

LCQ16: Marathon running

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 (March 12):

Question:

It has been reported that as many as 42,000 people participated in this year's Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon, indicating that this activity has gradually become a major local and even international sports event and that the passion of the people of Hong Kong for long-distance running is increasing. Moreover, the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association (HKAAA), the event organiser, implemented a number of improvement measures for this year's event, including advancing the race day, arranging different routes for different races, arranging for the routes to pass through busy areas so as to allow members of the public to line both sides as spectators, changing the finishing point of the event, arranging live television coverage of the event so as to enhance the atmosphere of competition, etc. Regarding the arrangements for and the promotion of marathon, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the preliminary results of the review conducted by HKAAA on the various arrangements for this year's marathon, including the improvement measures which should continue to be adopted for next year's event and the areas in need of improvements, the negative impact of the event on individual districts (e.g. the noise problem of some parts of North Point), and if the time for the closure of Island Eastern Corridor should be adjusted so that the starting time for the 10-kilometre race can be deferred, thereby alleviating the impact of the event on nearby residents;

(b) given the increasing popularity of marathon running, whether it will consider formulating the following policies and measures to promote long-distance running, so as to encourage members of the public to do more exercise and adopt a healthy life style: including systematic jogging training in the physical education curricula for primary and secondary schools, giving support in the planning of sports facilities, providing more jogging tracks in various communities, resurfacing the existing jogging tracks with vibration-absorbing materials, assisting the relevant sports organisations in organising training courses to promote correct knowledge of long-distance running, and supporting the organisation of more long-distance running or marathon races; and

(c) whether it will promote marathon races as major tourism events to attract

more runners from other places, in order to build an image for Hong Kong as a vibrant city?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association (HKAAA) met with the relevant government departments and organisations on February 27, 2008 to review the various arrangements for this year's Hong Kong Marathon. They noted that the new arrangements, which included the use of the Island Eastern Corridor as the course for the 10-kilometre Challenge to segregate it from the course for the Half Marathon Race and Full Marathon Race, and shifting the Finish Area of the races from the Golden Bauhinia Square in Wan Chai (the Finish Area for previous events) to Victoria Park in Causeway Bay, were well received by many participants. At the meeting, relevant government departments and organisations considered that the arrangements for this year's event were appropriate, and in view of the effectiveness of the new arrangements, recommended the HKAAA to consider continuing with the above-mentioned arrangements in the future.

As regards the time for the races, the HKAAA will consider the possible noise impact, road closure and the traffic conditions, and accordingly defer the starting time of the 10-kilometre Challenge accordingly. It will discuss the matter with the government departments concerned before making a decision.

(b) To develop a strong sporting culture is an objective of sport development in Hong Kong. In this connection, the Administration has taken various measures to encourage members of the public to participate in sports activities.

Athletics has been a core learning activity under the Physical Education (PE) Curriculum for schools, and structured jogging training has also been a well-developed and sustained activity in primary and secondary schools for many years. During PE lessons and co-curricular activities, teachers introduce to students the skills and knowledge of distance running, and make arrangements for students to participate in endurance runs for the purpose of physical fitness test. Besides, most schools in Hong Kong organise other jogging-related activities annually, such as distance-running competitions, round-the-campus runs and cross-country races, and include competition events for distance running in their annual athletic meets.

Regarding the promotion of distance running, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), through the Sports Subvention Scheme, provides funding support to the HKAAA and relevant sports organisations every year for

organising various types of athletic activities and structured athletic training courses, including those on distance running, for public participation. Through the "M" Mark System and Support Packages, the Administration encourages and assists local sports organisations to stage major international sports events, including those of distance running, in Hong Kong. Moreover, the LCSD provides venues for HKAAA to organise marathon training courses, which help enhance participants' knowledge and safety awareness of distance running by HKAAA.

At the community level, we understand that jogging is becoming increasingly popular among members of the public and will provide suitable recreation and sports facilities correspondingly. When planning for recreation and sports facilities, the LCSD will incorporate jogging tracks into the project scope, where appropriate, having regard to factors such as the environment of the sites and the views of district councils. The LCSD will also consider using vibration-absorbing materials when resurfacing existing jogging tracks in parks.

(c) The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) has been working closely with the HKAAA, the organiser of the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon, to promote the event to the tourist industry and overseas. Promotional activities include:

- (i) introducing "Hong Kong Marathon" tour packages in markets with a strong interest in marathon, such as Japan, to boost enrolment;
- (ii) collaborating with the media in other markets, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, and inviting them to come to Hong Kong to cover the event; and
- (iii) disseminating information on the Hong Kong Marathon through the HKTb's official website and other promotional channels.

In addition, at the HKTb's suggestion, the HKAAA has adopted the following measures to enhance the attractiveness of the event to overseas visitors:

- (i) accepting overseas visitors' enrolment upon their arrival even after the closing date (About 250 visitors were enrolled in this year's event upon their arrival in Hong Kong); and
- (ii) staging a two-day Hong Kong Marathon Expo one week in advance of the event to enrich the marathon elements. This has been arranged since 2002.

Every year, the HKTb joins hands with the HKAAA, the event sponsors,

and the local and overseas media to launch various promotional activities to attract overseas tourists to participate in the Hong Kong Marathon. Statistics have shown an increase in the number of overseas participants from 294 in 2001 to 1,762 in 2008. The HKTb will continue to spare no effort in promoting this major international sports event with a view to enhancing its attractiveness.

Ends/Wednesday, March 12, 2008