

LCQ2: Football development

Following is a question by the Hon Chim Pui-chung and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (December 21)

Question:

According to the information of the Federation International de Football Association, the position of Hong Kong men's football team in the world ranking dropped to a record low of 168th in November this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) given that Hong Kong was once praised as the "football kingdom of the Far East", and the team of the Republic of China comprising representatives of Hong Kong's football players won the championship at the 1958 Asian Games, whether it knows the reasons why the world ranking of Hong Kong men's football team hit a record low;
- (b) given that the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) is the recognised sports association responsible for the development of football in Hong Kong, whether the authorities have assessed if, apart from overseeing how HKFA utilises government subsidies, there is a need to monitor or supervise its operations; and
- (c) of the policies or specific plans currently put in place by the Government to step up promotion of football to become a popular and proper sport which has the support of the public in Hong Kong?

Reply:

Acting Madam President,

Football has long been a very popular sport among Hong Kong people. According to a Census and Statistics Department survey commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) in 2010, football is one of the sports that attracts the highest numbers of viewers and participants in Hong Kong. Although local football has had its ebb and flow, we still remember how in the 2009 East Asian Games the Hong Kong Team showed perseverance and tenacity to win a gold medal, making history for Hong Kong football and delighting the public.

The Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) determines the ranking of football teams around the world using a points system which is mainly based on the results of teams in international matches. FIFA announces the rankings every month. The drop in the ranking of the Hong Kong men's team to 168th last month is indeed food for thought. Various parties have commented as to why the performance of the Hong Kong men's team has been less than satisfactory and members of the Legislative Council have also expressed their views in motion debates.

In reply to part (a) of the question raised by the Hon Chim Pui-chung, the HAB commissioned a consultancy study in 2009 to review the position of football in Hong Kong and to recommend viable options for the development of the sport locally. The consultant considered that the main factors affecting the standard of football in Hong Kong included a lack of talent identification and development mechanisms for young players; inadequate co-ordination across professional-, district- and school- based football competitions; limited provision of facilities for training and competition; and a low level of aspiration to play professional football in Hong Kong. All these factors combined have created a vicious circle - poor playing and management standards have led to a decreasing number of spectators, which has led to reduced revenue from gate receipts and media interest in the matches. As a result, less sponsorship income has been received, players' incomes have remained low and therefore fewer players are willing to pursue a career in football. The consultant believed that all aspects of the sport have to be improved if we are to turn this situation around.

To address these problems, the consultant put forward a series of recommendations regarding the long-term development of football in Hong Kong, which focus on improving the governance of the sport; raising the standard of professional and "national" teams; improving training for young players; upgrading football facilities and establishing a football training centre.

The Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA), which is affiliated to the FIFA, is the recognised sports association governing the promotion and development of football in Hong Kong. To take forward the above recommendations, the consultant considered that the HKFA should take a leading role in local football development, with the Government providing appropriate support in a well-coordinated manner, including the allocation of resources and the development of football venues.

Since the publication of the Consultancy Report on Football Development

("Consultancy Report") in March 2010, the HKFA and the Government have made a concerted effort to implement the consultant's key recommendations.

In response to part (b), the Government has always respected the HKFA's autonomy and independence and does not interfere in its affairs. To help take forward the recommendations in the Consultancy Report and initiate a renaissance of football in Hong Kong, the HAB has set up the Football Task Force, comprising members from the sports sector, to monitor the implementation of the related measures, as well as to provide advice and assistance in the process. Public funding provided to the HKFA in this regard is subject to the monitoring and control of the Government. The HKFA has signed an agreement with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and made a commitment to exercising proper internal controls, and to ensuring that public funding will be used in a cost-effective and responsible manner. It will also provide evaluation reports and submit progress and financial reports to the LCSD on a regular basis. Separately, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has compiled a Best Practice Reference for Governance of National Sports Associations (which include the HKFA) to assist these associations in further strengthening their governance and internal controls. The LCSD and the ICAC will help sports associations implement the best practices related to governance that are recommended in this reference document.

In reply to part (c), the Government is working closely with the HKFA to implement Project Phoenix to help bring about a renaissance of Hong Kong football. Specific plans include:

(i) Improvements in governance: In response to the consultant's recommendations, the HKFA last year appointed a "change agent" to review its corporate structure and mode of governance. In April this year, in the light of the recommendations of the "change agent", the HKFA revised its constitution; introduced independent directors and set limits on the length of service of directors; and enhanced the transparency of voting procedures. To improve its executive management in order to strengthen its co-ordination of football development, the HKFA has conducted a worldwide recruitment exercise and appointed a Chief Executive Officer with experience in sports management.

(ii) Improvement of facilities: The LCSD has earmarked resources to provide 21 new or converted "third generation" artificial turf football pitches in the coming five years, bringing the total number of such pitches to 37 to meet the increasingly keen demand

for football pitches for training and competition. Moreover, the LCSD designated "home" pitches for First Division teams starting from the 2010-11 football season to help the teams attract more supporters and sponsors. In the meantime, the HAB has been following up the proposed establishment of a football training centre in Tseung Kwan O, with the aim of providing high quality training facilities of a suitable scale to meet the long-term development needs of football in Hong Kong.

(iii) Provision of additional support: To ensure that there will be sufficient resources to take forward the recommendations in the Consultancy Report, the Government has, on the advice of the Sports Commission, earmarked \$20 million annually for the next three years to help the HKFA to undertake reforms and implement a long-term development plan.

As regards football at the district level, the Government granted over \$5 million in total to district-based football teams in November this year. District teams can make use of these additional resources to hire coaches, purchase equipment and improve team administration. With regard to youth football, the LCSD continues to provide subvention to youth development programmes in the districts.

The Government will maintain a dialogue with the HKFA and help the Association to take forward Project Phoenix, with a view to delivering a long-term strategy for promoting football in Hong Kong.

Thank you, Acting Madam President.

Ends/Wednesday, December 21, 2011

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