

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): Madam President, as I mentioned yesterday, quite a number of opinion surveys have indicated to us that the greatest concern of Hong Kong people is not constitutional reform but economic development. Unfortunately, as shown by the discussions in this Council, the greatest concern of pro-democracy Members is always opposite to that of Hong Kong people. Anyone who has been following the meetings of our panels will know what little interest the democratic camp has shown in economic issues. This is very unfortunate.

The main reason for the concern over economic issues is that the state of the economy and the people's livelihood are closely related. When the economy is sluggish, it will be impossible to improve employment. In this connection, we can notice that some Members are always urging the Government to create jobs. Such an advocacy will in fact mislead people to believe that the Government has the ability to improve employment. But the truth is that all societies must draw on the economic impetus provided by the people and the business sector before any jobs can really be created. If the Government ignores market demands and seeks to create some jobs on a temporary basis, it will at most relieve people's plight to a certain extent. In the long run, there will be no improvement to the standard and quality of living.

In the policy address this year, the Chief Executive advocates the vigorous promotion of cultural and creative industries as a new growth area for our economy. He will even take the lead in establishing a consultative framework for cultural and creative industries. This is a good initiative.

As a matter of fact, in his policy address two years ago, the Chief Executive already discussed the vigorous promotion of creative industries, and at that time, he also listed a total of 11 new industries involving the synergy of artistic creativity and product development. Unfortunately, after the passage of two years, there is still thunder but no rain. All is indeed mere lip-service. The only difference is that this time around, the word "cultural" is added. I hope that this will not further complicate the matter and can achieve some concrete progress and results instead.

Actually, the local film industry, music circle and creative sector have long since pointed out that their greatest concern is the protection of copyright. They are of the view that the mere establishment of some kind of development funds will never achieve this objective. One example is the uploading and

downloading of creative works on the Internet, an issue that has attracted great concern recently. The police recently arrested a man who illegally uploaded pirated films onto the Internet using BT technology. The man was subsequently charged. This is very encouraging to the industries concerned. But at the same time, I also hear people say that it was alright for the man to do so because he did not do it for money anyway. They think that such an act is not inexcusable. These comments actually reflect a certain kind of mentality. I shall come back to it in a moment.

But the Government's high-profile announcement of its first successful clamp down on illegal uploading activities is soon followed by the emergence of a new kind of piracy software called eXeem. It is said that when compared with its first generation counterpart, this software is even easier to use and much more elusive to tracking by law-enforcement agencies — truly, a foot of good brings with it a yard of evil, as the saying goes. For this reason, the authorities must enhance their knowledge of information technology, so as to ensure victory in this high-tech, ever-advancing "cops and gangsters" game. They must also perfect the relevant legislation as soon as possible and step up their enforcement and other related actions. If not, if they cannot even protect copyright well enough, how can it be possible to develop creative industries? Having said that, I must add that in all societies, the crux of the problem should always be whether or not there is any respect for intellectual property rights. The reason is that the film and music industries are not the only creative industries in society; many other industries, such as design and architecture, which also require originality, are also creative in nature. That being the case, the protection of intellectual property rights must be the most fundamental issue.

But it is such a pity that so far, people's knowledge of intellectual property rights is still minimal and they still cannot quite understand why they must protect these rights. I think the Government must invest more resources in education and enforcement. Most importantly, it must co-operate closely with the relevant industries, react more quickly, and step up actions against copyright piracy, especially by working with places where copyright piracy originates. It is only in this way that creative industries can really be promoted.

When it comes to economic development, we must of course talk about the tourism industry, one of the four pillars of our economy. It can be said that the past year was a very prosperous year for the tourism industry. Thanks to the

ceaseless efforts of the Hong Kong Government and the Liberal Party, the Individual Visit Scheme was further extended to a greater number of provinces and cities in the Mainland. The number of visitors to Hong Kong last year thus exceeded 20 million, reaching 21.8 million and bringing immense benefits to the retail and services industries, particularly restaurants.

The opening of the Hong Kong Disneyland in September this year will probably bring the tourism industry to a new peak of development. I hope that the SAR Government can collaborate more actively with the Mainland, enhance its promotion efforts and put in place a satisfactory package of ancillary measures, so that we can be ready for the large numbers of visitors attracted to the Disneyland. It is particularly important for us to maintain the quality of our services, and in this connection, I am very glad that both the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Chief Executive strongly support the Quality Tourism Services Scheme. Besides, I also strongly support the proposal of the Financial Secretary's Lantau Development Task Force on developing Lantau Island into a major tourism node comprising spa and eco-tourism facilities. We have been fighting for all these facilities for many years, and we hope that the Government can at the same time seriously consider the Liberal Party's proposal on setting up a casino for visitors, so as to further promote the development of the tourism industry and other related businesses and create more jobs for the grass-roots people.

I also welcome the Chief Executive's undertaking that a goods and services tax will not be introduced in the next two and a half years. But then, it has been reported that some government officials have sounded out the idea to the mass media, saying that consideration will be given to the imposition of a goods and services tax in Hong Kong. This may mean that we should not be happy too soon after hearing the Chief Executive's good news. I must reiterate that the introduction of a goods and services tax will definitely deal a blow to Hong Kong as a paradise for shoppers and gourmets, and our services industries and small and medium enterprises will also suffer immensely as a result. I note that although the new President of the American Chamber of Commerce thinks that there is room for reforming the tax regime in Hong Kong, he opposes the introduction of a goods and services tax. His arguments are roughly the same as ours.

Having said all this, I must still express my gratitude to the SAR Government for working so hard to fight for the signing of CEPA and also for

the ensuing benefits, because CEPA has doubtless played a very positive role in bringing about the economic recovery of Hong Kong. But I must also point out that the Government has still failed to do well enough in several respects. For instance, it has not offered any effective assistance to our services industries in their fight to lower the threshold of entering the mainland market. Besides, when it comes to assisting Hong Kong businesses in identifying business opportunities and vying for solid contracts and projects, the Government's measures are simply not strong enough.

In fact, as Members can often read in newspapers, heads of foreign governments do often go on overseas visits with business delegations, with a view to soliciting business contracts. The President of the United States may, for example, go on an overseas visit with a delegation of 200 to 300 people, many of whom are businessmen or top-level members of chambers of commerce. Members may also know that in his recent visit to Mexico, Mr ZENG Qinghong, Vice-President of our country, also brought along a delegation of state and private enterprises to look for business opportunities. I think the SAR Government should follow their example and adopt stronger measures to assist the local business sector in soliciting business. When it comes to these measures, I hope that people will not make any accusations about collusion between business and the Government. The reason is that when the business sector fights for these things, when it seeks to enhance our competitiveness in the outside world, it must always have the support of the Government. And, it must not be forgotten that the business sector is also working for the overall economic benefit of Hong Kong in doing so.

CEPA is a mutually beneficial arrangement indeed. The SAR Government must not be swayed by any unjustified comments, particularly the accusation that this is nothing but a petition for alms. We are not asking the Central Authorities for any money. In fact, we have to submit proposals to them and convince them that Hong Kong and the Mainland can complement each other's strengths in many ways. Moreover, we must not forget that practically all large enterprises in the whole world are casting their eyes on the vast mainland market. Hong Kong should not fall behind this trend. It must rid itself of any reservations and take proactive actions, instead of thinking that this is something shameful.

Madam President, the Government has repeatedly claimed that it wants to create a favourable business environment. But when it comes to the enactment of legislation, it often refuses to conduct any regulation impact studies.

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Consequently, it never knows whether the legislation enacted are feasible, or what the costs are, or whether the costs are justified. In that case, how can the Government convince the business sector in general, and small and medium enterprises in particular, that it genuinely wishes to foster a favourable business environment? I hope that the Government can put in place a policy under which the enactment of all relevant legislation must be preceded by such studies. This is the only way to put the mind of the business sector at ease. Thank you, Madam President.