

15 March 2012
For discussion

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Safety Arrangements for the 2012 Hong Kong Marathon

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures adopted by the organiser of the 2012 Hong Kong Marathon and other relevant organisations to ensure the safety of participants in the event.

Background

2. The Hong Kong Marathon is one of the most recognisable international events organised by the local sports community. It has been organised by the Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association (HKAAA) on a self-financing basis for 16 years and attracts numerous outstanding local and overseas runners, helping to promote Hong Kong's status as a centre for major sports events.

3. This year's Hong Kong Marathon was held on 5 February 2012. In addition to the full marathon, half marathon and the 10-kilometre races, a 3-kilometre and full marathon wheelchair races were added for the first time to allow people with disabilities to take part in the event. The number of participants has risen from about 1 000 runners in 1997 to 70 000 this year, of which over 65 000 were local runners.

4. The HKAAA is the "national sports association" responsible for the development of athletics in Hong Kong. It is a member of the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China, as well as of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and the Asian Athletics Association (AAA). As such, it possesses the professional qualifications and experience to host marathon races. After years of development, Hong Kong Marathon is now listed on the calendar of the Association of International Marathons and Road Races. In addition to the HKAAA, other sports organisations also host distance-running events of different levels in Hong Kong throughout the year.

Safety arrangements for the 2012 Hong Kong Marathon

5. For this year's Hong Kong Marathon, the organiser and other relevant organisations adopted the safety arrangements described in the following paragraphs.

Pre-race preparation

6. The planning and preparation of the 2012 Hong Kong Marathon was mainly conducted through the "Hong Kong Marathon 2012 Organising Committee" (OC). The OC was chaired by the HKAAA, which also provided technical support, and comprised representatives of government departments, including the Home Affairs Bureau, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Transport Department, the Auxiliary Medical Services (AMS), the Civil Aid Service, the Environmental Protection Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The OC considered what would be needed for the event and made relevant preparations, whilst the government departments offered advice and assistance from their respective purviews. The aim was to ensure a safe and orderly event.

7. The HKAAA determined the race routes based on its professional knowledge after consultation with relevant government departments, District Councils and public transport operators, as well as an assessment of the likely traffic impact. During the process, relevant departments gave advice and assistance to the HKAAA, having regard to factors such as public safety. Over the years, the HKAAA has adjusted the race routes according to needs and experience. Taking this year's full marathon as an example, whilst the alignment along the "three tunnels and three bridges" (Nam Wan Tunnel, Cheung Tsing Tunnel and Western Harbour Tunnel; Stonecutters Bridge, Tsing Ma Bridge and Ting Kau Bridge), which is familiar to runners, was retained, the section passing through Sheung Wan and Central was altered to reduce the elevation after rounds of discussion by the OC, so as to alleviate the burden on runners during the latter stage of the race.

8. The Hong Kong Marathon is held annually in January or February, usually on the second Sunday after the Chinese New Year. According to the HKAAA, this is the best time of the year for holding a marathon as the temperature is usually between 14°C to 17°C and relative humidity is usually low. As a rule, marathon races are held in early mornings when the air is cooler and fresher. We understand that marathons held in South-East Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Thailand,

Indonesia and Singapore start as early as 5 am.

Pre-race safety advice to participants

9. Marathons are physically taxing for runners. To ensure that runners pay due respect to the importance of proper and suitable training prior to the race, 35 marathon training classes for runners of various levels were organised by the HKAAA, attracting around 500 participants. The OC provided training information on the Hong Kong Marathon website, including how to prepare for the race, and an introduction to suitable training venues and diets before the event. The OC also advised through its webpage and on the race application form that people who are pregnant or who suffer from chronic diseases such as heart diseases and hypertension should not take part in the race, and reminded participants to undertake proper training. Participants were also advised to seek medical advice in case of physical discomfort before the race. From time to time before the race, representatives of the OC also disseminated messages on the safety of long-distance running through media interviews.

10. In an effort to ensure that participants could complete the race, the OC required that participants in the full marathon must have successfully completed at least one race of 10 km or longer in the Hong Kong Marathon or any other local or overseas races in the past three years. Participants in the 3 km wheelchair event had to be able to finish a 3 km race on flat surface within 30 minutes and complete a short ramp test within 3 minutes to qualify for the event.

Safety arrangements during the race

11. In addition to providing advice on medical service requirements to the OC during the preparation of the event, the AMS also provided medical support to participants on the day of the race. Medical stations and first aid stations equipped with automated external defibrillators were set up at the Start, Finish and various points along the routes. Ten ambulances, three ambulance-aid motorcycles and 17 first aid bicycles were deployed. Personnel and equipment support at various points along the routes were enhanced strategically. The AMS deploys medical personnel including doctors, nurses and first aiders to stand by and provide medical services at the Hong Kong Marathon every year. In 2012, 1 763 cases (including attending to muscle cramps, handling wounds, blisters, hypothermia and dehydration, performing cold therapy and transporting participants to hospitals) were handled by the 710-plus members of the AMS team at the 33 medical stations and first aid stations.

The number of cases handled in 2012 was over 900 fewer than in 2011.

12. To ensure an effective response to unforeseen medical needs, key members of the AMS teams had radio communication equipment. To cater to the circumstances of the Hong Kong Marathon, the AMS provided members with mobile phones to enhance communication. In addition, control centres were set up at Kowloon and Hong Kong sections of the routes to coordinate support efforts. Senior officials of the AMS were stationed at the control centre of the organiser to enhance coordination further. Apart from the AMS, the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University also provided participants with physiotherapy and massage service at the Finish.

13. To ensure the safety of participants, those who failed to pass relevant checkpoints at specified times were required to take shuttle buses or rehab buses to the Finish as instructed by race marshals.

14. As regards the wheelchair events, the OC has arranged to have the wheelchairs inspected on the event day prior to the race. Technical judges were appointed to adjudicate on the safety of wheelchairs in order to enhance protection for wheelchair participants.

15. With regard to supplies, distilled water (120 000 litres), sports drinks (80 000 litres), chocolate (110 000 bars) and bananas and pears (170 000) were available to participants at 32 water stations at the Start, Finish and various points along the routes in the 2012 event. Over 3 300 volunteers were enlisted to provide various services. All these arrangements were made in the light of the experience accumulated in past events over the years.

Review

16. To raise the standards of future Hong Kong Marathons and to address problems identified in this year's race, the OC held a review meeting on 16 February 2012 to examine in detail various issues including safety arrangements and put forward recommendations. Major recommendations are as follows -

- (a) Starting times for various races had been adjusted in view of the increase in participants and the introduction of wheelchair events this year. The OC proposed to improve communication between various parties so that unforeseen incidents could be handled more effectively;

- (b) During the review meeting, OC members proposed a number of improvements to baggage collection arrangements, traffic signage, race facilities, venue clearance time and the extension of intervals between races; and
- (c) The OC noted a tag-swapping incident. At present, runners found involved in such misconduct would be disqualified and banned from participating in all the events held by the HKAAA for a year. If the runners involved are athletes registered with the HKAAA, disciplinary action will be brought against them. The OC considered that low safety awareness was the cause of such misconduct. Therefore, the HKAAA planned to step up public education on safety awareness through a Jogging Promotion Scheme to be launched in Wan Chai, Kowloon City and Sha Tin. If the scheme is well received by the public, the HKAAA will consider expanding it to cover all 18 districts to enhance public interest in running and to disseminate safety messages. The OC will also provide more marathon training classes having regard to resource constraints and service needs.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to note the safety arrangements for the 2012 Hong Kong Marathon as described here.

Home Affairs Bureau
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