

LCQ12: Impact of air quality and weather conditions on the Olympic equestrian events

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Following is a question by the Hon Choy So-yuk and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

The equestrian events of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad will be held in Sha Tin in August this year. According to government records on the Air Pollution Index (API) for August in each of the past four years, the API recorded in three of them reached the "very high" band which ranges between 101 and 200, and the Very Hot Weather Warning issued by the Hong Kong Observatory was also in force for nine episodes during that period. Some members of the public are therefore concerned whether the equestrian events will have to be rescheduled or even cancelled due to poor air quality or hot and stuffy weather. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

- (a) it has assessed the risk of postponement or cancellation of the equestrian events due to the impact of air quality and weather conditions; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (b) it will draw up objective standards to specify under what air quality and weather conditions the equestrian events will be rescheduled or even cancelled; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (c) it has drawn up any plan, including formulating collaborative measures in consultation with the mainland authorities concerned, to improve air quality during the equestrian events, so as to provide the best environment for the people and horses coming to Hong Kong to participate in the events; if it has, of the details, if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG), together with the Equestrian Events (Hong Kong) of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad

Company Limited and the other organisations concerned, will adopt various practicable environmentally friendly measures and practices to ensure the Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events to be "of high standard, and with characteristics".

(a) We have assessed the possible impact of weather conditions on the Equestrian Events and prepared relevant contingency plans to set out guidelines on situations in case the events are affected by inclement weather. We shall, under the following circumstances, follow the established procedures and apply to the Beijing Organising Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad and the International Olympic Committee for approval of postponing the competition until the weather conditions have improved:

- (i) Severe Thunderstorms;
- (ii) Black Rainstorm Warning;
- (iii) Tropical Cyclone Signal No. 8 or higher; and
- (iv) Other weather conditions that may affect the safety of participants.

Meanwhile, we have also reserved two contingency days for the Olympic Equestrian Events and one contingency day for the Paralympic Equestrian Events in case the competition has to be rescheduled. To ensure the safety of all people and horses in the competition venues during inclement weather, we will work closely with the Hong Kong Observatory to monitor weather conditions in the vicinity of the venues.

(b) Regarding air quality, the Environmental Protection Department will provide forecast of the Air Pollution Index (API) for the coming 24 hours on its website. The hourly API from the Sha Tin and Tai Po air quality monitoring stations will also provide representative air quality information for the two competition venues in Sha Tin and Beas River respectively. We will closely monitor the situation. However, how air quality may impact on various aspects of the Equestrian Events, it is not possible to reschedule the events on the basis of some simple standards, say when the API has reached a certain level.

(c) HKSARG is committed to improving air quality. Apart from implementing various long term measures to control emissions from major pollution sources, we will also make the following arrangements during the 2008 Olympic Equestrian Events:

- the two power companies in Hong Kong have agreed to increase the use of natural gas and ultra low sulphur coal as much as possible during the events so as to reduce

emissions of pollutants;

- during the events, the Environmental Protection Department will update the APIs of the Sha Tin and Tai Po districts, which are near to the competition venues, on a hourly basis through the website of the department as well as that of the Hong Kong Observatory.

HKSARG has already gained the support of the Environmental Protection Bureau of Guangdong Province to introduce measures in support of the Olympic Equestrian Events. These include strengthening its inspection and control on air pollutant emissions and ensure proper operation of the flue gas desulphurisation systems of power plants during the Olympic events period. In fact, the two governments are determined to improve regional air quality. We have been actively pursuing various emission reduction measures to control emissions from pollution sources such as power plants, industries and motor vehicles.

We believe that implementing the above measures will help to provide the best competition environment to the athletes and horses coming to Hong Kong for the events.

Ends/Wednesday, May 28, 2008