

LCQ3: Football development in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 11):

Question:

It has been reported that Chinese leaders have recently advocated raising the development of football to a level reflecting the soft power of sports and culture in China. The report has also pointed out that the full house attendance at the match between South China Football Team and Kuwait Football Team at the Hong Kong Stadium on October 21 this year, which was a grand occasion rarely seen in recent years, reflected that local people have not abandoned their support for football. As to how the development of local football is to be promoted to foster interface with football in China, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it has explored suitable measures for the reform and sustainable development of football in Hong Kong; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) focusing on the raising of the standard of football by our country to a level reflecting its soft power, whether the Hong Kong SAR Government has adopted corresponding measures to complement; whether at present the authorities have provided any direct funding support for the development of football teams; if they have, of the details; if not, whether they will consider providing funding support, and in the long run, whether they will consider setting up different levels of subventions in accordance with the performance of football teams, thereby encouraging football teams to enhance their strength; and

(c) of the details of the in-and-out mechanism for the selection of elite sports under the current subvention policy for elite training, and the eligibility criteria for football to become an elite sport?

Reply:

President,

I thank Hon Cheung Hok-ming for his question. My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows-

(a) Football has long been a popular sport in Hong Kong, also a matter of concern to Members of the Legislative Council (LegCo). In response to the request made by LegCo Members on June 4, 2008 during the motion debate on promoting the development of local football, the Home Affairs Bureau have commissioned a consultant to conduct a study to review the current status of football in Hong Kong, analyse the experience of nearby countries and cities in developing football, assess the relevance of this experience to the situation in Hong Kong, and recommend viable options for the direction in which we might develop the sport locally. At present, the study is still in progress and the consultant is scheduled to deliver the study report in early 2010. We will then consider in detail how to formulate suitable and practicable measures and implementation strategies to help the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) promote the long-term development of football in Hong Kong. We plan to present the study report to the LegCo Home Affairs Panel early next year.

In addition, for the sustainable development of local football, it is essential to have a training base that is capable of identifying talent effectively and providing training for young football players. In this connection, we are studying the feasibility of building a football academy at Tseung Kwan O, and we will explore with stakeholders the most appropriate mode of development and operation.

(b) We are aware of our country's determination to promote the development of football. The Hong Kong SAR Government will continue to devote resources to the development of football in Hong Kong. To this end, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) provides an annual subvention of about \$7 million to the HKFA for the following purposes-

(i) To sponsor the HKFA in organising youth development programmes to identify and train talented young football players. In 2008-09, the HKFA organised more than 2,000 subvented football activities. These include the School Sports Programme, under which the HKFA assigns coaches to schools to conduct football training and organises student visits to major events, as well as the Youth Football Promotion Scheme, the Primary Athletes Football Training Scheme and the Young Athletes Football Training Scheme which together attracted about 50,000 participants;

(ii) To train Hong Kong representative teams and relevant officials, and arrange

participation of the representative teams in international football competitions; and

(iii) To support the regular operational expenses of the HKFA.

In addition, the Government provides funding from the Arts and Sport Development Fund and other sources to help football players to participate in major competitions. For example, in 2008-09 we allocated a total of about \$0.7 million to the HKFA to prepare the Hong Kong team for this year's 11th National Games and the 5th East Asian Games.

As regards the provision of facilities, the LCSD currently manages 51 natural turf pitches, 24 artificial turf pitches and 236 hard-surfaced football pitches. The LCSD is working to improve existing facilities and build new venues in order to meet the needs of the community, to promote football and to meet the need for training and competition venues for teams at various levels.

To strengthen support for the development of football at the district level, in 2002, the LCSD helped the HKFA to set up district football teams, by providing free training sessions for each of these teams at its pitches and encouraging the 18 District Councils to provide funding for their district football teams in order to reduce the teams' financial burden. In this connection, the Tai Po district team was promoted to the First Division League in 2006-07 and the Sha Tin district team was promoted to the First Division League in 2009-10.

The LCSD has also responded positively to a request by the HKFA to designate home pitches for each of the 11 First Division teams in the 2009-10 football season, which will allow for the allocation of more training sessions to these teams. As to the question of earmarking subventions to individual teams in accordance with their performance, we will consider this in the context of the strategic recommendations in the study report when this is available.

I would like to point out that the HKFA takes a leading role in local football development. The HKFA is affiliated to the Federation Internationale de Football Association and is the recognised national sports association (NSA) governing the promotion and development of football in Hong Kong. Its responsibilities include: organising local leagues; monitoring and providing assistance to local football clubs; selecting the Hong Kong representative teams; and cooperating and arranging matches with associations, football clubs and leagues in other countries and

regions. The Government helps the HKFA to promote and develop football principally by providing financial support and facilities.

(c) In so far as the policy for subventing elite training is concerned, the aim is to focus resources on sports with good potential or track records, or on individual athletes who have performed particularly well, with a view to raising Hong Kong's chances of achieving good results in international competitions. The elite sports programme is supported and managed by the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI). With effect from the beginning of the 2005-09 funding cycle for elite sports, the Sports Commission has selected sports for HKSI subvention in accordance with a set of stringent criteria. As regards football, the HKSI would make an assessment based on the medals won and ranking position achieved by the Hong Kong representative team and youth team in recognised regional and international competitions over the past two years. If the teams reach the required performance level, football can become an elite sport. According to the assessment criteria, football currently does not meet the qualifying standards to be an elite sport.

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