

LCQ18: Hong Kong Marathon

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

Following the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2007 held in March this year, some academics and runners made the following suggestions: advancing the race day, changing the routes of the event, extending the duration of the race and road closure, setting higher eligibility criteria for joining competitive races, reducing the maximum number of participants, adjusting the starting time for various races to avoid participants from obstructing each other, holding a separate long-distance running carnival for those who just wish to participate, opening some sections of the routes for members of the public to line both sides as spectators and arranging for the event to be televised so as to enhance the atmosphere of competition, stepping up efforts to promote correct knowledge of long-distance running, as well as urging participants to adopt a responsible and serious attitude in joining the event and be well-prepared for the race. In its reply to my relevant question in March this year, the Administration said that preliminary results of the assessment by the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association (HKAAA) on the aforesaid suggestions were expected to be available in June or later this year. Regarding the future arrangements for this event, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it knows the aforesaid preliminary assessment results, and which of the aforesaid suggestions will be implemented; if some of the suggestions will not be implemented, of the reasons for that;
- (b) given that during the Chicago Marathon held early this month, a participant died suddenly, hundreds of runners felt unwell and the event was cut short, whether HKAAA has looked into the causes thereof and drawn on the experience as reference for next year's race; and
- (c) whether it has, in collaboration with HKAAA, devised a contingency mechanism for next year's race to deal with any emergencies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) According to the information provided by the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association (HKAAA), the Event Day of the next Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon will be advanced slightly. The tentative date for the event is February 17, 2008 (Sunday).

Regarding the arrangements for the routes, the HKAAA set up a Task Force in May 2007 to study in detail the feasibility of changing the routes of the event with the relevant Government departments. After a number of meetings and following a study by a traffic consultant, the Task Force recommended in September 2007 to shift the Finish Area of the event from the Golden Bauhinia Square (the Finish Area in the previous events) in Wan Chai to the Victoria Park in Causeway Bay. The Task Force also recommended to change the course of the 10-kilometre Run to the Island Eastern Corridor on Hong Kong Island, so that the race will start at the eastbound carriageway of the Island Eastern Corridor in Fortress Hill, with the Turning Point located near Sai Wan Ho for westbound carriageway of the Island Eastern Corridor, and finish at Victoria Park. The HKAAA, relevant organisations and government departments held the Organising Committee meeting on October 18, 2007 and accepted the new arrangements proposed by the Task Force. HKAAA believes that the new arrangements can substantively reduce people flow in the Western Harbour Crossing and allow more runners to participate in various races of the Marathon, without the need for extending the duration of the race and road closure. Therefore, the HKAAA does not need to set higher eligibility criteria for joining competitive races, reduce the maximum number of participants, adjust the starting time for the event or add a carnival category in order to control the number of participants. Under the new arrangements, members of the public are allowed to line both sides of the route one kilometre before the finishing line to participate as spectators and cheer for the runners, so as to enhance the atmosphere of competition.

The HKAAA also plans to launch a public education and publicity exercise that includes stepping up efforts to promote correct knowledge of long-distance running, as well as urging participants to adopt a responsible and serious attitude in joining the event and be well-prepared for the race.

Regarding the proposed live broadcast of the Event on television, the Administration will not interfere with the business decision between the HKAAA and the relevant television broadcaster(s).

(b) The HKAAA has learnt that the problems encountered in the Chicago Marathon held early this month is probably due to the high temperature at 30 degree Celsius on the event day and the lack of water at water points.

The Hong Kong Marathon is held in February or March when the weather is

rather cool with an average temperature of around 20 degree Celsius. Moreover, as the water points set up by the HKAAA have never run out of water in the past, and the distance between one water point and another is only 2.5 to 3 kilometres, which is shorter than the requirement of not more than 5 kilometres under the international standard, it is believed that problems similar to those at the Chicago Marathon will not occur in Hong Kong.

(c) We know that the HKAAA will continue to implement the contingency mechanism that has been effective over the years for the next Hong Kong Marathon to deal with any emergencies, so that participants can enjoy a challenging and safe Marathon. The Administration will continue to liaise closely with the HKAAA and review the arrangements after the event.

Ends/Wednesday, October 24, 2007