housing for Senior Citizens

1. To be responsible for overseeing the order, cleanliness and the work of staff of the HSC.
2. To ensure the proper functioning of all systems including electricity, water, gas supply, drainage, fire fighting and other ancillary equipment in the HSC.
3. To promote co-operation among inmates in using the facilities of the HSC.
4. To attend to the general well-being of inmates such as assisting them to adjust to the new environment after moving in, and to give advice on medical or welfare services when necessary.
5. To assist in settling domestic disputes, within reasonable limits, amongst inmates and to maintain a harmonious relationship with inmates.
6. To ensure that house rules made by the Department are observed by inmates, to give verbal advice or warning, and to report difficult cases to the Housing Officer for further action where necessary.
7. To deal with emergencies and accidents (particularly after normal office hours) and to inform inmates' next-of-kin where necessary.
8. To ensure safe custody of all inventory items and stores.
9. To keep a system of records in respect of all inmates in the HSC.
10. To encourage participation of the inmates in social, recreational and other related activities organized by voluntary agencies.
11. To perform any other duties assigned by senior officers.

Effectiveness of Mother-tongue Education

18. **DR RAYMOND HO** (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council whether:*

- (a) *it has assessed, in the past three years, the effectiveness of using Chinese as the medium of instruction ("mother tongue education"); if so, of the criteria for assessment and the results thereof;*
- (b) *the Chinese language proficiency of those students who study in schools offering mother tongue education has improved as a result of receiving mother tongue education; and*
- (c) *apart from English language classes, other means of learning English are provided by schools offering mother tongue education?*

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

- (a) Since the Government implemented the Medium of Instruction (MOI) Guidance for Secondary Schools in 1998 with a view to enhancing students' learning efficacy, most secondary schools have adopted Chinese as the MOI. It has been generally recognized in the education sector that learning through an appropriate MOI (for the majority of students, it should be their mother tongue) helps enhance students' cognitive and learning ability. It facilitates more lively discussion in class, picks up the pace of learning, and promotes more in-depth learning. In the past three years, officers of the Education Department (ED) monitored the implementation of the MOI policy in schools through routine and focus inspections which further affirmed the above learning effects.

Separately, the Working Group on MOI jointly formed by the Board of Education and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research conducted an opinion survey on the MOI policy in June 1999 to gauge views from secondary school principals, teachers, students and parents. The findings revealed that mother tongue teaching enabled classroom teaching to be more versatile,

made it easier for teachers to engage students in in-depth discussion, and helped enhance teacher-student relationship and make classroom discussions more animated. These phenomena were very common even in schools with mostly academically low achievers.

Besides, the ED commissioned The Chinese University of Hong Kong in October 1999 to conduct a longitudinal study in about 100 public-sector secondary schools to monitor and evaluate the academic performance and personal development of students learning through different media of instruction. The study has covered the respective cohorts of Secondary One and Secondary Two students in these schools in the 1999-2000 school year and followed up on them until they completed Secondary Three and Four in the 2001-02 school year. The report is expected to be ready in 2003. The preliminary findings indicate that students in schools using Chinese as the MOI (CMI schools) have better performance in content subject learning especially in the subject of science. Their attitude towards learning becomes more positive. The ED has recently extended the study to cover development of these students in their senior secondary education until their completion of Secondary Five. Preliminary findings of the study will be available towards the end of 2003. The study will be completed in 2005, which will then give a more comprehensive evaluation of the MOI policy.

- (b) Based on schools' results in the Hong Kong Attainment Tests administered each year from 1998 to 2001, there is no significant change in the Chinese language standard of Secondary One to Secondary Three students in CMI schools. When The Chinese University of Hong Kong completes the above five-year longitudinal study, we would have more concrete and comprehensive data for evaluating students' Chinese language standard after the implementation of the mother tongue teaching.
- (c) Since the implementation of the MOI policy in 1998, the Government has endeavoured to help CMI schools strengthen students' learning of English. These secondary schools have been provided with the following additional support measures to facilitate them to create a favourable language environment:

- additional English language teachers to support extra-curricular activities for learning English;
- a recurrent English Language Grant for enhancing the teaching and learning of English. Schools may use the Grant for purchasing English learning materials and teaching aids, and for organizing extra-curricular activities for the English language subject;
- a one-off grant provided under the Language Fund in the 1998-99 school year to set up an English Corner in each school for enhancing the environment for learning English on the school premises;

In addition, CMI schools may effectively deploy school and community resources, available to all schools, to extend the scope of learning English through various measures such as:

- Schools may use the English Extensive Reading Grant to purchase English reading materials in support of their school-based reading programmes to encourage their students to have more exposure to English;
- Schools may also use the Capacity Enhancement Grant to hire outside services to organize English learning activities for enhancing students' language proficiency;
- The Curriculum Development Council encourages schools to promote "learning through reading", use information technology effectively, and adopt project learning, so that students may have the initiative to engage in independent learning outside the classroom. Schools may also extend the learning space of their students and provide them with life-wide language learning opportunities by making use of community facilities and resources, and taking part in the learning activities such as English Camp, overseas exchange programmes, and so on, organized by the ED or other organizations;

- Many schools have also made use of the allocations from the Language Fund and Quality Education Fund to organize English learning activities such as English Camp, English Day, English drama/opera, English radio/television broadcast in school and overseas exchange programmes, and so on, so as to provide students with a variety of experiences in English learning.

Tenancy Position of Cyberport Offices

19. **MS EMILY LAU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, when the Administration announced the Cyberport project in 1999, it claimed that the project aimed to create a cluster of leading information technology (IT) and information services companies in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the executive authorities inform this Council:*

- (a) whether the current tenancy position of the Cyberport offices meets the Administration's anticipated occupancy rate;*
- (b) of the name of each prospective tenant; whether the offices of these tenants are newly set up in Hong Kong or merely relocated from other parts of Hong Kong;*
- (c) whether the level of rents of the Cyberport offices is lower than that of the offices of comparable quality in private commercial buildings; if so, whether the unfavourable tenancy position of the Cyberport offices is the reason for the Administration's setting low rents to attract tenants; whether they have assessed if such a measure will result in a competition for profits with the private sector and deal a blow to the rental market of private commercial offices; and*
- (d) whether, having regard to the tenancy position of the Cyberport, they have assessed if the project has achieved its intended objective, and is attractive to the companies concerned; if an assessment has been made, of the outcome?*

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

- (a) For the office development of the Cyberport, Phase I was completed in April 2002, and Phases II and III will be completed between end 2002 and early 2004. So far, 13 companies and organizations have leased or committed to lease office space in the Cyberport and about 90% of the lettable space in Phase I has been taken up. We are satisfied with the current tenancy position.
- (b) The information concerned is in Annex. Though at present the number of newly set up offices in the Cyberport is limited, we are taking proactive measures to encourage overseas and mainland IT enterprises to launch their businesses in Hong Kong and in the Cyberport. We are in discussion with some of them to this end. Meanwhile, we should not overlook the attraction of the Cyberport to local enterprises. Its infrastructure, environment and facilities may attract them to sign up for expansion and new business opportunities.
- (c) It is difficult to make direct comparison between the rent level of the Cyberport offices with that in the private sector in other districts, in view of the differences in location, environment and supporting facilities as well as the restriction on the business profile of tenants.
- (d) So far, we have received a total of 94 applications. After vetting, 13 companies and organizations have either leased or committed to leasing office space in the Cyberport. It is most encouraging to note from our discussion with many tenants and prospective tenants that they are attracted to the Cyberport because of its state of the art IT facilities, campus-like environment, facilities in research, development and training, as well as the synergy to be unleashed among the cluster of like-minded companies and professionals. Initially, the Cyberport as a major infrastructure project to develop Hong Kong into a leading digital city has already made its first significant step forward.

Annex

List of Tenants/Committed Tenants of Cyberport offices
(as at 28 October 2002)

| <i>Tenants/Committed Tenants</i> | <i>Remarks</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. GE Information Services | A multinational company providing network and data centre infrastructure for B2B e-Commerce services globally. |
| 2. Microsoft | A multinational company and a leading software provider. It has recently acquired one more floor in Cyberport (in addition to the two floors leased earlier) to meet expansion needs. |
| 3. ESRI | A United States-based company providing Geographical Information System products. |
| 4. Sonera SmartTrust | A Finland-based company providing mobile communication and mobile-based services and applications. |
| 5. DBTRONIX | A local company providing security solutions for protection from breaches in Internet. |
| 6. Uni-Star | A local company providing incubator services for IT industry. |
| 7. PCCW | A Hong Kong listed company providing international, local and mobile telecom services, Internet and interactive multimedia services. |
| 8. Outblaze | A local company. Development and outsourcing provider of web-based |

*Tenants/Committed Tenants**Remarks*

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| | | communication and infrastructure software solutions. |
| 9. | A United States-based company ¹ | A company new to Hong Kong. It provides information security solutions for Internet, eCommerce and content protection. |
| 10. | University of Hong Kong | For setting up of "Cyberport Institute" to provide research and training facilities on site. |
| 11. | An Australia-based company ² | It provides software tools and professional services for business. |
| 12. | CSL | A local company providing telecom and mobile services. |
| 13. | Sybase | A multinational company providing technical services on business development and application solution development. |

1 The company prefers to announce its operation in Hong Kong later.

2 Negotiation entered the final stage. The company's name will be announced later.

Maintenance Works for a Government Car Park in Central

20. **MR ABRAHAM SHEK:** *Madam President, it was reported that, owing to leakage in the ceiling, the Transport Department (TD) had closed off 37 parking spaces in a government car park in Central since February this year. The Architectural Services Department (ASD) had commissioned a consultancy study on how to carry out the maintenance works and was planning to carry out the waterproofing works in January next year. Subsequent to media reports, the TD had stated that interim remedial measures would be taken with a view to reopening the parking spaces as early as possible. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *based on the hourly parking fees charged by the car park, of the annual income to be generated by the 37 parking spaces and the income foregone as a result of the closure;*
- (b) *whether the ASD's commissioning an outside consultant is due to its lack of resources and capability;*
- (c) *of the fees charged by the consultant, the time it has spent on the study and its findings; and*
- (d) *whether the TD had, before the media reports, considered taking any interim measures; if so, of its conclusion; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS:

Madam President,

- (a) Since February 2002, the TD had to suspend the use of a small number of parking spaces in the Star Ferry Car Park (the car park) to avoid causing nuisance to and ensure safety of the car park users. At any one time, the closed parking spaces were less than 10% of the total number of parking spaces in the car park. According to the TD's records, the maximum utilization rate of the car park reached 90% just once during the period from February to October 2002. Since the parking spaces available were not fully taken up, the question of revenue foregone did not arise.
- (b) The ASD has full technical capability to undertake the design and supervision of maintenance works for the car park. However, the workload of the ASD has increased considerably owing to the addition of \$1.5 billion worth of minor works for each of 2002-03 and 2003-04 financial years. Outsourcing of the maintenance works for this car park is therefore necessary.
- (c) The ASD commissioned a consultancy in July 2002 to investigate and plan for the maintenance works (including waterproofing) for the car park at a cost of \$190,000. The consultant started the study in late September 2002 and is expected to come up with

recommendations in two months. According to the consultant's preliminary findings, it is proposed that polyurethane waterproofing system should be used on the roof. We will invite tenders for the repair works in November 2002, for completion in January 2003.

- (d) It is not cost-effective to carry out interim waterproofing works for the car park during the wet season. With the onset of dry weather, the ASD has commenced temporary repair works using elastomeric coating in early October 2002. All but two affected parking spaces are expected to be reopened in October 2002. Temporary repair works for the remaining two closed parking spaces are not feasible because leakage is more extensive and cannot be adequately dealt with by the use of elastomeric coating.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motions. Two motions with no legislative effect. I have accepted the recommendations of the House Committee on the time limits. As Members are very familiar with the relevant time limits, I do not have to repeat them here. I only wish to remind Members that I am obliged to direct any Member speaking in excess of the specified time to discontinue.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): First motion: Transport needs of people with disabilities.

TRANSPORT NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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

The objectives of the Government's rehabilitation services are helping people with disabilities give play to their abilities as far as possible and encouraging their integration into society so that they can equally enjoy the rights enjoyed by other people. Surely mutual acceptance and co-operation is undoubtedly the ideal of every society, that is, people with disabilities and

ordinary people should equally be able to give play to their potentials. I am very glad that the Government's objectives are consistent with ours but it cannot just pay lip service without taking actions if it wants to attain the ideal. Unfortunately, the Government and public transport operators are usually just paying lip service.

We should start with transport services if we want people with disabilities to come out and integrate into society. Several disability groups and I have recently met with government departments and public transport operators, asking them to support the proposal to offer half fare concessions to people with disabilities and improve facilities. However, the Government and public transport operators have either given excuses to shirk responsibilities or put up a show in public. They would tell the public openly that they would take these proposals into consideration but in reality they are treating people with disabilities very coldly. Mutual acceptance and co-operation is evidently only a slogan of the Government and large organizations. It is the Government's excuse to gloss over its blemish in shirking responsibilities and the deceitful talk of large enterprises that only attend to the pursuit of exorbitant profits to the neglect of the people's livelihood.

It is a pity that some Members are going to oppose the motion today on the grounds that urging public transport operators to offer concessions is intervention in the market, same as the grounds on which they opposed Mr Andrew CHENG's motion last week. They will therefore stick to their principle and oppose the motion today. Madam President, the motion moved by me today requests the Government to urge various public transport operators to offer half fare concessions to people with disabilities and it only requests the Government to discuss with public transport operators. Will Members who are going to vote against this motion even disallow discussions? Actually, there are precedents for similar requests. For instance, the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) has recently offered concessions to domestic helpers but the KMB has not volunteered to do so and it has only done so after the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has discussed the matter with it. If Members attach so much importance to the principle, why do they not publicly denounced the EMB for intervening in the market? All people with disabilities in Hong Kong and I would like to ask these Members what principle they are insisting. Is it the principle of flattering large consortiums or following the lead of public transport operators? Are they only paying lip service and not going to

promote mutual acceptance and co-operation? I ask them not to use the free market as a shield to cover up their intention to help large consortiums do evil any more.

It is most reasonable to request half fare concessions for people with disabilities. Given their mobility difficulties, people with disabilities have to pay particularly high transport expenses for they have to be accompanied by other people when they go out. Offering concessions can reduce some of their expenses and draw their activity levels closer to those of ordinary people.

Information in the Special Topics Report No. 28 — Persons with disabilities and chronic diseases shows that 1.4% of people with disabilities live in the New Territories and their transport expenses are particularly high. Taking Tin Shui Wai as an example. It takes \$40 to \$50 to travel to and from Central. Not many people with disabilities, only 52 000 people, travel to work. It takes \$80 to \$90 for a person with disabilities living in Tin Shui Wai to travel to Central, accompanied by another person. Some people have come from Tin Shui Wai today and the high fares are really a heavy burden on them. As we can see, the wages of people with disabilities are lower than those of ordinary people. For example, the median wage in Hong Kong is \$10,000 but people with disabilities only have \$8,000. They make a lower income than other people but they have to meet the same high transport expenses, will they be less willing to go out? Will it constitute a barrier to their integration into society?

Perhaps some may wonder why public transport operators have to offer concessions to people with disabilities who already have a monthly disability allowance of \$1,260. Secretary Sarah LIAO made the same point when she answered my question on 9 October. Nevertheless, the disability allowance is even not enough to meet the medical expenses of people with disabilities. The Secretary for Health and Welfare said earlier that health care financing and an increase in medical charges may be necessary in the future. How will people with disabilities with an allowance of \$1,260 be able to meet their medical and transport expenses?

Besides, the allowance does not mean that it is not necessary to offer them concessions. Similarly, the elderly currently have an old age allowance but they are also offered transport concessions. How can society look after the elderly but not offer the same concessions to people with disabilities?

In fact, most people in the community agree that half fare concessions should be offered to people with disabilities. A disability group conducted a survey early this year and found that 84% of people supported offering half fare concessions to people with disabilities. The same group also conducted a similar survey this month and found that 90% of people supported the proposal, indicating that more and more people support offering half fare concessions to people with disabilities.

In fact, not only people in Hong Kong support this proposal. Let us look at the situation in foreign countries. Many countries have already implemented measures to offer transport concessions to people with disabilities. In Australia, people with disabilities over the age of 16 can take public transport free of charge and some places that are less developed than Hong Kong, such as the Philippines, Brazil and India, have also offered concessions to people with disabilities and even the Mainland has offered concessions to people with disabilities. Why can Hong Kong not adopt similar measures? The Government told us in the past that these countries could adopt such measures and offer concessions because those public transport operators were owned by the state. However, I do not think Hong Kong is in any way different because the Government has shares in and is a principal shareholder of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL). Why can the Government not take the lead to offer concessions to induce other organizations would follow suit?

At present, various public transport operators have not responded to the proposal for half fare concessions in a positive manner, which fully reflects that they just pay lip service without taking any actions. Mr John CHAN, Managing Director of the KMB, said that concessions would only be offered to people in need. Why do people with disabilities not have the need? I think that they precisely need assistance. Actually, the profits of public transport operators may increase rather than decrease if they offer concessions. As people with disabilities have to be accompanied by other people, the number of passengers will certainly increase after concessions have been offered, so, how can their income decrease? From the angle of money making, this is not a proposition of loss because their costs are fixed and their profits will only increase rather than decrease when there is an increase in the number of passengers. People with disabilities over the age of 60 account for 56.6% of all people with disabilities, that is, nearly 60% of them are offered or will be offered transport concessions for the elderly, therefore, the additional amounts of concessions to be offered to people with disabilities will not be considerable.

Madam President, concessions and facilities are mutually complementary and equally important to people with disabilities. If there are facilities but not concessions, people with disabilities cannot afford to go out and if there are concessions but not facilities, they can hardly go out. In particular, the design of various transport facilities is not people-oriented, and such facilities fail to cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

In fact, the existing Disabilities Discrimination Ordinance specifies that it is unlawful for public transport operators to discriminate against people with disabilities by failing to offer convenience for their use of facilities. However, most companies have taken advantage of the loopholes in the law and though they have provided the facilities, people with disabilities actually cannot use them. The Equal Opportunities Commission has received quite a number of complaints lodged by people with disabilities over the past few years and most of the complaints are against the railway corporations and bus companies, and the total number of complaints against them account for more than 50% of all such complaints. So, I think these public transport operators must improve the relevant facilities as soon as possible.

The publicity slogan of the MTRCL is "More Time for Life", but it appears that people with disabilities are "wasting time for life". More often than not, there is only one out-of-the-way exit in each MTR station for use by people with disabilities. Taking the Lam Tin MTR station as an example, Exit C is the only exit in the station with an access ramp for wheelchairs but it does not lead to such public facilities as clinics and hospitals that people with disabilities often visit and have to use. What is the use of the access ramp? It is a waste of money and the time of people with disabilities. As a matter of fact, the needs of people with disabilities have precisely been ignored.

Moreover, even after entering a station, people with disabilities have a long way to go before reaching the platform because only 24 out of 53 old and new MTR stations are installed with passenger lifts. Wheelchair users often have to wait for a certain period of time outside a MTR station before MTR staff come to their assistance and as they also have to use wheelchair aids, it will take an hour for them to reach the platform. What else is it if it is not a waste of time?

The KCRC is not much better than the MTRCL. For example, KCR stations are far away from the streets. Taking the Mong Kok KCR station as an

example, it is impossible for a wheelchair user to travel from central Mong Kok to the KCR station because they have to take several escalators. Lift maintenance by the KCRC that often takes two to three months is most disturbing and causes serious inconvenience to people with disabilities.

60% of people with disabilities mainly take buses besides the two railways but, as far as I know, only 25% of buses are installed with low floors needed by people with disabilities. Only 50% of the bus routes will be served by low floor type buses by 2006 and the full conversion to low floor type buses will not be completed in the foreseeable future. The slogan of the KMB is "KMB Services, Pursuit of Excellence" but how can it provide suitable services to people as publicized in its slogan if progress is made at a snail's pace?

Not only wheelchair users have difficulties in taking buses, the blind also have problems because it is not easy for them to board buses, and even harder for them to get off. We have requested time and again that buses should be installed with internal and external broadcast systems so that the blind will know when they should board and alight. Nevertheless, bus companies have all along refused to install external broadcast systems. Only 30% of the buses are currently installed with internal bus stop announcement systems, but most buses are also installed with multimedia broadcast systems that disturb the functions of the bus stop announcement systems. For this reason, the bus stop announcement systems exist in name only.

The transport barriers to people with disabilities are actually innumerable and the root of the problem is the perfunctory attitude of public transport operators. They think that they have done the task after making the most basic effort, without ever considering the practical needs of people with disabilities. Most importantly, it shows that they are not sincere at all.

It is a pity that the Government's monitoring of public transport operators is not strict enough, and it has performed even more badly in meeting the transport needs of people with disabilities. The Rehabus service is a live example. Data show that only around 4% of people with disabilities use Rehabus services. Why are there so few users? It is not because people with disabilities are not willing to take Rehabuses but the number of such buses are seriously inadequate. Are there enough Rehabuses when only 85 Rehabuses provide services to almost 270 000 people with disabilities?

The inadequate number of Rehabuses has caused many problems. Taking the dial-a-ride service as an example, booking for the service can apparently be made one week in advance but since demand exceeds supply, some groups often have to book such services half a year in advance to ensure that there are adequate Rehabuses to carry people with disabilities to take part in some activities. Madam President, how can such groups organize activities and how can they assist people with disabilities in integrating into society? We think that the cause of these problems is that the Government is not sincere enough in satisfying the needs of people with disabilities. Therefore, the motion moved by me today not only simply discusses how to offer half fare concessions and improve facilities. In fact, I hope that it can arouse the concern of the community about putting into practice the slogan of mutual acceptance and co-operation.

Actually, the demand of people with disabilities is very simple. They hope to enjoy equal rights to the use of public transport to enable them to move around freely and integrate into society like other people. Unfortunately, the existing transport arrangements completely fail to meet their demands. I hope the motion today can arouse the concern of the public, especially the Government and various public transport operators, about the problem.

I so submit.

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

"That, as existing public transport services are unable to meet the needs of people with disabilities for integrating into society and for travelling to work and to seek medical treatment, etc., this Council demands that the Government:

- (a) urge various public transport operators to offer half fare concessions to people with disabilities;
- (b) press various public transport operators to improve their facilities so as to reduce barriers to people with disabilities; and
- (c) improve the Rehabus service."

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

MR BERNARD CHAN: Madam President, it was not until I became a father about two years ago that I suddenly found walking along the street or taking public transport very difficult. Pushing a stroller with a baby in it is an obstacle course itself. This is especially the case in Hong Kong where pavements are far too narrow and public transport crowded with commuters.

If it is difficult for someone with a baby in pushchair in Hong Kong, what must it be like for someone who is confined to a wheelchair? It may be difficult for an able-bodied person to imagine how a person on wheelchair can move along the streets or take public transport on his own without difficulty.

At least one can always carry a baby on his back, which most people do. But if one is on a wheelchair, a simple journey and travelling may be a nightmare. Actually, I have heard many complaints from disabled people and other welfare groups.

In the past year, several non-governmental organizations have proposed to public transport operators to improve their services and provide concessions to the disabled. In June, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service together with other groups met the Commissioner for Transport on this issue. At the meeting, it was suggested that the concept of "transport for all" be implemented in all public transport policies.

The service of Rehabus is also inadequate. According to disabled groups, clients have to book the service three to six months in advance. This is, of course, inconvenient for the handicapped people, and will discourage them from taking part in community activities. It is sad to see that these people are being forced to stay at home because of difficulty in booking the service.

At present, there are already some concessions to disabled drivers. They may apply for exemption from payment of learners' driving licence fees, driving test fees and full driving licence fees. But these can benefit only the drivers, not the disabled passengers.

I believe that public transport operators should take their own initiative to consider offering special concessions to these passengers. By doing so, the companies can show the public that they do care about the community. They can create a better image while the handicapped can save money and be more active in participating community activities. This is a win-win situation.

This caring spirit is particularly important at a time of difficulties in present day Hong Kong. One may not feel the kindness of giving in a prosperous society. But at time of difficulties, giving freely to the needy is particularly touching.

Indeed, Madam President, there are many things that we must do if we are to be the "Manhattan-plus" of Asia, and match New York or London, and this is one of the things. For the sake of the disabled and everyone else, we must start planning these things for the better in Hong Kong. Thank you.

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

MS MIRIAM LAU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, people with disabilities are members of society. Like everyone else, they have the need to integrate into society, attend school, go to work and go shopping. Consideration must therefore be given to the needs of people with disabilities in the context of the public transport system to facilitate them to enjoy various transport facilities anytime, anywhere. Even the Government has once stated that its policy objective is to enable people with disabilities to enjoy all public transport services so that no special arrangements or special transport services will be required ultimately.

Public transport operators have, in recent years, strived to provide people with disabilities with "barrier-free" transport facilities. For instance, wheelchair aids, stair lifts, ramps, passenger lifts, and so on, are provided by the two railway corporations. Low-floor buses are introduced by bus companies to gradually replace old-styled buses. Although public transport operators strive to explore every means to make improvement, people who are not mobility-handicapped, due to their lack of first-hand experience, might not be able to fully appreciate the needs of people with disabilities. As such, I hope transport operators can continue to listen to the views of people with disabilities and make improvements accordingly.

Nevertheless, it takes time to build up a full "barrier-free" public transport system. Moreover, not all people with disabilities can utilize ordinary modes of public transport. There is a need for the Government to provide alternative modes of public transport. At present, a key alternative is Rehabus.

As the opportunities for people with disabilities to work and receive education have now been greatly enhanced, the supply of Rehabus service still falls short of demand, though additional buses are purchased every year to expand the fixed-route service. As a matter of fact, there is a constant rise in the number of people on the waiting list for the fixed-route Rehabus service. Up to August 2002, 119 people are still on the waiting list. If no one "gets off" (presumably no longer requires the service), people on the waiting list will be unable to "board" the Rehabus. They can only seek other solutions by themselves.

While the fixed-route service has failed to satisfy the demand, the dial-a-ride service is barely satisfactory. People with disabilities who need to travel to destinations outside the fixed routes have to make a telephone booking in advance. If the booking coincides with the peak period, it may have to be made six months in advance. It is easily understandable that this will seriously hamper the social activities of people with disabilities, because it is simply impossible for them to make arrangements with their friends to go shopping, watch a movie or dine out six months in advance.

Given the inability to shorten the waiting time for the fixed route and dial-a-ride services, the Government indicated in May this year that a study was being conducted to examine what arrangements could be made to provide transport services to people with disabilities to achieve optimum cost-effectiveness. The study has examined, among other things, various ways to grant subsidy, such as through the use of taxis.

In my opinion, it is worthwhile to explore in depth the feasibility of subsidizing people with disabilities, particularly the physically handicapped, in making use of taxis. At present, people with disabilities can enjoy the Rehabus service after paying an inexpensive fee, while the Government will subsidize the rest of the expenses. Last year, for instance, the Government made a provision of approximately \$26 million, and the Rehabus recorded 480 000 passenger journeys for the entire year. According to my calculation, it means that each user is given a subsidy of \$54 on average for each trip. The cost-effectiveness

might be enhanced if the same amount of subsidy is given to people with disabilities to take taxis instead. Furthermore, they can dial for taxis anytime, anywhere, without being subject to the present time constraints.

The Government had previously launched similar pilot schemes, but they ended in failure. This is because it was considered by some people with disabilities that the existing models of taxis might not be able to fully cater to their needs, particularly those confined to wheelchairs. It will be quite inconvenient for them for they must have their wheelchair folded and placed in the trunk before boarding a taxi. Nevertheless, I have been told that taxi operators plan to introduce a special taxi (also described as a multi-functional taxi) with larger space and a lifting platform shortly. I believe such taxis will be more suitable for use by people with disabilities since both the wheelchair and its user can be pushed into the cabin together. If such taxis are proved to be suitable for use by people with disabilities, it is possible for similar types of taxis to be introduced into Hong Kong. Actually, according to the information I have acquired, examples can be found in overseas countries where taxis suitable for use by people with disabilities have been introduced successfully. For instance, such taxis were introduced in Curitiba, capital of Parana in southern Brazil, as early as 1991. According to the data provided, taxi drivers in Curitiba carried 10 to 15 people with disabilities a day, and the scheme has worked out quite effectively.

As such, I hope the Government can expeditiously complete the relevant study and come up with a clear policy direction to enable the taxi trade to tie in with the Government's efforts.

The Liberal Party has all along believed that we must help those who are genuinely in need. Therefore, the Liberal Party will support this motion today. Mr Howard YOUNG will later speak on the position of the Liberal Party.

Thank you, Madam Deputy.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the Democratic Party supports the motion today. We agree that transport concessions should be offered to people with disabilities and transport facilities should be improved so that people with disabilities, like other people, can enjoy equal opportunities to participate in activities in the community, receive education, work and participate in social life.

Today, I would like to discuss in particular the offer of fare concessions to people with disabilities by public transport operators.

We all know that transport fares are high in Hong Kong, and the situation has recently become more evident. The exorbitant transport fares have all along been a cause of criticism by the public. Since 1989, there has been an 11% drop in the Composite Consumer Price Index and there have been substantial downward adjustments in the prices of food, clothing and housing. But there has been no reduction in transport fares that are closely linked with the people and such fares have conversely increased by more than 1%. The persistently high transport fares have pressed people with decreasing income and assets very hard, seriously affecting the livelihood of people with disabilities in financial difficulties.

A survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department last year indicated that the 20% employment rate of people with disabilities was lower than the overall employment rate. Even if people with disabilities have a job, their wage levels are generally lower than those of other workers. Restricted by their physical conditions, quite many people with disabilities can hardly travel to work and they can only rely on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payment of a few thousand dollars for living.

Moreover, low-income people also have limited choices in terms of places of residence and many people with disabilities live in the New Territories. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has just said that some people have come to Central from Tin Shui Wai today. Some people with disabilities live in Tuen Mun, Sha Tin or the North District and they travel frequently to the urban areas for work, so, their transport expenses at least exceed \$20 a day. Unlike ordinary people, people with disabilities have limited choices of public transport and quite a number of them will choose to take the railways which charge higher fares for the sake of more convenient access. Unlike us, it is not easy for them to take buses crowded with commuters, needless to say moving along the streets to switch to cheaper modes of connecting public transport.

I have also heard some people with disabilities say that they would rather stay home than go out to save money. If things continue this way, it will have adverse effects on the physical and mental health of people with disabilities.

Therefore, the Democratic Party agrees that transport concessions like those offered to the elderly and students should be offered to people with disabilities because we believe they also have financial needs and practical needs

of living. I also hope that they will be enabled have more opportunities of social contact.

Actually, transport concessions are offered to people with disabilities in mainland China, Taiwan and Australia. The Law for the Protection of People with Disabilities of the Mainland specifies that the blind can enjoy free in-town bus, tram, underground railway and ferry services, as part of the welfare for people with disabilities. In Australia, a disability allowance recipient who has attained the age of 16 years may apply for a free pass for public transport. The Philippines also provides people with disabilities with concessionary travel passes so that they will be offered concessions when they take public transport. Brazil even offers free travel to people with disabilities and people who accompany them.

Why are identical or similar benefits not given to people with disabilities in Hong Kong? Although the economic situation is worsening, most Hong Kong people understand the difficulties of people with disabilities and are willing to see them offered more transport concessions. The Democratic Party interviewed 600-odd people early this year and 80% of the interviewees agreed that public transport operators should offer fare concessions to people with disabilities and that the Government should encourage public transport operators to offer more fare concessions to people with disabilities to better promote their integration into society.

In fact, people with disabilities have the rights to integrate into society and I hope the Government will proactively encourage public transport operators to offer them transport concessions.

I so submit.

MR LAU CHIN-SHEK (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, over the past few years, I have very often come into contact with people with disabilities through the activities organized by an organization known as the Hong Kong Wheelchair Aid Service (Wheelchair Aid Service).

The Wheelchair Aid Service is a non-governmental organization formed by volunteers who are concerned about people with disabilities and is chaired by a caring doctor. The scope of services of the Wheelchair Aid Service is not restricted to personal support services for wheelchair users and it is prepared to

extend the clientele to families and offer assistance in respect of the problems faced by families. It is because the Wheelchair Aid Service thinks that wheelchair users will not only have mobility difficulties in daily life, their situation will also subject them and their families to pressures of life and psychological distress.

The Wheelchair Aid Service mainly provides three types of services: providing wheelchair users with personal support services, repairing wheelchairs for people in difficulties and providing wheelchair users with home alteration services. It has considered extending the scope of services to providing wheelchair users and their families with respite services and psychological counselling services, providing the children of wheelchair users with counselling services to enable them to understand and accept their wheelchair-bound parents and providing wheelchair users with employment counselling services.

I came into contact with wheelchair users face to face and talked to them through participation in the work of the Wheelchair Aid Service and gained an understanding of the barriers encountered by them in daily life and their thinking. I am deeply impressed by the volunteers of the Wheelchair Aid Service who are willing to participate in volunteer services after work without compensation and sincerely provide wheelchair users with services. They give me a deep impression that there are caring people around us.

I think that we need not only more voluntary organizations like the Wheelchair Aid Service to help people with disabilities integrate into society, but also the participation by the Government and public utility companies which is indispensable.

I would like to share with Honourable colleagues the story of Ah Ching, a wheelchair user. In mid-March last year, Ah Ching finally found a job, after painstaking efforts, as a clerk with a company in Hung Hom but there was no public mode of transport providing direct services from the area where she lived to her place of work. It was very difficult for Ah Ching to make several interchanges and the transport fares were pretty high because there was no half fare concessions, so, Ah Ching had to apply for Rehabus service. The employer initially encouraged Ah Ching to apply for Rehabus service and indicated that she could report duty after she got the service. However, Ah Ching could not get the Rehabus service even after she had waited for more than three months. Finally, the employer hired another person and Ah Ching did not get the job.

Today when there is a high rate of unemployment, it is already very difficult for wage earners to find a job, and it is even more so for people with disabilities to find a job. Even if they could luckily find a job, they have to encounter such difficulties as inadequate Rehabus service, high public transport fares and a lack of fare concessions. It is really disheartening to learn that they have to face so many difficulties.

The motion moved by Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung today not only reflects the opinions of people with disabilities and the interested bodies but also the common wish of mankind to promote mutual acceptance and co-operation in our community, equality and mutual help. I believe such strong opinions and wishes surpass the consideration of commercial viability and the Government's excuse of inadequate financial resources.

As far as I know, some public transport operators think that offering half fare concessions to people with disabilities will violate the principles of commercial operation, but I wish to say that public transport operators as members of society should and are duty-bound to promote the common social values. Now that all public transport operators have provided the elderly with fare concessions to show the community's respect for the elderly, why can they not provide people with disabilities with half fare concessions to promote mutual acceptance and co-operation in our community?

I hope the voting result on this motion will bring good news to people with disabilities.

With these remarks, I support Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's motion. Thank you.

MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, it is indeed a common phenomenon that people with disabilities will encounter many difficulties and barriers when they go out and use transport services. I once saw a disabled person on a wheelchair waiting for a bus. As the pavement is way higher than the road surface, the wheelchair jolted as it went near to the bus, and I saw a painful expression on the face of that disabled person. This instantly aroused strong feelings in me. Why do the authorities not build ramps at bus stops to facilitate access by disabled persons on wheelchairs? While this is only a trivial matter, it can show the community's care for people with disabilities.

Obviously, inconvenient access to buses by wheelchair users is the main reason why it is difficult for the disabled to move around. Of the existing 6 260 franchised buses, only 25% are accessible by wheelchairs, whereas the majority of them have not yet been retrofitted with access facilities for wheelchairs. Besides, the pavement kerbs often cannot link up with low-floor buses, thus causing a great deal of inconveniences to the disabled when they go out.

In all fairness, the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation and the MTR Corporation Limited have done a lot to cater to the needs of the disabled by providing a diversity of facilities and services, including wheelchair aids, lift platforms for wheelchairs, ramps, passengers' lifts, wide turnstiles and multi-use space in train compartments. Buses, however, pale in comparison in terms of convenient access by the disabled. According to a survey conducted by the Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong between September 2000 and January 2001 among the disabled on their views of the public bus service, 55% of low-floor buses failed to place the floor panel onto the kerb on arriving at the bus stop, thus making it impossible for wheelchair users to move into the bus on their own; 70% of the low-floor buses failed to provide bus-stop display screens and broadcast for people with visual and hearing impairment; and the findings also showed inadequate provision of the Rehabus service. From this, we can see that public transport services are still inadequate to fully meet the needs of people with disabilities and thus warrant improvement.

According to statistics, there are now close to 250 000 disabled people with mobility difficulty, and they are also the wealth of society. Many of them are disabled only physically but not in terms of their will. They have overcome difficulties that are inconceivable to the able-bodied and made extraordinary achievements in learning, work and social services, and their spirit is commendable. However, there are still many whose movement is restricted due to inadequate public transport facilities and services and they thus become fearful of stepping out of their home, not being unable to integrate into society and lead a normal life. Therefore, in view of the needs of a large number of people with disabilities for integrating into society and for travelling to school, to work and to seek medical treatment, public transport services must provide the necessary facilities to ensure convenient access by people with disabilities so as to satisfy their needs.

The Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong suggests that the authorities should build dropped kerbs at all bus stops. An access ramp zone should be designated between the bus stop and the road for low-floor buses to be linked up with the surface of pavement, so that passengers on wheelchairs can directly move onto the ground on alighting from the bus. The authorities should also require bus companies to purchase buses accessible by wheelchairs when they replace buses or acquire new ones. Public transport operators should provide as many as possible such facilities as handrails, low-floor entrance, broadcast system, and so on. The construction works of major pedestrian links on roads should be expedited to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The existing Rehabus service should be improved by increasing the number of Rehabuses and the frequency of buses running on fixed routes, expanding the existing routes, increasing the number of stops, and enhancing the dial-a-ride service for organizations to rent Rehabus on holidays.

All in all, the Government should encourage public transport operators to take corresponding actions to meet the needs of the disabled and to provide convenient transport services for the disabled as far as possible, in order to facilitate their full participation in the community and integration into society. Let us work together to foster a barrier-free and discrimination-free society full of love and care for people with disabilities.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MR MICHAEL MAK (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, as society advances and the people's thinking further liberalizes, and with the hard work of all sectors of the community, the concept of mutual acceptance and co-operation is being gradually realized in Hong Kong. The findings of many surveys also show a rising trend in the acceptability among the people of Hong Kong towards people with disabilities. However, whilst all sectors of the community are vigorously promoting a "barrier-free city", the support provided by society to people with disabilities still appears to be inadequate. The transport problems faced by them have not yet been resolved properly. They still face hurdles after hurdles and encounter barriers everywhere when they want to move around freely in this civilized city of Hong Kong.

According to the Special Topics Report No. 28 published by the Census and Statistics Department in August last year, a total of 18% of the population of Hong Kong are people with disabilities and patients of chronic diseases. Given that many of the disabled rely on wheelchairs to move around and the facilities provided by various means of transport still leave a lot to be desired and are inadequate, Rehasus has, therefore, become one of the most important means of transport for the disabled to go out for activities. But as the number of Rehasus is absolutely inadequate, coupled with such factors as the financial capability of the disabled, the disabled are subject to many inconveniences and financial pressure when they go out. To people with disabilities, a city full of barriers is a serious exploitation of their rights to employment, education, medical care, social life and participation in social affairs.

Madam Deputy, while many people are still biased against the disabled, there is actually no difference between the disabled and the able-bodied in respect of productivity and intelligence. All that the disabled lack is only some supporting facilities. In poor regions, people with disabilities may not have the opportunity to bring their talents into full play due to environmental factors. But in this civilized cosmopolitan of Hong Kong, people with disabilities should not be the subject of discrimination, and they should enjoy the rights to which they are entitled, including the right to access various kinds of transport facilities free of barriers.

However, it is heartrending to see that major public transport operators, despite having made sizable profits, as repeatedly mentioned in a motion debate last week when the persons in charge of certain public transport companies, such as Mr John CHAN of the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited, were denounced, have failed to assume their social responsibilities on their own initiative by providing concessions to people with disabilities. It was only until the public and various quarters of the community had made high-profile appeals to them that they reluctantly introduced some so-called concessionary measures. These petty concessions indeed lack the sincerity to genuinely return wealth to the people, and inevitably give people the impression that these companies are reaping extortionate profits at the expense of the people. In fact, to public transport operators that are already making enormous profits, the provision of fare concessions to the disabled is tantamount to redistributing a small amount of the wealth of society. It is also as easy as offering concessions to the elderly. Moreover, improving transport facilities to increase the patronage by people with disabilities is also conducive to promoting the objective of "a society for all".

The Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works, Dr Sarah LIAO, said in the Legislative Council last week that she would work in a gradual and orderly manner. But I think the Government, before awarding franchises to public transport operators in future, must attach the condition that the relevant company must provide fare concessions to people with disabilities.

Madam Deputy, public transport is an important means on which the disabled rely to participate in community life. Inadequate transport facilities and expensive fares would mean exploiting the freedoms of the disabled. Providing fare concessions to people with disabilities will absolutely not impede the business environment. Nor is it an instance of interfering with or upsetting free competition by administrative instruction, as described by some people. Rather, it is purely a moral aspiration. If there are Members voting against this motion on morality or abstaining in the vote, they are openly making themselves enemies of the disabled, in open confrontation with the disadvantaged groups in society!

Although the disabled have different forms of disabilities, they have time and again shown splendid performances in open competitions with their perseverance to strive ahead and strong willpower. For example, the Hong Kong team of disabled athletes won 18 gold medals on the second day of the Far East and South Pacific Region Games for the Disabled. The achievements that they have made with their hard work should be the pride of Hong Kong people. If all people in Hong Kong can be more caring to the disabled, their dignity will be enhanced and the quality of their living improved. The community at large will naturally become more harmonious and the spirit of mutual acceptance and co-operation will be further realized. Hong Kong, the Pearl of the Orient, will then shine all the more brightly. With these remarks, Madam Deputy, I support Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's motion.

DR LO WING-LOK (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, recently, I was privileged to be invited to act as an adjudicator for the "Ten Outstanding Warriors of Regeneration in Hong Kong" election campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to grant commendations to some people with disabilities for the way they face disabilities, overcome disabilities, and emerge from them to lead a new life. I am very happy to see that most of the participants are very active and optimistic.

Apart from helping themselves, they also help to take care of their family. Some also take part in voluntary work in addition to their own jobs to help other people with disabilities. Being one of the adjudicators, I certainly had the opportunity and time to talk to them, and one of the topics of our conversations was to understand how their needs are met. For instance, when I talked to a wheelchair-bound participant, I tried to find out how he could cope with his everyday transport needs. There was one wheelchair fencer and as I hold athletes in high repute, I asked him how he could go to venues for practice and competition. I learned that he had to make efforts several times more than those required of someone with no mobility handicaps. For example, before he goes out he must first study the map and check out the bus routes. Not that he does not know how to go there. He must do so for he has to check which routes are served by low-floor buses. If the relevant routes are not served by low-floor buses, he will have to make a detour simply because he must catch a low-floor bus. He has to do the same if he takes the MTR, for he has to find out whether lifts are available in the nearby MTR stations. If so, then he must find out the exact location of the lift inside the station.

Were I so unfortunate as to become wheelchair-bound, I must think about how I could travel between the Legislative Council and my office. If I need to move around on a wheelchair, I must first go up a flight of stairs when I step out of my office. What should I do then? I would need someone else's assistance. When I get to Des Voeux Road Central, the pavement there is narrow and there are lots of bamboo scaffoldings around. I do not know what I could do. I think a smooth journey to the Legislative Council might take one hour, though it might just be a five-minute journey originally. So, Madam Deputy, in that eventuality one day, I would always be late.

It is indeed worthwhile to organize these activities, and we also have to encourage members of the community to pay attention to the problems faced by people with disabilities. Inviting Members and celebrities to be adjudicators also carries very good educational value. Many organizations that are concerned about the well-being of the disabled have asked celebrities to try to cover up their eyes for one day and feel for themselves what it is like to move around in complete darkness or feel for themselves what it is like to move around in a wheelchair.

It is necessary for society to care for the well-being of the disabled. Particularly, for the purpose of social harmony and integration, people with disabilities must be given equal opportunities to seek development in society and share the fruits of society. Public transport is only part of the transport needs of the disabled. I think government policies are even more important. We have to ask the Government: Has it taken equal opportunities into consideration in respect of its transport policies? This will enable the disabled to lead a comparatively normal life and subsequently integrate into society. This will provide them with the opportunity to compete on equal footing and enable them to give play to their talents, work ability and economic value, in which case society would find that the special commitment for the disabled would be lessened accordingly and that this would even be rewarding in terms of social costs. So, I think we, being Members of this Council, have to monitor whether the Government has fully taken care of the needs of the disabled in formulating transport policies.

Madam Deputy, I so submit.

MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, I very much wish to see that all people with disabilities, be they born disabled or disabled after birth, can live in society like normal people do, integrate into society with us and share everything in society together. I think this is very important.

Some years ago the authorities organized a "smile campaign", in the hope that everyone in society can smile and live freely in society. I think this is an aspiration for all of us, and a very important goal under mutual acceptance and co-operation. So, given the present economic downturn, I think we should absolutely throw weight behind the appeals made in Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's motion. Many concerned organizations have contacted us and told us about their difficulties. Under the present circumstances, even the able-bodied may encounter great difficulties in employment, let alone people with disabilities. They may face even greater difficulties in employment, and their wages are often lower than those of the able-bodied. But in fact, the disabled very much wish to rely on their own ability and efforts to support their own living. Do they wish for other people's sympathy and assistance? No. They only wish to find a job through their own efforts. Some of our friends with disabilities do think this way. But more often than not, we see a very cruel reality in the process.

The other evening I was invited by an organization to Tsui Ping Estate, and when I was busy talking to other people, a disabled person came to me and said that he had been offered a job and would very much like to take it. But the problem was he had to pay very expensive transport fares, for he had to take more means of transport than other people do. Under such circumstance, how could he obtain support so that he could take up this job that he very much wanted to do? He wanted very much to support his living with his own efforts. Come to think about this. If this disabled person lives in other places, he would be provided with some assistance in this respect. This is expressly provided in some of the laws of China. For example, Article 44 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Person provided that "Agencies of public services shall provide preferential and auxiliary services to disabled persons. In taking public transport vehicles, disabled persons shall be given convenience and special consideration; they shall be permitted to carry on board their indispensable and auxiliary facilities free of charge." I think these provisions have clearly shown the care for the disabled and displayed the spirit of mutual acceptance and assistance. Therefore, I very much hope that Secretary Sarah LIAO will listen to my views today. I was very busy last week, so I did not participate in the debate and therefore could not put forward proposals as to what the Government should do to make public transport operators adjust their fares downwards in order to help the grassroots. But I have the opportunity to express some of my views on this today. I think it is entirely necessary for us to help reduce the transport expenses borne by members of the public.

By the same token, since the disabled are more frequent users of public transport services, it is all the more necessary for the Government to provide assistance to them. By assistance, it does not mean that we should purposely help them in one way or another. Rather, when they want to stand on their own feet but encounter difficulties in so doing, and if we can help them seize the opportunity, then that would be tantamount to helping them. Why do we not do this? I think society can provide them with this opportunity. Domestic helpers are one example. The Employees Retraining Board has successfully fought for domestic helpers half fare concessions from bus operators. Then why can we not do some more for the disabled? Obviously, on this point, some may say that many other people also need government assistance. But I think we may as well include this in our consideration. Since the economy is in the doldrums, and we all face the same problem and have to pay expensive transport fares for travel to work, we therefore have to consider how the problem can be resolved through different channels, so that everyone can be given some breathing space.

Moreover, other than the expensive transport fares, I would also like to sponsor another motion on assistance for the disabled. I wish to talk about modes of public transport. Earlier when I left my office to this Chamber, a colleague of mine said that when he was riding on a bus, he saw some disabled persons encounter great difficulties in boarding modes of public transport. Although the Government, in taking the mass carrier system forward, has required bus companies to retrofit low floors on buses to facilitate access by the disabled, it is learned that so far, half of the bus fleet still cannot meet this requirement. As a result, when people with disabilities, particularly those who are wheelchair-bound, will encounter great difficulties when boarding and alighting from the vehicle. Even when the able-bodied walk on a high platform or slope (Tsui Chuk Garden, for example), they may often fall and sustain injuries. So, I must ask: For the disabled, how can they board and alight from the vehicle?

So, we have discussed with bus operators with reference to the situation of each housing estate. We found that some improvements would be made after every such discussion. But if no discussion is held with them, no improvement will be made. Here, I wish to ask the Government this: In relation to the disabled, for how many times has the Government discussed with the bus companies? Why is the progress so sluggish? Why has the problem not yet resolved? I certainly wish to see the provision of barrier-free public transport services for the disabled. But what about the supporting facilities required of public transport? Of course, operators of public transport systems will say that if they are required to improve their facilities, their cost will rise. I think we must know how to strike a balance between the ever expanding public modes of transport and the needs of society. I also think the Government or the Secretary must do more in this regard.

Public transport aside, we also see that insofar as the demand of the disabled for Rehabus service is concerned, the situation is rather grave. In the past, when my mother was still alive, she, being a disabled person, heavily relied on the Rehabus service. Now that she has passed away for more than three years. But people with disabilities are still telling us that the demand has remained extremely keen. Very often, they find it very difficult if they have to go to certain places on Rehabus. In this regard, can the authorities further discuss with the relevant service providers or consider more in the context of government subvention?

To conclude, I hope we can come up with ways to enable the disabled and the able-bodied to live together. That is, I hope to see integration of all people living in Hong Kong, whether they are able-bodied or born disabled or disabled after birth, and regardless of the causes of disabilities, particularly as the Hong Kong economy is in such a bad shape today and many people find it difficult to land a job, and even if they can find a job, their wages are very low. The Government should consider ways to put in place a sound system to provide assistance to both the able-bodied and the disabled, so that everyone can be employed and have a job to support their own living.

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

MR ALBERT HO (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the ways in which a society treats its vulnerable members and looks after people with disabilities will reflect whether it is a caring and loving society. No matter how economically advanced a society is, if it shows insufficient care and concern for the needy and those wanting care, it is nothing but just a society without any humanity. It can be said that despite its material affluence, it will remain a society completely devoid of any humane values. So it is not the goal of a modern society like ours.

Madam Deputy, in 1995, we enacted the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, an important first step forward in the implementation of an anti-discrimination policy. Subsequently, the Equal Opportunities Commission issued a number of codes of practice, requiring the implementation of matching policies in different fields to eliminate discrimination, so that the rights of people with disabilities in respect of employment, education, and so on, can be sufficiently protected. But I must still point out that in many cases, our notion of discrimination is still extremely narrow; we still think that as long as we do not reject, resist and look down upon people with disabilities, we will not be guilty of discrimination.

The standards we require are of course much higher. What we require are positive actions and policies which can enable people with disabilities, people who are thus vulnerable, to really integrate into society, participate in its various activities, enjoy equal opportunities as able-bodied people do and live a life of equality and dignity. In this regard, our policies in many different fields are far from being adequate. In education, for example, we can see that the special

facilities and assistance offered by educational institutions to a person with mental disability or other learning difficulties are seriously inadequate. In employment, we have repeatedly asked public organizations to take the lead and set down some percentage targets on the employment of people with disabilities. But they have not done this so far, much to our disappointment.

It must be admitted that the situation is better in some fields. In sports, for instance, we can see that, thanks to the support and encouragement by the Government and other organizations, our disabled athletes have achieved very good results in the sports arena. This shows precisely that as long as our Government and society can give them more support, more care, more encouragement and more assistance, people with disabilities will be able to give full play to their hitherto hidden potentials, thus becoming valuable assets of society. More importantly, these people will be able to live a really meaningful life.

The motion topic today focuses on transport facilities. I do believe that no one in this legislature will oppose the motion; instead, we should all render our full support. We may even treat the proposal today as the starting point and take yet more active steps in more fields. A reduction of transport fares is of course a form of resource assistance for them, and it will also become a very important kind of encouragement. To many patients of chronic diseases and people with disabilities, they do have a practical need for Rehabus as a means of transport. If society cannot make transportation easier for people with disabilities who need medical consultation frequently, I really fail to see how the Government can realize the principles of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and meet its policy requirements.

And, there is still another point. It is certainly very important for us to minimize the barriers faced by people with disabilities on various means of transport, and in fact, many facilities in our society are far below the standards of similar facilities in advanced places. What is more, I must emphasize that the barriers today are not only physical but also psychological in nature, and they often make many people with disabilities mentally and physically exhausted. Our society is full of barriers for these people. They have to endure many unnecessary and unreasonable physical burdens which also exert lots of psychological pressure on them, making it difficult for them to integrate into society like all of us. I wish to stress that public organizations all have the social obligation to support the motion today. And I must state clearly to the

representatives of organizations in the public gallery today: "You are not asking for any welfare benefits but only asserting the rights of disabled people. Every Member should give you full support."

MS EMILY LAU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, I rise to speak in full support of the motion moved by Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung.

As Mr Albert HO has just said, a civilized society is a caring society. Having listened to the speeches made by so many Members, I trust Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's motion today will be passed with the full support of this Council. Members have also made it very clear in their speeches that necessary transport services should be provided to people with disabilities in Hong Kong to enable them to fully participate in various activities in the community.

Perhaps because of this motion proposed by Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, I note some reports mentioning that some public transport operators have been asked whether they would respond to the motion proposed by Mr LEUNG by offering half fare concessions to people with disabilities. I have also read some reports that the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) and the New World First Bus Services Limited would consider the proposal but the MTR Corporation Limited has indicated that though facilities for assisting people with disabilities were not installed in the past, it has made improvements in the past decade and spent almost \$200 million, therefore, it is not going to offer half fare concessions. The Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation has not responded in a positive manner, but it has indicated that its existing fare policy is similar to that of other modes of public transport. Madam Deputy, I am not sure where the similarity lies, but I believe there is a similarity in high fares. The Citybus Limited has not responded because it has not received the substantive contents of the proposal.

So, I believe the Secretary, Dr Sarah LIAO, has the responsibility to urge public transport operators to do so because Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung has asked all Members to support his motion to request the Administration to make some efforts. One of the things it should do is to urge various public transport operators to offer half fare concessions to people with disabilities. I believe the Secretary has heard that very clearly and Members have said in one voice that they agree. Some operators concerned have indicated that they are considering the matter, of course, they have to consider the matter more actively. For those operators that have not considered the matter, I ask the Secretary to request them

to consider the matter expeditiously and I hope that she will bring this Council good news as soon as possible.

Madam Deputy, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is one of the organizations with a significant share of responsibilities in looking after people with disabilities. I have contacted the EOC and it has given me some information on the work that it is currently handling. The EOC says that it has all along discussed with the Transport Department (TD) about how to reduce the public transport barriers to people with disabilities. The EOC has indicated that it has put forward some proposals to the TD in the hope that the TD can implement them. First, it has asked the TD to discuss with public transport operators and, upon agreement by both parties, work out a timetable illustrating when people with disabilities can be provided with barrier-free public transport because some Members have just said that it will apparently take an indefinite period of time to meet the requirement. Second, the EOC has also proposed that the Administration can also consider adding a requirement of barrier-free services when it deliberates on awarding franchises to bus companies. If approval is given for their continual operation, they must make some sort of a commitment in this respect. The EOC also thinks that various public transport operators should provide more information to let people with disabilities know which routes are served by buses with barrier-free facilities. As mentioned earlier, few routes are served by buses with such facilities, therefore, public transport operators should try their best to provide more relevant information to people with disabilities and let them know the relevant service schedules and routes to facilitate their use of such services.

The EOC has also requested the TD to encourage public transport operators to provide more rehabilitation taxi services. The boots of some rehabilitation taxis can accommodate wheelchairs. Madam Deputy, several Members have earlier mentioned rehabilitation taxi services and I believe we should continue to study the use of rehabilitation taxis. Perhaps the Secretary can explain this point in detail later but in any case, I agree with the proposal made by Ms Miriam LAU about subsidizing the use of taxis by people with disabilities to enable them to travel direct to places they want to go. The Secretary may ask whether we should allow them to take taxis to work every day. I believe we have to consider this point further, but we would like to give a message today that more assistance should be given as far as possible to enable sufficient employment of people with disabilities and their participation in various activities in the community. For this reason, I very much support the

EOC in making these proposals and I hope the Secretary will later on tell us on behalf of the TD the progress of the relevant discussions.

The EOC has also pointed out that rehabilitation services are very important and such services must be enhanced to benefit more people with disabilities. Lastly, the EOC has stated that it sincerely welcomes the offer of fare concessions by public transport operators. In other words, the EOC will sincerely welcome it if the bus companies concerned or railway corporations offer fare concessions to people with disabilities.

Madam Deputy, I believe Members have made this message very clear today. This Council fully supports the points made in Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's motion and I sincerely hope that the EOC, Secretary Sarah LIAO or the Commissioner for Transport, Mr Robert FOOTMAN, will make their utmost effort to discuss the matter with public transport operators.

Lastly, Dr LO Wing-lok has just asked some social celebrities to disguise themselves as people with disabilities and feel their needs in this respect. I note that a few years ago some groups in foreign countries called upon supermarket operators to put on presbyopic glasses or carry some lead (not for diving) to put weights on their bodies. Why did they do so? They wanted supermarket operators to experience the problems encountered by the elderly or people with visual impairments during shopping. I suggest that Mr John CHAN, the senior management of other public transport operators and the Secretary to also try to use wheelchairs or put on eyeshades and see how they can use public transport. If they can do so, I believe they will be empathize with people with disabilities when they formulate policies and address the needs of the disabled more quickly.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, Mr LAU Chin-shek has already spoken in support of Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung' motion on behalf of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. But I still wish to reiterate our support here. Hong Kong can now rank itself among the economically advanced countries of the world, but still we have to debate such a topic today. So, I really think that we should all feel ashamed. The Secretary is new in office, so I do not know what she thinks. I hope that she can say a few words on her feelings. Will she feel ashamed of this government of ours?

Topics like "integration into society" have been debated the world over for many years, and even in Hong Kong, we have been debating them for years. Organizations for people with disabilities have also been fighting for this throughout the years, only that we are often far too patient. Organizations for people with disabilities are especially so, for despite waiting so many years, practically nothing has changed. Well, it looks likely that the motion today will be carried. However, is the Secretary going to do anything after its passage? Do we still have to wait? If yes, how many years? I must say that the entire society of Hong Kong should feel ashamed for we still have to debate this topic today.

Last week, or the week before last, somebody asked the people of Hong Kong what they could be proud of. There are certainly many things we can take pride in, but regarding the motion topic today, we really cannot be proud of it at all. Quite the contrary, we should all slip away quietly, heads down out of shame, at the mentioning of this topic. What I mean is that we really owe the numerous vulnerable members of the community an apology. Hence, I hope that the debate today can achieve the concrete result of enabling people with disabilities to integrate into society. I also hope that instead of just chanting empty slogans all the time, we can henceforth take specific actions. All of us must join hands to remove all the barriers faced by people with disabilities, whether financially or in terms of facilities.

Another thing is that I think enterprises should really think about their social obligations, especially those towards the vulnerable. When reacting to calls for a fare reduction by the KMB, Mr John CHAN claimed that there was no room for this, and that only those in need should be offered assistance. Well, now, we are really talking about how to help those in genuine need. I do not know what kind of excuse Mr John CHAN can still come up with. Last week, we discussed the reduction of transport fares for all, but this week, we are more specific, pinpointing at those who are in genuine need of assistance. So, can he still come up with yet another excuse? I do not know what excuses were advanced by John CHAN when the Secretary discussed the matter with him. But is it possible to get rid all those excuses now and make enterprises realize the need for them to discharge more social obligations?

Lastly, I must say that I am extremely disappointed by the Government. The reason is that whenever it deals with any issues of concern to the general public, the Government will invariably say "no", behaving as if it were really a very strong administration. For example, when discussing Article 23 of the

Basic Law, it has tried so very hard to put up an appearance of great resolve, asserting that a law must be enacted. But whenever the interests of consortiums are involved, it will immediately become a weak government. As far as the topic today is concerned, I do not know when the Government is willing to behave like a relatively strong administration again and negotiate with the enterprises concerned. I always find it hard to understand one thing in particular. The Government is actually the largest shareholder of the two railway corporations, but it has failed to make any proper arrangements through negotiations. The Government may say that the two railway corporations have to operate under commercial principles. When talking about full-scale fare reductions, it may say that the two railway corporations must operate in accordance with commercial principles, and so it cannot possibly do anything. But the motion today is not about the overall operation of transport operators; it touches upon just a very tiny area, the tiny area of how best to help out those Hong Kong people who are in genuine need. So, why is it still so difficult for the Government to direct the two railway corporations policy-wise? I am not convinced that the issue under discussion can actually escalate to the level of affecting commercial operation. So, why has the Government still behaved so weakly? Why is it impossible for it to order the two railway corporations to do something?

In fact, this is also the case with the bus companies. The franchises granted by the Government are conditional, so can it be stated clearly in the franchise terms that some kind of concessions must be offered to people with disabilities? I trust the Government must have considered some feasible proposals, such as the provision of barrier-free facilities to people with disabilities. Can any similar concessions be written into the franchise terms? Even if this is not the case now, it must be done in the future. That way, I am sure that the two bus companies or others wishing to be granted a franchise will certainly know what to do. I hope that when the Secretary speaks today, she can tell the numerous disabled people in Hong Kong what active steps the Government will take to promote the cause under debate. If she does not do so, then, perhaps, we will have to bring up the topic for debate next year. Well, we are really tired of speaking on this topic any more.

I often hope that the Government can tell us some morale-boosting news, especially news about some matters which do not involve any major changes, but which can help out those Hong Kong people in need. I think it is worth the while for the Government to change back to a stronger administration over this issue. That way, prompt assistance can be given to all those in genuine need. Thank you, Madam Deputy.

DR RAYMOND HO (In Cantonese): Madam Deputy, people with disabilities are members of our community. Apart from their physical handicaps, they are by and large no different from ordinary people. Like us, they need social life and work. In terms of clothing, food, housing and transportation, they are theoretically the same as us. However, as there is a lack of public transport facilities specially designed for them, they often encounter greater difficulties than we do when it comes to transportation. As such, it is imperative for the Government to pay particular attention to this area to enable them to integrate into society and work outside their homes. Over the past five years, I have been working for five schools for the disabled managed by the Red Cross. This five-year experience has greatly enhanced my understanding of the needs of the people with disabilities. To me, such experience is immensely valuable.

At a meeting of this Council on 22 May 2002, I raised a question on transport facilities provided for people with disabilities. Although the Secretary indicated in the meeting that the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC), Light Rail Transit (LRT) and MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) have provided some facilities to people with disabilities, public transport operators have, generally speaking, provided facilities far from being sufficient for use by these people. For instance, though 37 Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations are equipped with passenger lifts, such facilities are still absent in 12 MTR stations, making it difficult for people with disabilities to access MTR platforms.

In using public transport, not only people with disabilities encounter difficulties, the visually impaired encounter the same problem too. At present, audible signal devices are installed in the escalators of only a few MTR stations. This is obviously insufficient when it comes to meeting the needs of the visually impaired. In my opinion, the MTRCL and KCRC should install audible signal devices in the escalators of all stations to facilitate the visually impaired using the escalators. In addition, more than half of the stations are not installed with rubber guide paths for the visually impaired. This is indeed very unsatisfactory. I believe visually-impaired persons will encounter a similar problem when taking buses. They hardly know when they are supposed to get off the bus. It is indeed necessary for bus companies to install audio-visual signalling systems on buses to facilitate the visually impaired, or even audio-impaired persons, to know their whereabouts.

Improved facilities can of course eliminate barriers encountered by people with disabilities when using public transport. Owing to their physical handicaps, however, people with disabilities will often respond more slowly when using public transport. Therefore, they often encounter difficulties when using public transport during the rush hours. I believe their work will definitely be affected as well. As such, I hope the relevant organizations can pay more attention and make arrangements suitably.

As for the Rehabus, I find it necessary for the service to be improved. It is noted that the average waiting time for booking the Rehabus service is 34 days at present. This extremely long waiting period will definitely affect the daily life of people with disabilities. In a civilized society, such a low standard is unacceptable.

The idea of offering people with disabilities transport fare concessions is theoretically sound. Generally speaking, the incomes of this group of people are relatively low. It is certainly good if public transport operators can provide them with fare concessions. However, it is questionable as to whether the Government should stipulate fare levels. After all, public transport operators have their own *modus operandi* and marketing strategies. Only they know clearly how much room there is for fare concessions.

Transport networks in Hong Kong have improved substantially when compared to the past. Hopefully the standard of transport services will rise higher and higher. Nonetheless, public transport facilities specially designed for people with disabilities are still inadequate. I hope the Government can, apart from developing a sound transport network, satisfy the needs of people with disabilities with respect to transport facilities and thus enable them to integrate into society and lead a normal life.

Madam Deputy, I so submit.

MR HOWARD YOUNG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, Ms Miriam LAU has earlier in the debate given an account of how we should help people with disabilities to overcome the barriers in engaging in activities out of their homes, so that they can, like ordinary people, have their own social life, work, and leisure activities, as well as enjoying more convenience when travelling to seek medical treatment or consultation.

Yet I would like to particularly point out here that, owing to their physical handicaps, people with disabilities have to make enormous efforts and overcome numerous psychological barriers before they are able to step out of their homes. It is indeed immensely difficult for them to make each and every step because they are often constrained by the limited and inflexible Rehabus service. They will definitely find it easier to integrate into society if public transport operators can take the initiative to offer them fare concessions.

Reduced transport fares will provide an additional incentive for people with disabilities to travel to work or engage in outdoor activities. In particular, various modes of public transport have one after another installed additional facilities to provide more convenience to the disabled. For instance, wheelchair aids, stair lifts, ramps and wide turnstiles are installed in some railway stations by the two railway corporations. The fact that more and more public buses with manual or electric access ramps are now running on the streets has provided added attraction and convenience for people with disabilities to make use of public transport. I believe this will not only help them integrate into society from different strata, but also help nurture their spirit of self-reliance and lessen their dependence on society.

At present, 25 000 holders of Registration Cards for People with Disabilities are offered half-fare ferry concession by the New World First Ferry Services Limited. It is reported that more and more transport operators will consider offering various concessions to people with disabilities. For instance, the KMB is prepared to have its fare concession scheme currently provided to home helpers who need to travel to work further extended to other needy people. As for the 25 000 holders of Registration Cards for People with Disabilities issued by the Social Welfare Department, I believe they would like to see fare concessions extended beyond the New World First Ferry Services Limited. They will certainly hope that other transport operators will follow suit. The Liberal Party considers these initiatives very much merit support. As remarked in last week's motion on the downward adjustment of transport fares, we absolutely support the actions taken by various operators to offer, as far as possible, concessions to the public in the light of their own operations and capabilities. We think this is worth promotion and encouragement.

To people with disabilities, not only expenses can be saved if public transport operators can take the initiative to offer extensive fare concessions to holders of Registration Cards for People with Disabilities. Most importantly,

the offer reflects that the community cares for and identifies with them. Insofar as public transport operators are concerned, I believe the offer of concessions to this unfortunate minority in society will not pose a heavy burden on their fare proceeds and undermine their corporate profitability. At the same time, they can serve a double purpose through these good deeds and acts of charity for society, so what is the sense of not doing that?

As such, we support the manner in which this motion is proposed today by merely asking the Government to urge, but not compel, various transport operators to address the transport needs and convenience of people with disabilities and, at the same time, taking into account the operation of transport operators.

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

DR DAVID CHU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, there are currently more than 260 000 people with disabilities in Hong Kong. Being members of society, they are entitled to enjoying various public facilities and sharing the fruits of social advancement. However, people with disabilities trying to integrate into society are still faced with tremendous difficulties because of the failure of community facilities to co-ordinate properly. In order to help these people to overcome their hardship, the Government and various sectors of the community must offer them more direct and practical assistance. Making adaptations to the transport arrangements can help these people at the most fundamental level.

Though mass transit systems in Hong Kong have realized the necessity to address the needs of people with disabilities, the actual progress has been slow. To these people, making use of such modes of public transport as buses and trains is not easy at all. It is therefore necessary for us to provide them with modes of transport specially catered to their needs. At the same time, public transport enterprises are morally obliged to offer them reduced fares or free services.

At present, there are only 80 or so Rehabuses in Hong Kong. With limited capacity, each bus can only carry four wheelchairs plus six other passengers. This is obviously inadequate. In 2001, the Rehabus service could only handle an average of 1 300 passenger trips per day. As supply falls seriously short of demand, people with disabilities encounter great difficulty in using the dial-a-ride service. Only 5% of those making use of the service

managed to secure the service within a month. As for others, some even needed to wait over six months. Those who need to travel to seek follow-up consultation, pursue studies or take part in community activities are thus seriously inconvenienced. It has been reported that some people with disabilities were even forced to give up job opportunities for failing to book the Rehabus service. To encourage these people to integrate into society, the Government is obliged to inject more resources into the Rehabus service.

Even though the fiscal deficit problem remains serious, more resources can be devoted to improving the Rehabus service if the Government can reduce unnecessary expenses in other areas. Over the past five years, resources allocated to the Rehabus service rose only 3% on average per annum. In the previous fiscal year, approximately \$26 million was spent on the Rehabus service, accounting for only a very small proportion of the Government's overall expenditure. People with disabilities are the most needy group in society. Yet assistance rendered to them by the Government has been inadequate. It is entirely fair and reasonable for more to be spent on helping them.

Madam Deputy, both the Government and the general public are obliged to help people with disabilities to become a full member of our community and help remove the barriers encountered by them in their daily life. In this respect, we must work even harder. With these remarks, I support the motion.

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, regarding the transport needs of people with disabilities, as pointed out by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan earlier, we have waited a very long time. I recall my first study on the transport needs of people with disabilities was carried out in 1983. Now 19 years have lapsed. Has there been any improvement in the interim? Yes, there have been some improvements. For instance, there were previously no low-floor buses, no elevators in MTR stations, and no ramps for use by people with disabilities for the purpose of crossing the roads. Some improvements have indeed been made. But judging from the angle of equal opportunities, are people with disabilities today able to enjoy equal opportunities in the use of public transport? The answer is obviously negative. This goal has not been achieved.

Actually, many means of public transport are still very inconvenient to quite many people with disabilities. Though low-floor buses are now available (certainly not all buses have low floors), the disabled still encounter problems

when taking buses, as mentioned by Honourable Members earlier. Members should note that seats specially reserved for the disabled are usually located in the centre of a bus. After boarding the bus, the disabled will have to thread their way through two rows of commuters, or a large crowd in the case of a congested bus, before reaching the centre. Any further actions, such as fastening seat belts, will basically attract the attention of every commuter on the bus. May I ask Honourable Members, imagining themselves to be disabled persons, if they will be willing to wheel themselves to the centre of a bus unhurriedly when everyone on the bus is looking at them? Such psychological pressure has posed huge obstacles to people with disabilities. As such, even if all buses are designed to have low floors starting from today, it will not be helpful to the disabled.

Members may have noticed that the MTR Corporation Limited has recently installed some bollards at the elevators accessing the platforms. Though wheelchair-bound disabled persons have always been unable to use elevators, the bollards will cause great inconvenience to the disabled who rely on "walking canes" if they have to go through the bollards. We must therefore consider ways to facilitate different categories of disabled people making use of public transport.

In order to satisfy the transport needs of people with disabilities, improvements to the existing modes of public transport are evidently required. However, a big gap still exists, even though discussions have dragged on for more than a decade. It is evident that the gap remains despite persistent efforts of promotion. For the time being, the Rehabus is obviously an inevitable solution. In the long run, special arrangements must be made before some of our disabled friends can utilize public transport. Therefore, the Rehabus must operate in parallel with modes of public transport which can be utilized by people with disabilities. However, we can obviously not rely solely on the Rehabus to meet the actual needs in the long term.

Ms Miriam LAU raised the problems currently facing the Rehabus a moment ago. For instance, the extremely high utilization rate of the Rehabus of over 90% makes it necessary for the dial-a-ride service to be booked six or three months in advance. In other words, almost all time slots are taken up. To a disabled person making a phone call to check availability, the chances of success are lower than 10%, or sometimes may even be lower than 2%. Is such a service acceptable?

Of course, we agree that it is necessary to increase the number of Rehabuses. Nevertheless, Members should understand that even if 10 or 20 additional Rehabuses are provided, the problem can still not be resolved. At present, there are 18 000 or so taxis in Hong Kong. In contrast, only scores of Rehabuses are available. It is conceivable that, while the waiting time for a taxi during rush hours is several minutes, the waiting time for a Rehabus will be several months. Even if 10 or 20 additional Rehabuses are provided, it will still be necessary for bookings to be made several months in advance. There is still a long way from achieving the goal of equal opportunities. We must look into the matter to see what can be done to resolve this problem in concrete terms.

It was mentioned by Ms Miriam LAU earlier that a car dealer imported two months ago a so-called multi-purpose taxi or Rehabus taxi. Let us imagine this. The cabins of vehicles in London are generally high enough to accommodate most wheelchairs, if equipped with electric lift platforms. The crucial problem facing us is: Most wheelchairs, with the exception of only one motorized model in the market, cannot be folded. The size of the wheelchairs used by persons whose four limbs are handicapped is even bigger. These are the problems we must consider. The disabled aside, we can still notice the existing design of taxis is not convenient for use by mobility-handicapped persons by just looking at the ways elderly persons get on and off a taxi. When 24% of members of the community are elderly persons, we should explore what can be done to facilitate the elderly and people with disabilities to get on and off taxis. It is worthwhile for us to explore multi-purpose vans, also commonly known as "seven-person vans".

As regards the issue concerning fixed routes, when the Finance Committee of this Council approved a funding application by the Government last year to encourage people with disabilities to work, the Government was questioned by several Members as to whether transport would be made available to the disabled who would receive help from the Government to seek employment since there would obviously be difficulties. Nevertheless, due to the lack of service for such non-fixed routes, those who managed to secure a job were eventually forced to give it up. This is indeed very unsatisfactory. What should we do to effectively deal with this problem? Though it is impossible for additional Rehabuses to be provided immediately, what stopgap measures can be introduced immediately to enable those successful jobseekers who are unable to book the fixed-route service to be provided with suitable transport arrangements without

delay? I believe we have to make use of modes of transport available in the open market to help them.

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

MR ABRAHAM SHEK: Madam Deputy, inadequate access to public transportation services has long been a major concern of the disabled community. Even the Equal Opportunity Commission, our local discrimination watchdog, made note of the issue of accessibility in its most recent annual report.

For people with disabilities, access to transportation is an absolute necessity — to obtain education, to find and keep a job or even just to go shopping. The barriers that they face in using public transit are the real handicaps to their ability to live independently and happily. The barriers also prevent them from being productive and active members of the community.

At present, legislation is in place to protect people with physical challenges from being discriminated against in the provision of services and facilities. Accordingly, major public transport operators have made improvements to minimize or remove existing obstacles. However, some members of our community feel that the pace of change is too slow. I agree that more can be done, but significant progress has been made. What we must recognize is the complex constraints that transport operators experience.

Firstly, many of the older transport systems were not designed for people with disabilities. Thus, for existing barriers to be removed, the operators face very significant difficulties. Often, there is limited space or there are technical complications in retrofitting existing stations or vehicles and installing additional facilities to increase accessibility. The rush-hour overcrowding situation of public transport networks also increases the difficulty of this task. Given that each service provider has its own operational problems and constraints, it is unrealistic to demand that they all fully provide accessible services within one timeframe.

There is also the problem of budget constraints. Public transport operators worldwide express similar concerns that progress towards greater accessibility is hampered by the lack of funds. While some facility improvements are relatively low-cost (such as tactile ground surface indicators to

signal stairs, platform edges and general directions), others are very costly. For example, retrofitting transit stations with elevators costs millions of dollars; providing buses with low ground-level entrances is also an expensive capital investment. Under the current economic environment, it is unrealistic to expect transport services to achieve comprehensive access in a short time.

A more realistic approach in tackling the issue of accessibility is to improve the public-funded Rehabus service. At present, Rehabus has established a network to provide customized service for those with special transportation needs. Users have the option of some fixed routes or booking the service for more remote destinations. The Rehabus service is an important agency that complements public transport systems.

However, Rehabus also has its own inadequacies. One of its major inconveniences is the lack of flexibility. Rehabus must be booked as early as a week in advance with specific times and destinations. This requires extensive advance planning by the users and prohibits them from any last minute appointments, spontaneous outings, or even staying late at work to finish an urgent project.

No doubt, the operators of Rehabus are also under a tight budget, and this early booking requirement is a means for them to utilize their resources fully. Unlike the financially independent public transport systems, the Rehabus service can only sustain itself or make significant improvements with financial commitment from the Government. Without additional public resources, it will be difficult for Rehabus to significantly shorten the advance booking time. Therefore, to better meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities, the Government should strengthen the Rehabus service and increase its funding support.

The motion today also urges various public transport operators to provide more affordable services to people with disabilities, specifically to consider offering half fare concessions for the physically challenged. However, it is accessibility, not affordability, that is the main concern for the disabled. Without accessible services, they cannot even travel on public networks. Thus, any fare concession that they may enjoy is secondary. Our concern should focus on access. Besides, some transport operators are already offering across-the-board fare concessions, and I believe that some physically challenged travellers are already enjoying these discounts. It is my belief that the

Government does not need to interfere in the business decisions of individual public transport companies. The Government should leave them to fulfil their obligations to society, particularly the aged and the handicapped, according to their means and ability.

Madam Deputy, the disabled community is not the only sector that requires accessible services. The elderly also have a strong need for access facilities similar to the disabled. The examples are buses with ground-level entrances and vehicles with entrance ramps for wheelchair-bound commuters. With an increasingly ageing population, the issue of accessibility will undoubtedly become more prevalent. Public transport operators must respond to this trend and continue to progress towards service accessibility for all. They should be socially conscious of the needs of the aged and the handicapped.

Thank you.

DR TANG SIU-TONG (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, despite the fact that the rights and interest of the disabled have seen some improvement in recent years, people with disabilities still face lots of obstacles when using different modes of public transport. Sometimes they are even forced to choose to stay at home, not being able to move one single step. If we want to help the disabled integrate into society and bring their talents into full play, the first step should be helping them come out of their home. But two questions are involved here. First, is there adequate and suitable public transport to satisfy the transport needs of the disabled, so that their mobility would no longer be hampered? Second, can the disabled afford the transport expenses? Insofar as these two questions are concerned, the present situation still leaves a lot to desire. Though major public transport operators have made some measure of improvement, the disabled are still confronted with many barriers in using public transport. Furthermore, the present level of transport expenses poses a very heavy burden to the disabled. The Government and various sectors of the community, including public transport operators, should provide more assistance to them, and fare concession is the most fundamental means to this end.

Madam Deputy, the concern group for a barrier-free city formed by 12 voluntary agencies conducted a survey last year. The findings showed that 70% of the disabled interviewed considered that their transport needs were not addressed squarely. This shows that although the majority of public modes of

transport have facilities in place for the disabled, these facilities are virtually useless or insufficient. At present, of the 6 000-odd franchised buses, only one fourth are accessible by wheelchair users. As regards the Rehabuses, although they can provide the required service, the existing fleet of Rehabus cannot meet the demand for the service. Some residents in Yuen Long have complained to the press that many of the buses serving Hung Shui Kiu are ordinary buses not designed with low floors for use by people with disabilities. It was only after the problem was reflected by the concerned organizations and residents that the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited deployed three low-floor buses to serve Route 63K. In spite of this, given a serious shortage of low-floor buses, people with the need must still wait for a very long time before they can board a suitable bus.

Apart from the provision of sufficient buses of new model, the training of bus drivers, and their service attitude towards the disabled as well as their perceptions of the disabled are also key factors determining whether the disabled can be facilitated in their use of buses. There have been cases in which the bus driver complained to the disabled passenger about having to pull out the low floor manually for it failed to unfold automatically. Moreover, passengers have also reflected that if the bus, when pulling in at the stop, cannot lay close to the pavement kerb, the bus driver will simply refuse to activate the low floor. I understand that the vast majority of bus drivers do respect and enjoy their work and are dedicated to serving the passengers, and those were just a few individual cases. However, to these passengers who have been treated unfairly and impolitely, these unhappy experiences will dampen their desire to take public transport. Therefore, the Government and various transport operators should step up the training of their employees to inculcate in them a correct attitude towards people with disabilities.

Indeed, other than buses, the disabled also encounter difficulties when travelling on the Mass Transit Railway (MTR). At present, not every entrance or exit of MTR stations is designed with ramps or lifts to facilitate access by wheelchair users. Besides, a passenger lift is not installed in the concourse of every station carrying passengers to and from the platform. Certainly, Members may find a Wheelchair Aid enclosed in a glass box at the concourse of MTR stations for carrying a wheelchair up and down the stairs, but the disabled must first make arrangements with the MTR staff before they can use this Wheelchair Aid. As other people's assistance is required, this is very time-consuming and inconvenient. As a result, this Wheelchair Aid has virtually

become an exhibit which is there for people to see rather than use. The Secretary can check out the utilization rate of this "window-dressing" Wheelchair Aid and she will know how often it is actually used. Madam Deputy, I am really doubtful about how much effort the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has made to assist the disabled. Has the MTRCL taken into account the needs of the disabled when making improvements to its facilities? For example, in the Tseung Kwan O Line, the old turnstiles have been replaced by new sensor gates, but the blind will easily be hit and hurt by the door of the new gates. Moreover, as early as in 2000, some organizations pointed out the lack of Braille buttons on the touch panel of the MTR ticketing machines, which shows that the needs of the visually impaired are neglected. But much to our disappointment, the MTRCL has made no improvement at all. The West Rail, in comparison, has given far more detailed consideration to the disabled. It is learned that the ticketing machines of the West Rail will include Braille signs and audible devices, and the add value machines will also provide Braille buttons. Wheelchair users can also buy tickets at low ticketing counters in the stations. Since the West Rail will be able to do these, why can the MTR not do the same? Here, I call on various public transport operators to expeditiously improve their facilities. Certainly, monitoring by the Government is also very important.

Madam Deputy, I wish to add one last point. In planning the transport system of Hong Kong, particularly feeder services by various modes of transport, more consideration must be given to the needs of the disabled. At present, the disabled, after taking one mode of transport, often have to go a long way before they can interchange to another mode of public transport, and this has caused great inconveniences to them. I hope the Government or the relevant operators, in planning interchanges in future, should avoid this scenario, so as to create a "barrier-free" environment for the disabled as far as possible.

Madam Deputy, I so submit.

MR HENRY WU (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, being a Director of the Hong Kong PHAB Association, I have always kept a keen interest in the needs of the disabled. I also strongly support the elimination of discrimination and barriers in this regard in society, so as to encourage the disabled to participate in social services and integrate into society. But I am well aware that the actual environment has subjected the disabled to lots of difficulties. Therefore, I support the motion which calls on the Government to urge public transport

operators to improve their services and facilities for the disabled, and it is all the more imperative to provide additional resources to improve the Rehabus service.

Public transport service is an important intermediary for maintaining community cohesion. The daily life of the people relies heavily on the bridging role of public transport. But unfortunately, many modes of public transport have failed to install specific equipment to fully facilitate access by people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users. Therefore, I hereby urge the Government to expeditiously help these vulnerable people in a serious attitude, with a view to creating a "barrier-free" public transport network.

Madam Deputy, the creation of a "barrier-free" public transport network cannot be achieved overnight. After discussions with the concerned organizations, I hold that special consideration must be given to the following points:

Firstly, to make bus companies expeditiously fulfil their undertaking of acquiring buses that are safe for use and easily accessible by wheelchair users when replacing or purchasing buses. As regards the existing low-floor buses, the relevant facilities should be further improved where possible.

Secondly, departments overseeing transport matters should discuss with various public transport operators on the installation of ancillary facilities for the disabled and the relevant supporting facilities, provide an action plan on "barrier-free" services, and work out a timetable for implementation as soon as possible.

Thirdly, when planning transport networks and the supporting services, the disabled and the relevant organizations should be consulted as early as possible, and negotiations and reviews should be conducted where necessary.

Apart from these three points, those who require special care when going out must be provided with other options of transport, and the Rehabus can satisfy their needs in this regard. However, the existing Rehabus service is gravely inadequate, with great limitations particularly in the number and routes of the Rehabus, and also in respect of the booking of service, and the actual demand for the service cannot in the least be met. As a result, people with mobility

handicaps who are in need cannot access the assistance of the Rehabus to integrate into the community. So, before the provision of a comprehensive range of "barrier-free" public transport services, the operation of the Rehabus must be improved expeditiously in order to provide sound and effective services.

Madam Deputy, according to the findings of a questionnaire survey, about 50% of the respondents considered that the main reasons barring them from using the Rehabus are first, "unsuccessful booking" and second, "expensive charges", and they therefore use this service less.

I have talked to the concerned organizations in order to gain a better understanding of the situation, and the conclusion is that the service currently provided by the Rehabus is certainly gravely inadequate. According to their experiences in hiring the Rehabus, half of their attempts to book the service had failed on average, that is, five out of 10 attempts to book the Rehabus service were unsuccessful.

Moreover, the requirement that booking should be made six months in advance as well as some other restrictions also pose considerable barriers to the use of the Rehabus service by the disabled. There are even views that the problems brought by these barriers are even more serious than the shortage of ancillary facilities for the disabled. Imagine how many activities or appointments in our daily life can be confirmed six months in advance? The difficulties in hiring the Rehabus and other various restrictions have created a far-reaching impact on the normal community activities of the disabled. To people with disabilities, they prefer to stay at home for it is difficult to confirm appointments six months in advance; to the organizations, the difficulties in hiring the Rehabus service have hindered the organization of more activities for participation by the disabled.

Madam Deputy, I have been given to understand that the organizer of a large-scale activity, wanting to enable more disabled people to take part in it and share the joy with other people together, had specifically made arrangements to reserve plenty of spaces for wheelchair users and issued invitations to the guests and the relevant organizations one month in advance. But as they could not hire enough Rehabuses to carry the disabled to the venue, some of the disabled who wished to go were unable to take part in the event.

The provision of additional resources is the most effective way for improvement to be made. While it is somewhat difficult to infinitely increase the number of Rehabuses to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, efforts should at least be made to reach a reasonable and acceptable level, so that there will not be such cases as five out of 10 bookings are unsuccessful. Also, the requirement that bookings should be made half a year in advance should be abolished expeditiously in order to enhance flexibility and remove this restriction that has created a labelling effect on the disabled, thereby enabling the disabled to integrate into society more easily.

Indeed, we all understand that the Government and public transport operators are striving to improve the facilities for the disabled, but insofar as the progress is concerned, I think there is still room for improvement.

As far as I understand it, the Transport Department is conducting tests on a new type of taxi. The key feature of this type of taxi is that a lifting platform is fitted to allow wheelchair users to move into the taxi cabin direct, without having to fold up the wheelchair for keeping in the boot. I hope that this type of taxi can come into service soon, so that the disabled can have one more option. However, when introducing this service, we must at the same time carefully consider making improvements to the supporting facilities of other transport networks.

Madam Deputy, I so submit.

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

(No Member responded)

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS (in Cantonese): Madam Deputy, the motion of Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung covers the portfolios of both the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works and the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food. My reply today will encompass the viewpoints and opinions of Secretary YEOH Eng-kiong.

Ms Emily LAU advises us to actually experience the hardship of people with disabilities. I also think that this is very important. In 1965, when I was

still in secondary school, my elder sister and I had the opportunity to look after the blind in a place called "The Blind People's Home". At that time, there were not any transport facilities which could enable the blind to get around freely, which was why the 10 inmates or so of the Home could only move around within an area measuring about half a kilometre in radius, completely idle, as they could not go out. Our job was to teach them some skills. Blind people are in fact very good at music, and fortunately, the inmates of the Home organized a choir of their own. Kate, whom I looked after, was especially outstanding. She was the pianist of the choir. Later on, this blind people's choir was invited to give some performances in San Francisco, but because of insufficient funding, only one person could be assigned to look after them during the trip. Subsequently, Kate, whom I looked after, was knocked down and killed by a car.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

Over the past few decades, I have always hoped that the Government can expedite the implementation of its rehabilitation programme and all those measures aimed at helping people with disabilities to participate in community activities and integrate into society. Although this is not part of my portfolio, I am still glad to learn that all Members have reached a consensus in respect of transport facilities. I will do the best I can.

To realize the objective of its rehabilitation policy, the Government provides funding support to the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation for the operation of a Rehabus service and also provides a disability allowance to people with disabilities. I heard Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung say earlier that this type of allowance is meant for meeting the special needs of people with disabilities, and I also know that the allowance may not be enough for those disabled people having to go out to work. I understand that Secretary YEOH Eng-kiong will look further into this issue. The Government also encourages and helps public transport operators to provide as much as possible convenient transport services and facilities to the disabled.

I understand that people with disabilities have many special transport needs. Under the existing economic conditions, and in view of the special needs of people with disabilities, the Government calls upon the various public transport operators to appreciate the needs of people with disabilities and provide these

people with convenient transport services and fare concessions as far as their business conditions permit, so as to reduce the expenses of people with disabilities. My colleagues in the Transport Department and I have been holding discussions with public transport operators on this, and I have put forward an idea similar to the one aimed at helping domestic helpers. We are also discussing the definition of "people with disabilities" to determine, for example, whether the term should be confined to people having mobility handicaps.

Twelve inner-harbour and outlying routes operated by the ferry companies now are offering a special half-fare concession to people with disabilities. Most major public transport operators, including the MTRCL, franchised bus companies and ferry companies, will offer free rides to people with disabilities on the International Rehabilitation Day every year. This is a gesture of good will, and I hope that these transport operators can extend the spirit to ordinary days.

While welcoming their various fare concessions, I have also met with public transport operators, urging them to offer more concessions to people with disabilities. Members have advanced many specific opinions today, and I will reflect them all to the parties concerned.

As for what the Hong Kong Government has done with respect to the provision of facilities, I must say we believe in the concept that public transport services should play the role of assisting people with disabilities in integrating into society, and so, through various different channels, we have sought to encourage public transport operators to provide a greater number of facilities which can offer more convenience to people with disabilities to enable them to use public transport without any barriers.

The railway corporations currently providing facilities for the convenience of people with disabilities are the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) and the MTRCL. All the stations of these two railways are equipped with special facilities that can facilitate access by people with disabilities to the services of the East Rail and the MTRCL. These facilities include wheelchair aids, stair lifts for some stations, ramps or passenger lifts, wide flap gates and multi-use space in train compartments, guide paths for the blind, platform tactile yellow lines, escalators and audible signal devices in lifts.

As for franchised bus companies, low-floor buses are currently used by the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB), the Citybus Limited and the New World First Bus Services Limited. These buses are equipped with facilities providing convenience to people with disabilities, such as ramps and space for parking wheelchairs. And, the entire bus fleet of the Long Win Bus Company Limited is of a model especially designed with wheelchair-bound passengers in mind. Starting from 2000, all franchised bus companies are required to purchase low-floor buses in their bus replacement programmes. It is expected that by 2006, the proportion of low-floor buses will have increased from 30% now to 50%. Since the proportion of such buses is on the low side in the KMB fleet, I have requested it to submit a concrete timetable to us, so as to speed up the replacement process.

Moreover, the franchised bus companies also provide other facilities to people with disabilities. For instance, bus stop announcement systems, vehicle numbers, Braille boards, door closing buzzers and Braille route maps are being provided on an increasing number of buses to facilitate the use of franchised bus services by people with disabilities.

The ferry companies also provide assistance bells and toilets for the disabled at the boarding gates of major passenger ferry piers such as the Central Pier. These piers are also equipped with ridged gangplanks to facilitate embarking and disembarking by wheelchair-bound passengers.

For those maxicab routes commencing operation after 1997, their vehicles are all equipped with an assistance bell for the convenience of people disabilities.

Braille vehicle registration number plates are installed in the cabin of all liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis. These taxis are also equipped with audible fare meters to provide information about fares and so on to all passengers, including people with disabilities. Taxis are also permitted to let people with disabilities board or alight in prohibition zones.

Since 2000, the tram company has been installing larger destination plates and boarding gate buzzers on all the trams deployed to provide ordinary passenger services, so as to offer greater convenience to the visually impaired.

In the next few years, there will be a steady increase in such facilities. The KCRC, for example, will install more wide flap gates at individual stations;

in the next four years, the number of buses that can accommodate wheelchair-bound passengers will increase by roughly 1 000. And, the Transport Department is now working with vehicle manufacturers to explore the feasibility of introducing and testing a special kind of LPG taxis with a lifting platform and enough room for one wheelchair.

Members have advanced many constructive proposals on the provision and improvement of facilities for people with disabilities. We will discuss all these proposals with the relevant organizations and urge them to make improvements.

Rehabus services are provided by the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Society with government funding, the objective being to take people with disabilities to and from their schools, workplaces and activity centres. Over the past five years, the number of Rehabuses has increased from 74 to 85 now. Members have raised the point that the shortage of Rehabuses and the resultant long waiting period have rendered such services unable to meet the practical needs of people with disabilities. I trust that Secretary YEOH Eng-kiong will consider Members' views in detail and make improvements sincerely. I have also heard a win-win scheme from Members, one under which, for example, taxis are used to replace Rehabuses, because the costs as computed is just \$54 per person. We will also consider this idea.

Lastly, let me reiterate that we in the Government are sincere in looking after the vulnerable members of society. The goal of the Government is the same as Members' — we all hope that the transport needs of people with disabilities can be fully considered, and that they can be assisted in integrating fully into the community. Last week, my colleagues met with Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung and a number of disabled people's representatives. This meeting has deepened our understanding of the transport needs of people with disabilities. We have also received their proposals on fares, facilities and Rehabus services. We will study these proposals together with the organizations concerned, so as to cater for the transport needs of people with disabilities. Besides conducting discussions, we will also make our utmost efforts in several other respects: (1) In respect of laws, we will require public transport operators to install with full speed the facilities specified by the Equal Opportunities Commission; (2) In respect of management, we will call upon all public transport operators to fulfil their commitments to society, and all these commitments are set out clearly in the relevant provisions. I also hope that with the efforts of public transport

operators and the understanding and co-operation of members of the public, people with disabilities can integrate into society, and that Hong Kong can thus become a truly civil, loving and caring society.

Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, you may now give your reply. You still have 45 seconds.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, first of all, I would like to thank Members who have indicated support for the motion and I am grateful to the Secretary for responding in a positive manner. However, I am very sorry that the subject today has reminded the Secretary of an unhappy incident. I dare not say that we have to turn grief and indignation into strength, but I do not wish to see people with disabilities to continue to face so many barriers and fail to integrate into society. This is also a consensus among Members. I hope the Secretary will more actively fight for the interests of people with disabilities in this respect to give them more space and help them integrate into society at an early date. Lastly, I hope Members will support this motion. Thank you.

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

(Applause in the public gallery)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I ask people in the public gallery not to clap their hands. Although I know that you very much approve of the passage of the motion, but you cannot applaud in the public gallery according to the rule.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second motion: Developing renewable energy resources.

DEVELOPING RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, one evening, on returning home, I put off my shoes and lay them on the shelf. At this juncture, the lights and the computer turn on. Mine are actually a pair of specially designed shoes which, when I move around during the day, can convert the friction of the soles against the ground and the shock produced by walking into electrical energy. The energy is then stored, ready for use when I get back home. Sorry, however, Honourable Members cannot buy a pair of these shoes at the moment, for this is just my dream.

One year, I was working in London. Since I had to look for an on-street parking space every evening, I always dreamed about parking my car upstairs at home. Half a year ago, I had a dream, in which I found myself riding on a tricycle with a hood, exiting from the lift at home onto the carriageway, then going straight to my office. The hood and body of the tricycle were made of solar panels, and a solar cell was installed under the seat. The tricycle was not propelled by pedals through sprocket. Instead, it was propelled by a synchronizer which combined solar energy with the kinetic energy produced by the pedals, making even an up-slope ride very easy. Sorry, however, this is but another dream of mine.

Can dreams such as these come true? I remember I liked cycling very much when I was small. Whenever I had done too much exercise, I would have

a nightmare, being chased by a ghost of some kind. In the dream, the road would become steeper and steeper, making my escape on the bicycle more and more difficult. Sometimes, in the same dream, a bicycle powered by both fuel and the pedals would emerge suddenly, and with it, I managed to flee. Then, a few years later, bicycles powered by both fuel and the pedals really came onto the market in Japan. So, see, dreams can really come true. It is a pity that I am no engineer, which is why I have to count on others to make my dreams about renewable energy resources come true.

Some 10 years ago, I saw a large windmill for the first time in the outskirts of San Francisco. I then fancied that if there was a large windmill like this on the rooftop of my home, I would be able to save a lot of electricity tariffs every year. Then, just very recently, in Vienna, I spotted many similar windmills in the backyards of people's homes. Several years ago, I also happened to read a research report on solar energy, and I thought that in a densely populated place like Hong Kong, where there is such a high density of buildings, it would be a good idea to convert all the curtain walls of buildings into solar panels. Since solar panels can absorb solar energy, they will not only lower the room temperature of buildings, but also prevent the reflection of heat onto the roads. And, the solar energy can also be used, thus saving the electricity expenses of buildings. I have recently learnt that the Government has already started some experiments and studies on this.

Having said that, I must also add that the development of renewable energy resources still faces many obstacles. One of the obstacles is probably the cost of renewable energy resources. At present, the costs of renewable energy resources, including solar energy and wind-powered electricity generation, are generally higher than conventional forms of electricity generation using coal, natural gases and nuclear power. But we have never factored social costs into our computations. The environmental damage caused by the air pollution associated with electricity generation may sometimes lead to economic losses, as it may adversely affect people's health, thereby increasing our health care expenses.

At the same time, technical advances have been constantly upgrading the efficiency of electricity generation using renewable energy resources. The costs of solar energy, for example, have dropped almost 60% over the past 10 years. Recently, the experience of California, the United States, shows that with bulk purchase, the costs can actually come further down another 60%. I

believe that when renewable energy resources gain more popularity and the market becomes more mature, the costs will keep going down, largely due to the economy of scale and increases in funds available for research and development. The market development of personal computers and cell phones in the past decade or so and also the development of LCD monitors more recently can all give us sufficient confidence in promoting the development of the renewable energy resources market.

Another obstacle is the existing structure and regulation of the electricity market. Currently, the electricity market is basically something like a statutory monopoly. One power company, for example, requires that unless there is written consent of the company, no customer is permitted to connect any private generator to the electricity supply of the company. Very often, those people who have any ideas on using renewable energy resources in building management will encounter such a problem. In the end, they have to give up their ideas and refrain from conducting the relevant research. The situation with universities may of course be a bit better, for power companies think that there is more room for co-operation in the case of university research. And, if the Government wishes to conduct any research, power companies are also prepared to co-operate. But things will be very difficult for ordinary people or construction companies interested in such research.

Mr Fred LI will discuss the interconnection of the two power companies later at this meeting. I hope that the Government can study the liberalization of electricity supply networks at an earlier time, when it conducts the interim reviews on the two power companies next year. We may draw reference from foreign experience, or consider our own experience in liberalizing the telecommunications market a couple of years ago. When the schemes of profit control are reviewed next year, we should deliver a clear message to the market, so that the two power companies and other prospective investors can make preparations in good time, instead of waiting until 2008. The reason for this is that if we introduce any policy changes to the local power market, we will have to draw up the necessary legislation, power supply standards and regulatory mechanism, and all this will take quite some time. So, I think if we can do all this in a period of four to five years, we will already be pretty quick.

I also wish to discuss another point here, a point concerning the setting down of an indicator. Members concerned about environmentalism all know that the consultancy study on renewable energy resources commissioned by the

Government is basically near completion, and a report will be released at the end of this year. I wonder if the Secretary will disclose its gist when she speaks later on. As reported by the press, the consultancy study recommends that 10 years from now, renewable energy resources should occupy 1% of our total energy consumption. I do not know how accurate the press reports are, but this indicator is certainly too modest. In many countries, the indicator is 15% by the year 2010. It must be admitted that Hong Kong has been lagging far behind in this respect, so it is basically impossible to attain 15% in a matter of less than eight years. That is why many local environmentalists and green bodies have proposed to set the indicator somewhere between 5% and 10%. But the proposed indicator of 1% mentioned just now is really too modest. The setting down of an indicator is very important because it can deliver a clear message to the market. But an indicator of 1% will convey a message to the market that the Government is not going to develop renewable energy resources in a vigorous manner. This will definitely discourage investors. I do not wish to propose any specific indicator to the Government today because I hope that it can study this issue with an open attitude. Any such indicator must be practicable and it should reflect that the Government is going to make active efforts, and we should then set down an attainable indicator on this basis. This is very important.

I hope that Members can support this motion and speak enthusiastically on it. I shall give my reply to their remarks later on. Thank you, Madam President.

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

"That, with the signing of the Kyoto Protocol and the international agreements reached at the Earth Summit by China, Hong Kong, as a special administrative region of China, has the responsibility to implement the commitments in these agreements, particularly the use of renewable energy resources and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; to this end, the Government should expeditiously formulate and implement the policy on renewable energy development so as to achieve the objectives in energy resources, environmental protection and economic aspects; the implementation of strategies for renewable energy resources should include:

- (a) increasing the use of renewable energy resources and setting a practicable target in this regard;

- (b) formulating corresponding legislation and administrative framework to facilitate the research and development and application of renewable energy resources;
- (c) providing support and incentives to promote the scientific and technological research and market development of renewable energy resources;
- (d) incorporating the policy on renewable energy resources into town planning and urban development strategies and making it one of the key factors to be taken into account;
- (e) collaborating actively with the Pearl River Delta authorities and the Guangdong Provincial Government in studying the feasibility of developing and introducing renewable energy resources; and
- (f) promoting education, professional training and publicity, with a view to enhancing the public's understanding of renewable energy resources and their application skills."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Dr LAW Chi-kwong be passed.

Does any Member wish to speak?

MR LAU PING-CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Madam President, the development and application of renewable energy resources are an important link in sustainable development. If we do not develop and use renewable energy resources, there will be a day when all our energy resources will be depleted. In the rapid development of Hong Kong over the past few decades, the issue of environmental protection was neglected and very few people discussed the topic of renewable energy resources. So at this time of an economic downturn and when people begin to be concerned about the issue of environmental protection, the discussion of renewable energy resources may somehow be a blessing in disguise.

In the past, the development of renewable energy resources often depended on whether or not the geographical conditions were suitable for the development of a particular renewable energy resource such as solar energy, hydro-electric power and the use of wind in power generation. Moreover, the factor of cost-effectiveness was also considered. For this reason, the development of Hong Kong in this aspect has been very slow and we are even behind some other economically backward cities.

In recent years, with a growing awareness of environmental protection, people in Hong Kong have become more interested in renewable energy resources. However, the development and application of such renewable energy resources in Hong Kong are still at an infancy stage. Many areas and aspects of renewable energy resources merit exploration and trial. The Government should give support and encouragement in terms of policy. For example, waste disposal is a headache for the people of Hong Kong. At present, about 6 million tonnes of waste will be disposed of in the landfills each year. Although efforts are being made in raising the waste recovery rate, for example, the recovery rate for domestic waste was 35% and that for building material waste was 79% in 1999, the rate for domestic waste is still far from satisfactory. Besides, our landfills are almost all filled up, the costs for managing the landfills are high and the underground water in the landfills may be polluted, hence producing damaging effects to the future generations. In the Hong Kong context, incineration may well be a better and more thorough solution. Two years ago, I went with members of the Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs to Europe to visit the advanced incineration facilities there. The technologies used in those plants have almost managed to produce no emission in the process of incineration. The thermal energy produced in the process can be turned into a renewable energy and the remains left can be used to make useful materials like cement and bricks.

It is unfortunate that the incineration plans in Hong Kong fail to meet the requirements of the times. The reasons for this are, in my opinion, related to the living environment and the design of buildings in Hong Kong. The basis for waste recovery is classification of waste. In other words, those types of waste which have some economic value, such as waste paper, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and so on, should be separated from those without any economic value which are then divided into dry and wet refuse for separate disposal. Take the example of multi-storey buildings, the waste chambers may not have enough space to store dry refuse and there is usually only one refuse chute. Most people will wrap the refuse and put it into the refuse chute direct. We can

imagine bags of refuse passing through the chute down many floors and finally land into the waste containers on the ground floor. The refuse which is dry will finally be mixed together with the wet refuse and so it is difficult to separate them.

Maybe the energy produced by waste incineration is minimal compared to the overall energy consumption in Hong Kong. The same goes for the amount of energy obtained from solar energy collectors installed on the rooftop of buildings for the purpose of power generation if this is compared to the power consumption of the whole building. However, from the perspective of environmental protection, that is still worth our support and it should be developed. Madam President, when this Council held a debate on the Local Agenda 21 last week, I mentioned that four professional bodies in Hong Kong are planning to set up a professional council for environmentally-friendly buildings. One of the objectives of this professional council is to set up a labelling scheme for environmentally-friendly buildings with the aim of achieving better use of and savings on energy resources in buildings through building design.

With regard to the use of solar energy, some cities on the Mainland use solar energy more extensively than Hong Kong, for many domestic buildings are installed with photoelectric panels. The energy so harnessed can be used for the purpose of lighting up the front of the building or the access to it, or for the purpose of heating and supplying warm water. Despite the limited amount of energy collected, looking at the matter from a macro perspective, anything which helps reduce the consumption of conventional energy resources and the emission of carbon dioxide is worthy of our support.

I know that some green groups in Hong Kong have set up some wind power monitoring points on Lamma Island and Po Toi Island for the collection of wind data at these two locations. If it is confirmed that wind power generation is practicable, I hope the Government will give more encouragement to the application of renewable energy resources as these.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MISS CHOY SO-YUK (in Cantonese): Madam President, meteorologists of the United Nations have issued a warning that global warming in the next 100 years would be far more serious than the situation in the last century. Temperatures

are increasing at a rate unprecedented in the past 10 000 years. The warm weather has caused a drop in the agricultural production of Asia. Australia and New Zealand are plagued by drought, Europe by flooding and deserts in Africa are expanding. The effect of all these is that millions of people will be threatened by famine.

As we all know, the major cause of global warming is the greenhouse effect caused by carbon dioxide produced by the burning of coal, petroleum, natural gas and such like petrified fuels. In a bid to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, countries all over the world have reached a consensus to promote the use of renewable energy resources. It is sad that such green energy resources still remain at the research stage in Hong Kong, they are not being put into actual use and there is not even any specific objective on that. As we look around the world, we can find that as advanced countries in the West are forerunners in green energy, so it is not surprising that they are miles ahead of us, but even in Shenzhen on the other side of the river, as well as other cities on the Mainland, they are making better progress than we do.

The European Union (EU) reached an unofficial agreement during the Earth Summit at Johannesburg, requiring the use of renewable energy resources in the world to reach 15% against the total amount of energy consumption by 2012. The goal determined by the British Government is that by 2010, 10% of the power generated in Britain will be produced by renewal energy resources. In the case of Denmark, the goal is even set at 29%.

Even though China has made a rather belated start in the development of green energy, it has been making rapid progress in the application of solar energy and wind power. The annual growth in the sale of solar energy heaters is close to 30%, and the total area of solar panels ranks number one in the world. In addition, the total capacity of wind turbine generators in China is 224 000 kW. It is estimated that by 2015, the total power generated by wind turbines in China will increase substantially to 7 million kW. China has set a specific target that by 2015, the proportion to be taken up by new and renewable energy resources against total energy consumption will be 2%. As for the similar proportion in Shenzhen which is a fast-growing city, the target is to raise it to 3% by 2010.

In the case of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), although the Government has always been talking about renewable energy resources, no specific policy on this has been devised to date. Nor are policy

objectives formulated and financial incentives given on this. As a result, the use of renewable energy resources is still a castle in the air. If we do not rise and make efforts to catch up, it would be hard for us to call Hong Kong a cosmopolitan city which attaches great importance to sustainable development.

A most obvious case is that at present the power supply networks in Hong Kong are monopolized by the two power companies. Any power generation facility which is to connect with the existing power supply networks would have to get prior approval from the two power companies. As the Government has not set any target proportion of using renewable energy resources against overall energy consumption, it is hard to imagine how the power companies would take the initiative to undermine their business potentials.

In next year when the Government undertakes an interim review of the profit control schemes and to map out the way forward for the schemes which will expire by 2008, reference should be drawn from the approach taken by the authorities of Guangdong Province, in that vigorous support for the use of renewable energy resources would be given both in terms of matching policies and financial measures. These include ensuring all facilities using renewable energy resources are connected to the existing power supply networks.

Madam President, the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works made it clear sometime ago that unless specific targets were set, it would be very difficult to effectively promote the application of green energy resources. The DAB very much agrees to this view and we propose that in order to ensure a steady demand for renewable energy resources in Hong Kong, a target should be set to make the proportion of renewable energy resources take up at least 5% of the local power consumption by 2010. Although Dr LAW Chi-kwong has not suggested any specific target, nor mentioned the power generation capacity of Hong Kong using renewable energy resources, we are of the view that even if Hong Kong cannot produce enough electricity with such resources, we may purchase it from nearby places. So in order to reach this target, power companies may develop their capacity to produce power using renewable energy resources and, if necessary, they may also purchase power from companies which generate power using renewable energy resources.

The Government invariably shirks its responsibility for not putting in great efforts to promote the development of renewable energy resources and says that the cost for this mode of power generation is high. This is not necessarily the

truth. First of all, the question of the costs of power generation using conventional fuels would depend on the emission standards imposed on these companies by the Government. For example, the Environmental Protection Department still permits the power companies to use the same emission standards adopted when the power generation facilities were commissioned many years ago. It is therefore obvious that when power companies are using old power generation facilities, without installing expensive purifying equipment, then the cost of power generation will certainly be much less.

Moreover, if a compulsory proportion of using renewable energy resources is set, then with more power consumption, the cost for renewable energy will certainly drop. According to estimates made by a scholar whose research interest lies in solar energy, if only the power companies can reach an agreement with the manufacturers of solar panels to agree on the bulk purchase of electricity, then the price for each unit of electricity would be greatly reduced to that of coal-fired power generation which is currently in use.

Madam President, although there are many technical problems related to the promotion of renewable energy resources, this type of energy is still the right choice for us. For it turns the natural elements into energy and will not produce any greenhouse gases. The SAR Government should give it the due recognition and efforts must be taken to explore its feasibility. The public should be educated in the advantages of using green energy resources so that resistance to their use can be reduced. It is hoped that this new market in energy can grow and develop. In the end, the supply of energy can be more diversified, safe and reliable, while the damage done to the environment is reduced to a minimum.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): Madam President, the serious air pollution in Hong Kong has brought about a negative impact on both the health of the people as well as the tourist industry. The polluted gases are mainly generated by the burning of mineral fuels such as coal, petroleum and natural gas. With the development of the local economy as well as the population growth, the amount of energy consumed has been continuously increasing. Therefore, we strongly agree that we should actively study whether renewable energy, which causes "zero pollution" and is inexhaustible, should be developed and utilized. Meanwhile, the SAR Government has already put forwards a proposal to the

Central Government to extend the Kyoto Protocol to Hong Kong. We have to take up this international obligation to study the issues of the application of renewable energy resources and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, so as to fulfil the ideal of sustainable development.

The Liberal Party all along supports the development and application of renewable energy resources. However, I must stress that the concept of sustainable development aims at striking an appropriate balance between the three aspects, namely, the community, the economy and environmental protection. We are of the view that, in utilizing renewable energy, we must do it in a way that is compatible with the principle of economic efficiency, taking account of its impact on the community and the economy. We do not want any party to proceed with this at all cost and act in a way that ignores the interests of other parties.

Doubtless the development of renewable energy resources is an important part in the work of environmental protection. However, while pursuing this, we have to consider our own capabilities as well as limitations, and we should never act blindly. Presently, the major problem in introducing renewable energy is its cost-effectiveness, which was also mentioned by Dr LAW Chi-kwong just a moment ago. Renewable energy is still an innovative technology now, the cost of which is higher than traditional fossil fuels. This is an indisputable fact. According to the research undertaken by some specialists, the costs of using solar power in Hong Kong will be six to nine times higher than those of generating electricity by using coal, natural gas and nuclear technology. Guangdong also faces the same problem. Presently, Guangdong uses wind energy to generate electricity at a cost of RMB 0.61 yuan per unit, over 60% higher than the traditional energy generating technology or hydro-electric power which costs RMB 0.38 yuan.

Besides, it is necessary for Hong Kong to possess the essential potentials for developing renewable energy, such as solar power, wind, and so on. But we must also carefully consider whether we have sufficient technical expertise and talents to develop and construct the relevant power generation facilities and equipment. Meanwhile, we also have to consider such issues as the cost of construction, the interconnection of power supply networks, or even the future demand, and so on. The Liberal Party acknowledges the significance of developing renewable energy resources, but we think that the Government, while promoting the development of renewable energy resources, must also give due consideration to the economic benefits of the community as a whole.

With the premise of achieving a balance among the three aspects, namely, the economy, the community and environmental protection, I think the Government could explore the possibility of developing renewable energy resources in the following directions. First, the Liberal Party hopes that the Government can expeditiously formulate an explicit energy policy and coordinate the various studies and relevant projects. In fact, the Government has already started to introduce renewable energy technology in recent years. For example, the Architectural Services Department will install solar panels in 10 buildings in the Science Park. It is estimated that this will achieve an annual saving of \$200,000 in electricity tariffs. However, in order to save this \$200,000, how much resources the Government has spent on it? What proportion does this \$200,000 represent in the total expenditure on power consumption? Considering the issue in this way would enable us to arrive at a conclusion of whether the initiative is justified. Moreover, the Government has also drawn up Building Energy Codes and installed photovoltaic panels in public buildings to dovetail with the plan to generate electricity by solar power. We must collect the relevant information from these experiments for analysis, so as to enable us to make sensible judgements from the perspective of economic efficiency.

An advanced society should adopt an open approach to consider and analyse novelties and new technology. However, it should, at the same time, adopt a pragmatic approach to consider the issues in greater depth and in a more comprehensive manner. For example, in considering the development of renewable energy resources, it should evaluate the kind of investments the community has to make in various aspects like talent training, and so on. This is also a commitment that cannot be ignored.

In social development, the concept of sustainable development must be consistently implemented so as to take care of the interests of all the different parties. The original motion suggests the Government to incorporate the policy on renewable energy resources into town planning and urban development strategies. If this is conducive to achieving sustainable development and that the community also agrees in general that it is worthwhile to pay the price involved, then of course we would think that the suggestion is worthy of our support.

Hong Kong is just at the starting point of promoting the development of renewable energy resources. The Government should strengthen its work in

educating the public on the knowledge in this aspect. The Liberal Party suggests that the Government should step up its educational and promotional drive in schools, government departments and commercial and industrial institutions, so as to enable the people to have a better and clearer understanding of the relevant knowledge as well as the scope of its application. The concept of sustainable development should also be introduced in this context, so that the people can understand that they should strive for a suitable and favourable balance among the three aspects, namely, the community, the economy and environmental protection.

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

MR AMBROSE LAU (in Cantonese): Madam President, with a view to implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the international community signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The latter is currently the only international law document on the tackling of global climate change. China signed the Protocol at the United Nations headquarters on 29 May 1998, demonstrating its proactive attitude towards international co-operation on environmental protection and the promotion of global sustainable development. As a Special Administrative Region of China, Hong Kong is naturally obligated to implement the commitments concerned.

From the macro point of view and looking at the energy structure of the world, one can see that the fossil fuels available for human use are mainly coal, then oil and lastly natural gases, which respectively represent 68%, 17% and 15%. According to one projection, oil will be exhausted in 40 years, natural gases 60 years and coal 220 years. What is more, conventional fuels like oil, coal and natural gases have been causing extremely serious pollution. Therefore, the international community now attaches very great importance to the development of renewable energy resources, and the governments of many countries are offering more and more concessions under their renewable energy resources policy. Hong Kong should catch up with the world in this respect.

Madam President, in the specific context of Hong Kong, the worsening of air pollution is caused by two main factors: first, the air pollution caused by vehicle emissions; and, second, the regional air pollution caused by the drastic increases in air pollutants produced by the industrializing Pearl River Delta.

Regarding the first factor, the Government has formulated a policy on tackling the pollution caused by diesel vehicles, including taxis, minibuses and other light, medium and heavy diesel vehicles. But since in the long run, the number of vehicles in Hong Kong will only increase, there cannot possibly be any improvement to our air quality if we continue to use fossil fuels. Hence, Hong Kong must expedite its improvement to railway services and encourage people to make use of the less polluting means of transport. That said, in the construction of environmentally-friendly transport systems, we must also take account of the Government's fiscal deficits and the ways in which infrastructure investments can tie in with our economic restructuring. Care must be taken not to enlarge the fiscal deficits and increase business costs while implementing any renewable energy resources strategy.

Regarding the second factor, Hong Kong should co-operate with the Pearl River Delta in a bid to reduce the environmental pollution caused by industrial and vehicle emissions, and the two should also jointly explore the development and introduction of renewable energy resources. Guangdong Province has in fact been making strenuous efforts to develop wind-power electricity generation in recent years. There are now two wind-power electricity generating plants, one in Nanao and the other in Huilai, with a combined generating capacity of 69 MW. The authorities there plan to construct seven additional generating plants in the coming five years, in the hope of increasing the generating capacity from 69 MW to 300 MW. Hong Kong should quicken its pace of studying the import of wind power generated electricity from Guangdong. At present, wind-power electricity generation in Hong Kong is applied only on a very small scale. For instance, the generating capacity of the wind-power electricity generating system in Shek Kwu Chau is just 300 W, making the whole thing a mere window-dressing of a "green housing estate".

Madam President, oil has replaced coal as the world's most important energy resource in the energy structure. It is estimated that there will be an annual increase in demand for oil ranging from 1.5% to 1.8%, meaning that if the world continues to maintain a high-side supply of oil, the oil reserves may last 35 to 40 years. Although the world now attaches very great importance to renewable energy resources like solar energy, wind-power and tidal energy, it is projected that the demand for these energy resources will only represent a mere 2% of the total energy demand by the year 2020. Therefore, realistically, one just cannot expect renewable energy resources to replace oil, both in terms of quantity and quality, over a very long time in the future. For this reason, the

Hong Kong Progressive Alliance supports the development of renewable energy resources in Hong Kong, its aims being: (1) to implement the commitments made in the Kyoto Protocol; (2) to take account of Hong Kong's specific circumstances and pool our strengths together to tackle the pollution caused by vehicle emissions; and (3) to tie in with the development of the local economy and formulate a renewable energy resources policy, so as to create employment opportunities.

Madam President, I so submit.

DR RAYMOND HO (in Cantonese): Madam President, although China has recently signed the Kyoto Protocol and the international agreement reached at the Earth Summit, it is not one of the countries listed in Annex I to the Kyoto Protocol. So China does not have to set any target for reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases. Hong Kong has not decided on the issue of whether or not to adopt the target listed in the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of emissions as applied to other advanced industrial countries. However, I think that Hong Kong, as a part of China and a member of the international community, cannot shirk its responsibility in reducing the emission of greenhouse gases. And an effective means to achieve this end is promoting the use of renewable energy resources.

As early as in the beginning of 2001, I moved a motion in this Council on renewable energy resources, urging the Government to take expedient measures and speed up the pace of the development and introduction of renewable energy resources. The motion was passed with the support of Members. Doubtless in last couple of years, the Government has expanded the application of renewable energy resources technology to individual projects, one of which is the solar energy application project in the Science Park at Tai Po which has received extensive media coverage. But generally, a specific policy on the promotion of renewable energy resources is still lacking in Hong Kong.

All along we have been heavily dependent on mineral fuels. In terms of power generation, most of the fuels we use are a cause of great pollution. In the course of power generation, the large amounts of greenhouse gases produced daily are constantly damaging our air quality. In Hong Kong, 82% of the greenhouse gases produced is carbon dioxide, of which more than 60% comes from power generation plants. The reason for this is that the two power

companies produce almost half of their electricity by burning coal. More than 20% of the rest of carbon dioxide produced comes from transport. The use of mineral fuels does not only lead to some adverse impact on the environment, but also leads to the depletion of more mineral fuels the reserves of which are limited. This is inconsistent with the principle of sustainable development.

On the contrary, renewable energy resources are natural sources of energy that will never be depleted. Some of the better known ones are solar energy, wind power, tidal power generation and application of methane gas from refuse, and so on. The geographical setting of Hong Kong gives us a certain advantage in the development of some types of renewable energy resources. For example, our abundant sunshine throughout the year will help develop application of solar energy. By installing photovoltaic panels in the high-rise buildings and on both sides of the streets, solar energy can be harnessed and converted into electricity. In terms of wind power, some green groups and scholars have pointed out that there are some locations in Hong Kong which have the potentials for the development of such energy. As a matter of fact, the Hongkong Electric Company Limited has commissioned the Friends of the Earth to look into the feasibility of developing wind power in Hong Kong. Test points are set up on Lamma Island and Po Toi Island for such purpose.

Apart from the advantage offered by our natural setting, we also have quite a number of experts who engage in researches on renewable energy resources, such as those in the post-secondary institutions. The Government should give them more support in terms of resources. We can also draw reference from the experience of studies conducted on the Mainland in the related fields. Renewable energy resources have received a lot of attention on the Mainland and, thanks to the suitable resources and natural conditions, significant achievements have been made in developing renewable energy resources.

It is sad, however, that we do not have any related policy on the development of renewable energy resources. In contrast, many advanced countries such as Denmark, the United States, Germany, Australia, and so on, have made great strides in the development of related technologies. This is made possible as a result of vigorous government efforts in promotion and the importance which their community attaches to sustainable development. The governments of these countries provide the necessary support for the

development of renewable energy resources and in terms of policy, amendments are made to related policies and specific targets are set up to facilitate a wider application of renewable energy resources. For example, during the Earth Summit held in South Africa, countries of the European Union reached an unofficial agreement under which member states would work towards the goal of reaching a 15% share of renewable energy resources in their total energy consumption by 2012. In addition, Australia has set a goal of having 11% of its total power generated by renewable energy resources by 2010. And Denmark has even set the target at 29%. Likewise, our Government should consider setting goals similar to these.

I also mentioned when I moved a motion on renewable energy resources that it is imperative that the Government should formulate an energy policy and legislation to dovetail with this. It is because the application of renewable energy resources is subject to very great restraints from existing rules and regulations, especially those related to power supply, for example, restrictions on users of renewable energy resources in connecting with the existing power supply network. Since the control scheme which regulates the power companies will expire in 2008, it is time for the Government to formulate a long-term energy policy and undertake a review of related policies.

In addition, industrial alcohol recovered and produced from the waste of building materials and diesel recovered or produced from chemical waste are subject to duty. These are examples which will stifle the development of renewable energy resources in Hong Kong. So the Government should devise effective measures to encourage the application of these renewable energy resources.

With regard to the overall strategy for the development of renewable energy resources, the Government should consider providing tax concessions so that financial incentives can be given to encourage more companies to invest in projects on the development of renewable energy resources. Lest, we will have to rely on the Government to use our limited resources to promote the development in much slower pace, and we will lag far behind other countries. So the Government should give some preferential treatment to companies and individuals who purchase and install renewable energy systems and facilities. This will hopefully induce more companies and members of the public to join the ranks of those using renewable energy resources.

Lastly, the Government should enhance promotion efforts to make the people realize the interrelationship between renewable energy resources and sustainable development. The people should be made aware of the capabilities of renewable energy resources in solving the problems of environmental pollution and the depletion of energy resources. The public will then be able to give full play to their role as energy users in the market and thus expedite our conversion to the use of renewable energy resources.

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

MR FRED LI (in Cantonese): Madam President, the Government is studying the interconnection of power supply as well as the arrangements after the present Scheme of Control agreements signed with the two power companies expire in 2008. In the mean time, the Government will conduct the last interim review with the two power companies on the Scheme of Control agreements next year. The Democratic Party considers that this is the right time for Government, while studying the Scheme, to consider expanding the application of renewable energy resources to a wider scale.

Why do we have to discuss renewable energy resources today? What is wrong with generating electricity by using the existing fuels or gases?

According to information provided by the green group, Friends of the Earth, local power plants are the major source of Hong Kong's carbon dioxide emission, contributing to 64% of such emission that causes air pollution. Therefore, the Democratic Party advocates the use of renewable energy resources because, apart from fulfilling our international obligations, more importantly, we have to provide our next generation with an environment with "breathable air".

In fact, it is already quite late for us to start discussing renewable energy resources today. Our air has been polluted; the climate is becoming increasingly hot. Hong Kong is being affected by the greenhouse effects. However, we cannot just sit there to wait for the arrival of the doomsday. The Democratic Party hopes that this motion debate can make Honourable Members, the power companies and the Government, especially the Economic Development and Labour Bureau which is in charge of energy affairs, adopt a positive and open attitude to explore the issue of developing renewable energy resources.

Hong Kong is geographically small with a lot of high-rise buildings. Under such conditions, developing renewable energy resources, such as building wind energy or solar power generating stations, will inevitably face a lot of constraints. Therefore, in developing renewable energy, we must seek co-operation with the Mainland or build the relevant power generating facilities on Hong Kong Island or the outlying islands. However, with the existing scale of interconnection of the two power companies, the development of renewable energy will be greatly restricted if there are no further changes to cope with the situation.

Since April 1984 the two power companies, that is, Hongkong Electric Company Limited (HEC) and CLP Power Hong Kong Limited (CLP), have established the interconnection of power supply. The total capacity of this interconnection was upgraded to the present 720 MVA in 1991. This interconnection system is mainly used for generation capacity support and emergency power support, and it does not allow for regular sharing of electricity supply between the two power companies.

Hong Kong does not have a large-scale interconnection system of power supply. Suppose Guangdong is able to transmit wind energy to Hong Kong after having strived to develop renewable energy for a certain period of time, then such energy resources could only be transmitted to the CLP, whereas customers of the HEC will not be able to benefit from it. This is because at the moment only the CLP has established an interconnection with the Mainland.

Apart from this, if one of the power companies has developed wind energy or solar energy, yet due to the capacity constraints, the energy resources so generated can only be transmitted to clients of that particular company, but not those of the other company for use. So such resources cannot be used by everyone in Hong Kong.

Moreover, the present interconnection, owned by the two power companies, is a private asset by nature. It is by no means easy to encourage organizations other than the two power companies to develop renewable energy, and then transmit such energy resources via the interconnection.

On the other hand, the Government has signed Scheme of Control agreements with the two power companies, allowing them to make a profit of

13.5% on basis of its fixed assets. This arrangement is definitely not encouraging the two power companies to purchase electricity from each other or purchase electricity generated by renewable energy resources in the Mainland.

All along, the Democratic Party has been advocating the upgrading of the capacity of the interconnection, because only by doing so can we reduce the total power generating load of the system as well as the demand for backup generating capacity. This would help to reduce the costs, and ultimately the benefits so derived can be transferred onto the consumers. Besides, this would also enhance the reliability of the whole power generation and transmission system. The findings of the consultancy report commissioned by the Government in 1999 on upgrading the capacity of the interconnection have rightly illustrated the benefits of such an upgrading.

Now, with the additional factor of renewable energy resources, the Democratic Party thinks that the Government should adopt a more positive attitude and increase the capacity of the interconnection of the two power companies. The Government has already launched another technical study on the interconnection of the two power companies in the beginning of last year, yet no findings have been released so far. We hope, with a prolonged delay again, the Government will not repeat the notorious practice of discussing without making any decision on this issue.

Of course, some electricity experts may opine that the proposal of developing renewable energy resources is not feasible. The reasons are: firstly, the costs are very high; secondly, technically there are certain difficulties; and thirdly, the power supply from the Mainland is not absolutely reliable because the demand for electricity in the Mainland is also ever increasing. So how can there be surplus electricity for transmission to Hong Kong? The Democratic Party clearly understands that the development of renewable energy resources is not a project that can be implemented in the short term, and the difficulties mentioned above would not be solved overnight either. However, the Democratic Party hopes that the Government can at least set a long-term goal for the development of renewable energy resources, for the sake of our environment as well as our next generation. It is because the Democratic Party believes that if we keep on using natural gases or coal for power generation, the cost to be borne by society in the future will be even higher. I hereby hope that the Government could have a long-term vision.

Lastly, I wish to talk about my trip to Kunming last Christmas (I still had my Home Visit Permit with me at that time). I could see that the roofs of the whole city of Kunming were all installed with solar panels. I felt that this was a city far more backward than Hong Kong — from the construction of roads to its town planning. However, each of its residential buildings is fitted with a solar panel mainly for providing people with hot water. I do not know what the Secretary means by shaking her head right now. Why is Hong Kong so backward in this regard? So far, only the former Urban Council had made use of solar energy to provide hot water in public toilets. Hong Kong is really quite backward in the development of this area. I think the Government could give some encouragement to the public on this matter, especially in utilizing solar energy resources as Hong Kong has plenty of sunshine throughout the year. I feel that we simply should not waste the energy resources given to us by nature.

I so submit.

MR ABRAHAM SHEK: Madam President, environmental protection, sustainability and renewable energy are popular terms nowadays, although renewable energy may be the most technical and least familiar term to the general public. Renewable energies are those from readily available sources in nature — like solar energy, wind, tides and so on. Many developed countries already use renewable sources to generate some of their electricity. The utility companies in Hong Kong currently provide a very reliable and moderately priced supply of electricity to the city's population of 6.8 million. However, we rely heavily on fossil fuels, which emit large amounts of carbon dioxide during the combustion process. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas and a leading cause of global warming. It is also one of the major air pollutants in Hong Kong. Although the Government has dedicated considerable efforts in improving our air quality and in reducing our reliance on carbon-intensive fossil fuels by developing renewable energy, its progress is slow. Hong Kong's energy demands are expected to grow by about 2% a year, driven by a population increase of approximately 1 million people every 10 years over the next two decades. The development of renewable energy resources is essential to Hong Kong's quality of life.

In addition, China is now a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, which calls for international reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. As a part of China, not to mention being a world-class city, Hong Kong should also commit to the

greenhouse gas targets set by the Kyoto Protocol. Currently, the portfolio for energy policy rests with the Economic Development and Labour Bureau, whose interaction with the utility companies is primarily to administer supply contracts. Could it not help encourage and investigate renewable energy resources or help reduce our use of carbon-intensive fossil fuels? Hong Kong currently accounts for 0.18% of the world's greenhouse gases. The Government should develop and advocate renewable energy through regulatory or legislative means, such as implementing a bill similar to the Renewable Energy Act of Germany. At the Earth Summit on sustainable development in August this year, the European Union committed to a renewable energy target level of 15% of total energy demand by 2012. Hong Kong, if we are Asia's world city, should also set practical timetables and targets to implement our energy policy.

In my view though, Hong Kong is unlikely to adopt renewable energy as its main power source for at least another 20 years, because change would require our current infrastructure to be significantly altered. In order to expedite the acceptance of renewable resources, the Government should incorporate renewable energy policies into future town planning and urban development strategies. With the current substantial budget deficit of the Government of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) though, it will be difficult to carry out this plan at its full cost. A most cost-efficient method to accomplish these green energy plans might be to initiate public-private partnerships in government construction projects. With the participation of the private sector, renewable energy development policies can be enacted more swiftly and, in turn, more construction jobs can be created. And the end results will invariably benefit all of us too.

Yet, developing renewable energy resources involves enormous start-up costs. To attract investments from the private sector, the Government should offer support and incentives to promote scientific and technological research, and to nurture a market for renewable energy. Moreover, universities and educational institutions should be encouraged to train a professional pool of local talents to study renewable energy resources.

The implementation of renewable energy strategies should also include greater collaboration among the SAR Government, the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Pearl River Delta authorities. Hong Kong and Guangdong are separated only by a river. When the wind is easterly, pollutants flow from Hong Kong to the Pearl River Delta. In winter, when the wind is northerly,

Hong Kong suffers. Neither side can solve the problem alone, so both governments should collaborate to study the feasibility of developing and introducing renewable energy resources.

Another reason the SAR and Guangdong Governments should join forces is that the same air pollution not only worsens living conditions, but impacts on the investment environments in both Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta. Foreign investors are attaching greater and greater importance to clean air. But the two sides should not advocate renewable energy just to bring in investment. They should also implement these green policies for the sake of their own citizens' well-being so that future generations could live in a clean and healthy environment. I hope that our Government and its Guangdong counterpart will soon engage in talks to deal with the problem. Economic development cannot be sustained unless we seek to protect both our living and business environments.

Public support is crucial for any government policy to be successfully implemented. A policy on renewable energy development is no exception. In my view, environmental education in Hong Kong is not comprehensive enough. Although the Government has launched many community awareness programmes on air, noise, water and waste pollution, the public in general has no concept of what renewable energy is. The Government should specifically promote renewable energy in public education and publicity campaigns. Public awareness and acceptance are significant factors in encouraging and developing the growth of renewable energy as a power source. Moreover, energy conservation should be taught and installed as an integral part of our school system at all levels, so that the younger generation can cultivate a greater interest and concern for our local and global environments.

Hong Kong needs to ensure that it has a renewable energy policy so that we can achieve our objectives in the areas of energy resources development, environmental protection and economic progress.

Thank you, Madam President.

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

(No Member responded)

SECRETARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND WORKS

(in Cantonese): Madam President, the motion proposed by Dr LAW Chi-kwong was debated in this Council early last year. At that time, the Government stated that it supported the development of renewable energy resources in Hong Kong. Honourable Members may feel that with regard to lending its support to the motion, the Government seems to be quite ready to express its support for renewable energy resources. In fact, the issue has witnessed dynastic changes over the past decade. All along, renewable energy resources are not supported by all oil companies. That is why these energy resources have remained in the laboratories and failed to make their way into commercial development. It is only after much effort and promotion that it has become a mainstream idea. So what the Honourable Member has dreamt is correct, albeit after many nightmares, and the dream can become true now.

There are three major premises for sustainable development and energy resources, that is, society, economy and environment. There must be close links between these three, for as energy resources are essential to the promotion of social and economic development, they will also impact on the environment. Economic effects are also important, for in many aspects of industrial and commercial development, energy cannot go beyond some affordable prices, for if this happens, economic development as a whole will be jeopardized.

Thus, it is a natural consequence that sustainable development will lead to reforms in the energy system. In promoting the use of renewable energy resources, since it involves these three factors, so the promotional efforts have not been too much of a success. The issue has become an important subject during the discussions held in Johannesburg recently on sustainable development. However, no agreement on this was reached. On the other hand, countries from the European Union agreed to set a target for this. As a member of the international community, Hong Kong is obliged to promote the sustainable development of energy resources, enhance energy efficiency and apply technologies which make use of clean fuels to achieve economic growth, while at the same time spare no efforts in protecting the environment.

Mr Albert HO mentioned earlier that our development in this aspect had been very slow, and this I beg to differ. It is because before any scientific advance reaches maturity, it would be very difficult to notice its economic benefits, especially in such a small place like Hong Kong. It would do us no

good if a white elephant is produced. A good example of this is the desalination plant which was built in the 1960s and it was scraped without ever being put into use for one single day. With the advances in science and technology, it is unfortunate that very often we have not made the correct choice for the right technology that we want. For example, 1 million families in the United States are using solar energy and as Mr Fred LI has pointed out, every family in Kunming is using solar energy. The solar panels which they use do not convert heat into electricity, heat is simply stored in the panels and when water is heated, it can be used for baths and cooking. But it is very difficult to introduce this into Hong Kong, for we do not have so many houses and even if we have, their size is too small. As to what kinds of renewable energy resources we may use in Hong Kong, we have to wait for the detailed findings of the consultancy report.

Information shows that solar energy and wind power may be renewable energy resources that we may focus on and they may be the direction we should be heading. As to energy produced from refuse, effluent or sludge, that should be considered as well. In terms of the development of technology, there are some limitations and restrictions which we should consider carefully when we seek to use it. It is because some technology cannot be used in some places. We should also consider the conditions and special features of our geographical and natural environment. For example, wind power is well-developed in Europe and hydroelectric power is well-developed in Canada and the United States, due to the existence of certain favourable conditions there. As for Hong Kong, due to restrictions in our natural environment, there are no favourable conditions for the development of hydroelectric power and geothermal power. On the potentials for solar energy and wind power, we can take the following three approaches, that is, appropriate application of technology, cost-effectiveness and how policies can be used to back up overall sustainable development.

On the issue of how the Government has been applying renewable energy resources, I think Honourable Members discussed that in detail in last year's motion debate. Now I would only talk about the directions of the latest developments and cite some cases. We have installed more than 2 500 sq m of photovoltaic panels in the Sheung Shui abattoir and the Tsuen Wan swimming pool for heating purposes. Besides, we have also installed photovoltaic panels

in some parks and meteorological stations. I believe Members are well aware of these. An Honourable Member mentioned earlier that a large number of solar panels, or photovoltaic panels which I have just mentioned, are installed in the newly built Hong Kong Science Park. Photovoltaic panels are used to convert solar energy into electricity. As this kind of panels is quite expensive, we have to reduce the costs involving this kind of technology before its cost-effectiveness can be compared with thermal energy produced by fossil fuels. We expect that by 2004, the solar energy units at the Science Park will be able to transmit a maximum of 200 kW of electricity. Though this is only 1% of the total power supply in Phase 1 of the Science Park, it is nevertheless an important testing point, for when power is generated in the Science Park, it can be transmitted to the power supply network.

Many people have raised the argument that when power is transmitted to the supply network, it is not known if the stability of the network would be affected in any way and whether or not the power supply territory-wide would be affected. It should be remembered that the trials at the Science Park are very important, for in the first place, they are better able to grasp the relevant technological developments and in the second place, this would enable talks to be held with the CLP Power Hong Kong Limited to transmit the power generated to its supply network. As a matter of fact, the power generated by solar energy, that is, its cycle, is very stable and is even better than ordinary power. I have had arguments with other people over this issue and with the trials in place, I think this kind of uninformed views and misconceptions would be eliminated. On the other hand, wind power does not have this advantage, for it is less stable. Power companies are justified when they do not want to have this kind of power transmitted into their supply network, for this may make power supply less stable. The Government is of course very concerned about this, for we must ensure that power supply is stable. This problem can be solved by using the filter technology. That is why as an accountable government we cannot afford to do no tests beforehand and transmit all the electricity generated from solar energy into our power supply network. We are planning to conduct a small-scale trial and we hope that in the near future we can conduct some experiments on wind power in some housing estates. The power generated will not be used in battery cells but in power supply networks to see if this works. If it does, then this will pave the way for policy formulation later. But currently, we have to solve quite a number of technical problems.

As to the question of what is the way forward for this, I can tell Members now that the consultancy hired by us is studying into the effects, related legislation, mechanisms and promotion matters. The second stage of our study is to conduct a pilot scheme in which various kinds of photovoltaic panels with a total area of 500 sq m will be installed on the external walls of the government offices building in Wan Chai. The aim of the scheme is to test the safety and efficiency of these panels and to examine if the power generated by them is stable. Another aim of placing the scheme in the bustling streets of downtown Hong Kong is to educate the public and enhance their awareness of renewable energy resources. It is expected that the pilot scheme will be completed by the end of next year.

We would take all views and suggestions into consideration. In drawing up a proposal on renewable energy resources for public consultation, we would consider the following:

First, the proposal must be in line with our energy policy, in other words, to ensure that energy is provided in an effective, safe and affordable manner to meet the needs of society. The impact on the environment must be minimized in the process of using and producing that kind of energy, and that its use is efficient and will save on energy consumption.

Second, the proposal should take into account the actual situation in Hong Kong, as well as related issues like geographical setting, technology and legislation.

Third, the proposal should implement sustainable development in Hong Kong while striking a balance between social, economic and environmental developments.

Fourth, the cost-effectiveness of the proposal as well as its affordability to consumers must be examined.

As to the strategies for development, I have listed out a few examples already. On the education and research front, the Technology and Innovation Fund, Research Grants Council and Environment and Conservation Fund have made grants totalling more than \$21 million to finance more than 20 research projects on renewable energy resources and energy efficiency carried out by various local universities and private institutions.

The intent of the Economic Development and Labour Bureau is that when an interim review of the two power companies is conducted in 2003, we will discuss the issue of renewable energy resources with the power companies and put forward our demands. We will also see what kind of progress the two companies are making on that. When we formulate a major policy direction for power supply after 2008, we will consider whether targets for the use of renewable energy resources should be set, how support and incentives will be provided, how the policy on renewable energy resources will be incorporated into town planning and other issues such as collaboration with the mainland authorities and promotion activities, and so on.

Lastly, presently a lot efforts are being made to raise energy efficiency and minimize environmental pollution. The Energy Efficiency Office under the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department has been working on one of these initiatives since its establishment in 1994. It has launched the Energy Efficiency Labelling Scheme, compiled the Building Energy Codes, engaged in energy assessment in government buildings and set up targets and benchmarks in energy consumption for commercial buildings and vehicles, as well as promoting the water-cooling air-conditioning system, and so on. Through these policy efforts and promotion activities, energy efficiency in Hong Kong has increased 15% over the past decade. These efforts will continue in the next few years.

As to the greenhouse gases, in 2000 we succeeded in reducing the emissions to the levels of 1990. This has been made possible through the use of natural gas in power generation and various other emission reduction measures. We will continue to work on these. With respect to the Kyoto Protocol, we have taken the same stand as our national government and we have not made it a requirement that the emission of such gases be reduced to a certain percentage. However, an emission reduction target should be set after all, for it will become a driving force for positive actions in various aspects. One of the projects we are presently undertaking is about methane gas in the landfills. Quite a large amount of methane gas is produced every day, that is, about a few thousand tonnes. However, as methane gas is not properly utilized in the landfills, it is merely burned away. As a matter of fact, methane is used in many places to generate electricity and even transmitted to the power supply networks, or provide power for some small generators. The Government is working hard on all of these projects. That would mean some concrete actions to in furtherance of sustainable development.

Madam President, leaders of the world pledged in the Johannesburg summit that they would work together to conserve natural resources and promote social and economic development. Hong Kong will certainly do our part in this endeavour. Although we are at a start-up stage with regard to the development of renewable energy resources, we would strive towards achieving this goal. I would like to mention in passing here that although many people would say that the Johannesburg summit is very different from the 1992 conference, the most successful thing of the summit is the forging of tripartite collaboration between the enterprises, the non-government organizations and the governments in the promotion of sustainable development. A good example is that the petroleum giant, Shell, has formed a group with Green Peace and the government of a country, turning a relationship characterized by confrontation to one of partnership. In the promotion of renewable energy resources, there is now a new term called "coalition of the willing", that is an alliance of partners. I hope such a kind of relationship can emerge in Hong Kong so that an impetus can be given to boost developments which are beneficial to society, the economy and the environment.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr LAW Chi-kwong, please speak in reply. You still have six minutes 42 seconds.

DR LAW CHI-KWONG (in Cantonese): Madam President, I forgot to do something and would like to do it now: I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

I am very grateful to the Secretary for her positive response and for the enthusiastic speeches of several Members. Mr LAU Ping-cheung talked about the issue of burning refuse and I have a little reservation about this. My general understanding is that most renewable energy resources are energy resources converted from other forms of energy resources such as solar energy, wind energy, tidal power and wave power. All these energy resources are converted from other forms of energy resources. However, the burning of refuse is to destroy certain substances and convert them into energy and this is not in any way different from the burning of petrified substances. Moreover, the burning of refuse will also create some greenhouse gases, therefore, in considering the options for renewable energy resources, we can put aside the option of refuse for the time being.

Mrs Selina CHOW referred to the research being conducted at the Science Park earlier. I should also like to alert Members to the fact that in connection with such tests, we should not only look at the time-horizon for long-term investments but also at today's efforts and we could regard this as an expenditure item of research and development (R&D). The work we have done in this relation can effectively reduce future costs.

Mr Ambrose LAU earlier referred to the issue of whether or not we are being optimistic, which means it is estimated that in 20 years' time, renewable energy resources would only account for 2% of the total energy resources in the world. I mentioned the example of portable computers in my first speech. The portable computer I am now using is in many ways better than the so-called super computers that were in use at the time I graduated from the university and also more advanced than the mainframe computer that supported the teller machines of 200 branches of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited where I worked in my early years. However, the computer I am now using is only a very small piece of machinery.

Therefore, we should have some confidence in technology and future developments and changes would be expeditious. I believe future renewable energy resources would be like what I mentioned earlier — a pair of shoes that can be turned into a kind of renewable energy resources in my dreams, that is, the so-called plug and play energy, which means "隨插隨用" in Chinese. All renewable energy resources can also link with the energy network anytime, that means, such energy can be channeled into our existing electricity supply system to make our whole electricity supply more diversified and varied and reduce our reliance on the existing conventional energy resources.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone and I hope this motion can be carried smoothly. Thank you, Madam President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Dr LAW Chi-kwong be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

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

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now adjourn the Council until 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 6 November 2002.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

Appendix I**WRITTEN ANSWER****Written answer by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works to Dr Raymond HO's supplementary question to Question 1**

In the past six months, no road excavation works were carried out on the roads to and within Stanley during weekends and public holidays. All road works relating to maintenance of defective footpaths, carriageways, road markings and utility facilities were carried out on weekdays.

Appendix II**WRITTEN ANSWER****Written answer by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food to Dr LO Wing-lok's supplementary question to Question 3**

The Education Department (ED) will strengthen promotion and parent education to develop healthy eating habits among children through the following means:

- The ED launched The Parent Education Initiative in August 2001 to subsidize schools, Parent-Teacher Associations and non-profit-making organizations to conduct school-based parent education activities on promoting the physical, cognitive and psychological development of children. To date, 18 of the subsidized programmes are related to promoting healthy diet among children.
- To work with the Department of Health and Radio Television Hong Kong in producing road show publicity programmes and radio programmes on the issue of healthy diets.
- To produce pamphlets on promoting healthy diet and healthy living habits in children and distribute them to parents through secondary schools, primary schools and kindergartens. It is expected that this pamphlet would be ready for distribution to parents in early 2003. The above information will be uploaded onto the Education and Manpower Bureau homepage for the reference of parents and the public.
- The ED is now developing education material for the parents of pre-school children, which also includes information on healthy diet and healthy living habits. The aim is to help parents promote healthy diet and healthy living habit in their children from an early age. The materials will be uploaded onto the Education and Manpower Bureau homepage for easy access by parents and the public.

Appendix III**WRITTEN ANSWER****Written answer by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works to Dr Raymond HO's supplementary question to Question 6**

According to the Transport Department's information, 93% of the buses deployed in tunnel routes are air-conditioned buses. In this connection, please be advised that as far as cross harbour tunnel routes are concerned, all the buses deployed for these routes are air-conditioned buses.