

LCQ12: Strengthening exchanges with Middle East countries in sports development

Following is a question by the Hon Robert Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

In March this year, Hong Kong staged the first ever LIV Golf Tour, an international golf mega event, which featured not only the golf tournament but also concerts and a range of entertainments. There are views pointing out that Middle East countries have been actively developing sports in recent years, including hosting football matches, Formula 1 Races, snooker tournaments, and the aforesaid professional golf tour is also backed by a sovereign wealth fund from the Middle East. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will strengthen co-operation with Middle East countries to host more international sports mega events in Hong Kong that are sponsored or organised by Middle East countries;

(2) given that in the Riyadh Season World Masters of Snooker recently held in Saudi Arabia, a new rule was specifically set for the matches to increase their attractiveness, whether the Government will, in holding various kinds of sports mega events, draw reference from such creative practice and add new rules specially for Hong Kong-staged events so as to accentuate their uniqueness; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures in place to promote exchanges between Hong Kong and Middle East countries in sports development and foster the development of professionalised and commercialised sports in Hong Kong by drawing reference from the successful experience of these countries?

Reply:

President,

The Government's sports policy is to promote the development of sports through a five-pronged approach, namely, by promoting sports in the community, supporting elite sports, promoting Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events, enhancing professionalism and developing sports as an industry. Hosting major international sports events in Hong Kong promotes sports development in Hong Kong and showcases Hong Kong's capability to host world-class sports events. It also enriches the experience of tourists coming to Hong Kong and presents Hong Kong's characteristics and

charm to overseas athletes, on-site spectators and online viewers of the events, thereby bringing in more overseas visitors and enhancing Hong Kong's status as a centre for major international sports events.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Robert Lee is as follows:

(1) The Government is committed to promoting Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events. In 2004, the "M" Mark System for major sports events was introduced to support the hosting of major international sports events in Hong Kong through provision of matching fund and direct grants. To encourage the staging of more major international sports events in Hong Kong, the Government launched various measures in April 2023 to enhance the "M" Mark System. These include increasing the funding ceiling for each event to \$15 million, abolishing the quota of two "M" Mark events that can be organised by the same applicant each year, and relaxing the eligibility of applicants to cover events organised by sports associations and other private or non-governmental organisations. The enhancement measures have been effective since their introduction. In the 2023-24 financial year, a record high of 18 major international sports events supported under the "M" Mark System were held in Hong Kong. Among these events are the Aramco Team Series Hong Kong (women's golf), FIA World Rallycross Championship, the WDSF Breaking for Gold World Series, LIV Golf Hong Kong and World Triathlon Cup, which were staged in Hong Kong for the very first time. We expect that more than 20 major international sports events will be supported under the "M" Mark System this financial year, with an estimated funding allocation of about \$200 million.

The Government will continue to encourage and facilitate "national sports associations" and other private or non-governmental organisations to collaborate with relevant institutions in different countries (including those in the Middle East) or regions with a view to bringing more suitable mega events to Hong Kong, thereby reinforcing Hong Kong's status as a centre for major international sports events. For example, the Golf Association of Hong Kong, China, sponsored by a company in Saudi Arabi, brought the Aramco Team Series Hong Kong (women's golf) to Hong Kong for the first time last year.

(2) At present, some exhibition matches have already taken into account the situation of Hong Kong and devise different competition content in order to enhance the attractiveness of the event. For example, the International Tennis Challenge held in 2022 included a wheelchair exhibition match, of which international tennis players were invited to play with local wheelchair players. As for other major international sports competitions, they have to follow the competition rules formulated by the relevant international sports organisations in general. That said, organisers may formulate different rules according to the circumstances of Hong Kong so as to enhance the attractiveness of the competition upon obtaining acknowledgement or consent of the relevant international sports organisations.

(3) At present, the Government provides annual funding to the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) through the Elite Athletes Development Fund to

nurture local elite athletes, and support their training and participation in sports events held in Hong Kong and around the world. In 2024-25, the HKSI expects that athletes from around 11 "Tier A" elite sports will undergo training or participate in competitions countries in the Middle East, enabling Hong Kong to make reference to their work on elite sports development and athlete training, as well as fostering exchanges with countries in the Middle East on elite sports. Looking ahead, the Government will continue to explore opportunities for enhanced co-operation with other countries (including those in the Middle East) in the area of sports development. The Government will also maintain its support for the development of professional leagues and local clubs and encourage their participation in major sports competitions on the Mainland and in the region, thereby further enhancing sports professionalism and developing sports as an industry.