

LCQ17: Marathon race

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (January 31):

Question:

The Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2007 will be held on the 4th of March this year. When the event was held last year, the participation of many runners who had not been adequately trained for running, coupled with the serious air pollution on that day, resulted in a number of participants feeling unwell, and the sudden death of a man. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it has taken the initiative to contact the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association, the event organiser, to find out the new measures formulated by the Association for this year's event to prevent the recurrence of the aforesaid situation; if so,

(a) of the specific details of these new measures, such as reviewing the eligibility criteria for joining the race; providing the relevant training, promoting the knowledge of long-distance running and organising warm-up races; improving the routings and order at the start of the race; reviewing the number and distribution of water stations, first-aid stations, medical staff and event personnel; improving the arrangements for dealing with such situations as emergencies, serious air pollution or inclement weather, etc; and

(b) whether it has assessed if such new measures are adequate and will be effective; if so, of the assessment result; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Administration is always very concerned over the arrangements, especially those relating to safety, for major sports events. It was a regret that a participant died in the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon last year. Immediately after the incident, we took the initiative to contact the organiser (i.e. the Hong Kong Amateur

Athletic Association (HKAAA)) to conduct a review and to discuss ways to improve the arrangements for future events.

We learn that in light of last year's experience, the HKAAA will, in addition to continuing the procedures and arrangements that have been effective over the years, adopt a series of new safety measures for the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2007. The main ones of the new safety measures include the following:

(i) To strengthen public education and publicity:

In October 2006, the HKAAA introduced a new initiative known as "Marathon 101" to disseminate knowledge of long-distance running through the online community, internet websites, primary and secondary school programmes, competitions and training, and organise warm-up matches. Professionals and the Polytechnic University have also been asked to give special talks to enhance public awareness of safety in relation to the sports of marathon.

(ii) To re-arrange the procedures of the event:

The HKAAA will re-arrange the grouping of participants of the Marathon for this year. Participants with similar running speeds will be placed in the same group, race start time for each group will be re-scheduled and participants for the full marathon will be allowed to finish within 5 hours and 30 minutes (which is half an hour longer than that of the previous year).

(iii) To enhance medical support services:

The HKAAA will make arrangements to increase the number of ambulances from five in last year to seven while the number of medical staff and event personnel will also be increased to over 500. Besides, the HKAAA will provide on-course physiotherapy service for the first time with a view to further enhancing the medical support.

(iv) To offer new environmental protection measures:

In order to further reduce emission from event vehicles (including the lead car and the timing cars) moving along the running course, six environmental friendly vehicles instead of petrol-driven ones will be used as event vehicles to provide a better environment for the competition.

As the organiser of the event, the HKAAA will not only enhance the safety measures for the event but will also remind participants to pay attention to their physical conditions and make good preparation for the event by, for example,

undergoing training programmes to improve their physical fitness before the event. Moreover, participants should exert themselves in accordance with their personal health status and conditions on the competition day and to seek help from site staff when necessary and feasible.

(b) The Administration believes that with the established arrangements and the above new measures, the HKAAA can further improve the safety standard for the Marathon this year so that participants will enjoy a safe and challenging marathon. The Administration will continue to liaise closely with the HKAAA to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the various arrangements after the event.

Ends/Wednesday, January 31, 2007

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