

LCQ20: Major sports events awarded "M" Mark status

Following is a question by the Hon Dominic Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

The exhibition match between the Hong Kong Team and Inter Miami CF held on the 4th of this month has been awarded the "M" Mark status and funding support by the Government. Under the terms of the relevant funding agreement, the Government has required that a player from the Inter Miami CF, who is known as "the king of football in the world", must play at least 45 minutes in the match, subject to safety or fitness considerations. In addition, it is learnt that the organiser concerned had all along marketed the king of football's participation in the match in its publicity. Nevertheless, the king of football ended up sitting out the match without taking part. Upon learning that the king of football could not play in the match, the Government had requested the organiser to invite him to address the football fans or receive the trophy on behalf of his team after the match, but to no avail. It has been reported that a large number of local fans and fans from around the world have explicitly criticised the match for failing to correspond with the description and leaving them dissatisfied, which has a direct impact on the image of Hong Kong's tourism industry. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views pointing out that the large number of complaints, many of which from inbound visitors, received by the Customs and Excise Department and the Consumer Council about the aforesaid match failing to correspond with the description have clearly demonstrated that the incident concerned has an impact on the image of Hong Kong, whether the authorities will take legal actions to hold the organiser concerned responsible;

(2) as there are views that the exorbitant ticket prices of the aforesaid major sports event have enabled the participating organisations and the organiser to obtain substantial proceeds before the event, whether the Government will, in the future, require organisers of events held by the business sector which have applied for the "M" Mark funding to provide a certain percentage of the ticket proceeds as guarantee money to the Government or to secure bank guarantee for such events, so as to ensure that the organisers and event participants are fully committed to the staging of major sports events; and

(3) as the Government has indicated that it will critically review the "M" Mark System, of the expected completion time of the relevant work, and whether it will introduce a penalty system?

Reply:

President,

It is the Government's policy 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. In respect of promoting Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events, the Government introduced the "M" Mark System in 2004 to support the hosting of major sports events in Hong Kong through matching funds (i.e. a dollar-to-dollar matching grant provided for the event organiser in accordance with the cash sponsorship solicited from the commercial or private sectors) and direct grants. In addition to providing the public with the opportunity to enjoy top-level performance sports, stimulating sports atmosphere in community and promoting the overall development of sports, the "M" Mark System also attracts tourists to visit Hong Kong and enhance Hong Kong's status as a centre for major international events.

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

(1) The TATLER XFEST Hong Kong: Hong Kong Team vs Inter Miami CF (the exhibition match), organised by Tatler Asia Limited (the organiser), was held at the Hong Kong Stadium on February 3 and 4 this year. The event was once awarded "M" Mark status with a matching grant of \$15 million and a venue hiring grant for venue subsidy of \$1 million by the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC). It was expected that the match would offer football fans a wonderful game and an opportunity to witness the world-class player showcasing his skills.

The Government, like all football fans, was extremely disappointed that player Lionel Messi could not play in the match on February 4. In addition, a detailed account and explanation was not provided promptly. Later, we had been urging the organiser to explain in detail its arrangement with Inter Miami CF concerning Messi's participation in the match in Hong Kong, and to respond positively to the demands of different sectors of the community. In addition, we had been continuously discussing with the organiser to identify the viable options for handling the matter. The Consumer Council was subsequently engaged in the discussion as well.

On February 5, the organiser announced that it would withdraw its application for "M" Mark status and give up the \$16 million sponsorship. On February 9, it further announced that it would arrange a refund of 50 per cent of the ticket price to local fans and those from outside Hong Kong who purchased tickets for the match through the organiser's official sales channels. The Government welcomes the decision and considers that the compensation option is a responsible act by the organiser, which demonstrates its positive manner and sense of commitment. The accounts of the match were made publicly available by the organiser, demonstrating that it has made all efforts with sincerity to arrange the 50 per cent refund to respond to the

demands of different sectors of the community.

(2) and (3) The Government and the MSEC will jointly conduct a comprehensive review on the vetting and monitoring mechanism of the "M" Mark System so as to facilitate the staging of more major international sports events in Hong Kong while further enhancing the System. The review is expected to be completed in around the third quarter of this year.