

Consultation on whether Hong Kong should bid for 2023 Asian Games launched

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, said today (September 21) that the successful hosting of the Asian Games would not only significantly foster sports development in Hong Kong, but would also bring about long-term benefits to society.

If Hong Kong were to bid for the right to host the Games, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) would continue to adhere to the people-based principle, taking into account the interests of the whole community, he added.

Speaking at a press conference to release a consultation paper on whether Hong Kong should bid to host the 2023 Asian Games, Mr Tsang noted that the bidding for the Games was part of Hong Kong's overall strategy on sports development. There are three clear strategic directions for the long-term sports development - to help elite athletes achieve excellence; to develop a strong sporting culture in the community; and to raise Hong Kong's profile as a centre for international sports events.

He said "Based on these three strategic directions - Sports for All, elite athletes and making Hong Kong the place for major sporting events, we have formulated a series of measures. There are significant improvements in Hong Kong's sports development in recent years. For example, we achieved very encouraging results in the East Asian Games last year."

He said, "The successful hosting of the Asian Games will greatly promote sports development in Hong Kong, and in the course of preparing for and holding the Games, enhance civic pride and confidence in Hong Kong. This will help promote Hong Kong's spirit of perseverance and enhance social cohesion.

"Hosting the Games will also stimulate economic activities, create job opportunities and help strengthen Hong Kong's status as Asia's World City, thus bringing intangible long-term benefits."

On resources allocation, Mr Tsang added, "Drawing experience from the East Asian Games, we will continue to adhere to the people-based principle and take into account the interests of the whole community. We will not bring in extravagant infrastructure that creates no long-term benefits."

He stressed that the facilities would never become "white elephants". Instead, after the Games, the facilities would be used by athletes and residents at the community level in the long run.

On athletes' villages, Mr Tsang said that the common practice was to build non-luxury flats for sale to the public after the event. In Hong Kong's bid for the 2006 Asian Games, it was suggested that the flats be built by a private developer. We may now consider requiring a public body to take charge of planning, building and managing these units, he said. The Government remained open to these options.

Mr Tsang noted that there were diverse demands in society for more public resources to address problems such as poverty and environmental protection. He said: "We are of the view that these policy areas are not mutually exclusive. There is no need to refrain from promoting sport so as to step up efforts to alleviate poverty and protect the environment. On the contrary, these policy objectives are complementing one another.

"I have every confidence that Hong Kong possesses the required resources and capabilities to successfully host the Asian Games. I hope that everybody will agree to invest in Hong Kong's future, to give Hong Kong a chance."

The Asian Games typically last for two weeks, with participation by over 45 countries and regions. If Hong Kong were to successfully host the Games, the Government will be required to provide essential services in areas such as transport, security, media support, medical services and technology and communications. The Government will also need to ensure that the venues are of a suitable quality and capacity to stage an event of this magnitude, as well as to plan for the hosting of the Asian Para Games shortly after the Asian Games.

It is estimated that the direct total cost of staging the Asian Games will be in the order of \$13.7 - \$14.5 billion at the current price level, made up of \$3.2 - \$4 billion in operating costs and \$10.5 billion in capital costs. The latter is mainly required for temporary works on existing facilities and upgrading works to bring proposed new venues up to Asian Games standards.

To provide suitable venues for the Asian Games, the Government's assessment is that there may not be a need to build totally new venues solely for staging the Games.

Instead, a three-pronged strategy is proposed: making optimal use of existing government and non-government sports facilities; expanding planned sports facilities; and speeding up consideration of redevelopment and new projects.

These facilities could meet the needs of long-term sports development in Hong Kong, serve as excellent training venues for local athletes and be used by the general public, youth and students after the Games, making them economically viable in the long run and sound investments for the future.

According to the estimation by a consultancy firm engaged by the Government, about 10,450 to 11,170 jobs would be directly or indirectly created, and some 49,000 to 69,000 tourists would be attracted to Hong Kong, based on past Asian Games experience. The projected economic benefits in quantifiable terms are estimated at \$0.4 - \$0.6 billion at the current price level.

The Olympic Council of Asia requires that the formal bid document should be submitted by the National Olympic Committee by January 30, 2011. The HKSARG launched a consultation exercise today to collect views on whether Hong Kong should bid to host the 2023 Asian Games. Mr Tsang appealed to the public to give their views during the six-week consultation period.

The President of the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC), Mr Timothy Fok, said at the press conference that hosting the 2008 Olympic Equestrian Events and the 2009 East Asian Games (EAG) proved that Hong Kong had the capabilities and resources to organise large-scale international sports events.

"The SF&OC considers that based on the experience in hosting the EAG, staging the Asian Games will be beneficial to the long-term sport development in Hong Kong. Hosting the 2023 Asian Games will boost civic pride, as well as enhance sports facilities for elite athletes and the public as a result of the Government's upgrading works. Besides, organising large-scale sports events can always arouse public interest in participation in sports activities, bringing about substantial benefits to health and quality of living," Mr Fok said.

Consultation papers are available at the Public Enquiry Service Centres of District Offices, and offices and venues of Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The public are welcome to send their views by November 3 (Wednesday), either in writing

to the Home Affairs Bureau or through on-line forums. Details are available at Home Affairs Bureau's website, www.asiangames.hab.gov.hk.

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