

LCQ6: Hong Kong Marathon

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Yiu-chung and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 4):

Question:

There have been comments that the duration of road closure for the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon was too short, and the race routes lack attractive features and are boring. The event fell short of the standards of world class marathon races, and failed to promote Hong Kong's image as Asia's World City. Over the years, the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association ("HKAAA"), i.e. the event organiser, has been subject to criticisms, including that it had not organised the wheelchair race on a trial basis until this year, its accounts lacked transparency, and it had awarded contracts to its former Chairman despite conflict of interest. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that there are tens of thousands of runners for the 10-kilometre Challenge, Half Marathon Challenge and Full Marathon Challenge each year, and together with their friends and family members, there are many members of the public paying attention to the event, whether the Government will consider designating more road sections in the urban areas for inclusion in the race routes and extending the duration of road closure, so that the event will be more attractive to runners from foreign countries, runners will not have to set off in the early hours and more people may line along the routes to cheer on the runners;

(b) given that it has been reported that the Hong Kong Marathon is making profits, but every year it is hosted by the HKAAA, whether the Government will consider introducing tendering or competition to grant the right to host the event, with a view to enhancing the standards in organising the event; and

(c) given that marathon races of most metropolises include the wheelchair category, whether the Government will request the organiser of next year's Hong Kong Marathon to introduce wheelchair races so as to highlight Hong Kong's international image as a city of pluralism and equality?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Marathon is one of the most representative annual international sports events for the local sports community. It has been recognised as an "M" Mark major sports event for seven consecutive years, and attracted numerous local and overseas runners to take part in it. It also underlines Hong Kong's status for staging major sports events in Asia, and is conducive to the promotion of sports development in Hong Kong. The event has been organised by the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association ("HKAAA") on a self-financing basis for 14 years.

Every year the Hong Kong Marathon attracts a huge turnout, breaking the record for number of participants year after year—from about 1 000 runners in 1997 to 65 000 this year, among which over 60 000 are local runners. This shows the effect of the event in promoting sport for all.

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(a) All along, the race routes of the Hong Kong Marathon are determined by the event organiser (i.e. HKAAA) based on its professional knowledge after consultation with government departments, district councils and different parties concerned. In designing the race routes, the Government would provide assistance where possible, and would tender advice to the HKAAA on such areas as public safety, traffic diversion and the impact of the overall arrangements on the community.

Over the years, the HKAAA has adjusted the race routes as necessary and incorporated road sections with particular features. Examples include:

- * the inaugural edition of the Hong Kong Marathon in 1997 was held along a cross-boundary route between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, commemorating the historic moment of the return of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to the Mainland;

- * In 1998, the event was held at the new airport at Chek Lap Kok; and

- * In 2011, the race route covered "three tunnels and three bridges", namely the Nam Wan Tunnel, the Cheung Tsing Tunnel, the Western Harbour Tunnel, the Stonecutters Bridge, the Tsing Ma Bridge and the Ting Kau Bridge.

On the arrangements for road closure and traffic diversion, for many years, road

closure begins at midnight on the day of the event, and the closed roads are re-opened by phases around noon time as far as possible. This is to ensure that the HKAAA has enough time for preparation along the race routes, as well as to minimise the impact the road closure may have on other members of the public. According to previous experience, members of the public may watch the event in the morning at various locations in the urban area, and family and friends of the runners may also cheer them on along the course or at the finish.

(b) As mentioned above, the staging of the Hong Kong Marathon does not involve government subvention. The HKAAA is the "national sports association" responsible for athletics events in Hong Kong, and is also a member of the International Association of Athletics Federations and the Asian Athletic Association. As such, it possesses the professional qualifications and experience to host the Hong Kong Marathon, which is now recognised as a high-level competition listed on the calendar of the Association of International Marathons and Road Races. In fact, in addition to the HKAAA, other sports organisations also host distance-running events of different levels in Hong Kong every year. The Government is pleased to consider providing appropriate assistance to these events.

Concerning the accounts of the Hong Kong Marathon, according to the information provided by the HKAAA, a large portion of the revenue generated from the Hong Kong Marathon is used for organising the event and the remainder is allocated to the HKAAA for the purpose of developing and promoting athletics activities. Separately, runners may take part in the fundraising for charity activity through the Hong Kong Marathon-the funds so raised will go direct to the specified beneficiary organisations. In 2011, the beneficiary organisations were the ORBIS, the Hong Kong Paralympic Committee and Sports Association for the Physically Disabled and the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society.

(c) The HKAAA had originally scheduled for a 10-km wheelchair race at the Hong Kong Marathon 2011. International referees had also been invited to Hong Kong for an assessment of the race route. However, in the end, only two entries were received for the race, far lower than the minimum requirement of 10 participants, and the HKAAA decided after careful consideration and assessment to cancel the 10-km wheelchair race in 2011.

It is a pity that the wheelchair race could not be held at the Hong Kong Marathon 2011. We have suggested to the HKAAA to stage a 10-km wheelchair race at the

Hong Kong Marathon 2012 to promote integration of people with disabilities into the community, and to encourage runners from different sectors and backgrounds to participate in this major sports event. We have learned that the HKAAA would discuss further the details with relevant government departments and parties concerned with a view to encouraging more people with disabilities to participate in the event.

Ends/Wednesday, May 4, 2011

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