

Policy on checking mobile phone crime

It must be limited to checking criminality only

THE government plans to have in place a policy designed to check mobile phone-related crimes. No one can deny that of late threats, intimidation and extortion through use of mobile phones have risen to quite an alarming degree. These crimes vary in nature but in the end leave those affected in various degrees of distress. In the first place, it is generally young women who are the targets of unsolicited calls, to a point where these calls turn into harassment. In the second, sometimes families are the recipients of calls that leave them in a state of agitation. In the third place (and this is the worst), individuals are often threatened over mobile phones and generally asked to pay the caller and his associates a toll, failing which those at the receiving end might be in trouble. In such instances, the callers take care to hide the numbers of the phones they are calling from.

We therefore fully agree that a policy should be there to check such crimes. However, there is also a caveat here. It is that such a policy and its enforcement must not do anything that will have a negative impact on the mobile phone industry as a whole. We cannot ignore the fact that over the years the mobile phone industry has become an important sector of the economy and has made remarkable contributions to the growth of business and commerce. The expansion of the industry, especially in the rural regions, has meant a boost for agricultural activities and nationwide trade. Moreover, mobile phones, by enabling people to have access to new information, have greatly helped the spread of education. In other words, mobile phones, being an integral part of modern technology, have changed positively the way we think and act. Therefore, we feel that a concern for security, for a check to crimes must not in any way be allowed to disturb the thriving industry the mobile phone sector has become.

With technology at its most advanced stage these days, it should not be a problem hunting down the elements behind mobile phone crimes. The law enforcers must go after these elements firmly as a first step toward checking such misuse of mobile phones. Finally, steps must also be there to identify those individuals or groups involved in giving out to others the names and numbers of mobile phone users, who then become victims of harassment.

Let the authorities go for the law swiftly but judiciously. Most important, though, is the way in which it will be applied. Unless the policy is backed up by an enforcement machinery, the whole idea will lose meaning. Let there be no misuse of it, though.

MPO-listing as it stands now

Any more wavering would do more harm than good

THE task of Monthly Pay Order (MPO)-listing, that is, putting schools on the government's payroll under the present education minister Nurul Islam Nahid has proved to be a roller-coaster ride this year. And the delay caused has been due mainly to the complaints made by the MPs to the prime minister, under whose instruction her political and education adviser prepared another list incorporating the demands of the MPs. But that list, too, was found to be controversial for what they said it accommodated instances of alleged fraudulence, inclusion of institutions chosen by opposition BNP and, even Jamaat MPs. The education minister was again asked by the prime minister to prepare another MPO list, which was submitted on June 16 last.

Obviously, the long delay in MPO-listing has been made at the cost of the suffering of the teaching staff and also of the students of the institutions concerned. But can we still claim that the last prepared list is a faultless one? For the allegation of forgery and politicisation has already been raised against the listing process.

But in the first place to complete the MPO-listing properly and in an impartial way, certain criteria were set by the education ministry, such as taking into consideration the pass percentage, presence of qualified teachers on the staff, teacher-student ratio, the number of schools in the locality and so on for the schools concerned. But some MPs being critical of it, the PM had it reviewed which again is in for a second revision. But in actual practice, the objective could hardly be fully achieved, if only due to the allegations of corruption, lobbying and politicisation.

What is the way out of this vicious circle in the MPO-listing process? Meanwhile, the incumbent education minister must have become wiser and, that is, good intent alone is not enough to complete a tricky task like MPO-listing of educational institutions, which involves accommodation of competing interests. In point of fact, there should be a professional body to determine the eligibility criteria of the educational institutions under the education ministry, which the government should stick to. And while meeting the set criteria, we must ensure that no discrimination is made between the opposition and ruling party MPs in the process.

Last but not least, one cannot lose sight of the fact that, the entire exercise is meant to facilitate education of our children. But if the work of MPO-listing becomes something of a scramble for a slice of the government pie by fair means or foul, then the whole purpose of the task risks being defeated. Hopefully, the authorities would finalise the list soon and go about implementing it in right earnest.



It's 1966 all over again as Fifa shows its age by continuing to shun goal-line technology.

The beautiful game

And most importantly, none of that embarrassing holding up of a little sign to signal how much time is left after a whispered conversation with the fourth official. I mean, what is this: the Flintstones?

ZAFAR SOBHAN

HERE is nothing on this Earth more conservative than a sports authority, and there is no sports authority that is more conservative than Fifa.

This is too bad, because, while football is without question the sport of the gods, if there is anything that we have learned from the World Cup over the past month, it is that even the beautiful game could use serious reform.

Of course, Fifa is nose-deep in cronyism and petty corruption, and combines the efficiency of a third world government bureaucracy with the transparency of a mafia cartel.

However, we can dream for a moment as to what the sport might look like were it not trapped within the Byzantine conventions of its regulatory authority.

After all, it is not as though rules have not been changed in the past.

Once upon a time there were no substitutions (what, your goalkeeper broke his neck? Too bad!) And the offside law origi-

nally required three defenders between you and the goal, not two.

So, although changes are more burdensome to bring about and harder to effect than amendments to the US constitution, there is scope for them.

After watching the 2010 World Cup, here is my very modest list of proposals:

Only countries should be permitted to compete. England is not a country. It is a territory within the country known as the United Kingdom. Enough. The Faroe Islands don't merit their own team, either. If you can't enter the Olympics, you shouldn't be able to compete in the World Cup.

I'm not even going to mention goal-line technology, as the argument for it is so obvious and self-evident, except to point out that the Fifa president's initial knee-jerk opposition tells us all we need to know about him and his organisation.

If for some inexplicable reason the opposition is based on hesitation about new technology, a simpler, low-tech solution

would be more referees.

Why not one referee and two linesmen patrolling each half of the field? I am pretty sure six officials instead of three wouldn't break the bank. They don't look like they get paid much.

Moving on, I have never been a fan of the current interpretation of the offside rule. I hail from the Bill Shankley "if he isn't interfering with play, then what is he doing on the pitch?" school of thought.

That said, the real problem with the law isn't that players in offside positions are not called offside, but the opposite.

Often an attacker in an onside position is erroneously called offside, and once the flag goes up or the whistle blows, play stops and there is nothing that can be done to rectify the situation.

Why not just let play continue (no flag, no whistle), and then if the play leads to a goal, have it instantly reviewed and green/red lighted, like in cricket?

If the play doesn't lead to a goal, as will happen more often than not, no harm done, and play goes on.

Furthermore, I would even go so far as to consider scaling back the offside law so that it only applies either in the penalty box or the last third of the field.

This would serve the law's purpose of discouraging goal-hanging, but would ensure that attacking football isn't simply reduced to springing the offside trap, as is

the case today.

However, my biggest pet peeve about football is the archaic time keeping system.

One, why it is a secret, with only the ref knowing how much time is left, is beyond me. There is no reason the game clock cannot be placed on the score-board and visible to all.

I'll go even further. Why doesn't the clock stop when the ball goes out of play? Imagine the advantages if it did. There would be no time wasting. No substitutions during added time.

And most importantly, none of that embarrassing holding up of a little sign to signal how much time is left after a whispered conversation with the fourth official. I mean, what is this: the Flintstones?

Frankly, I'm just getting started here. Sadly for me, though, I suspect, a matter of some relief for my long-suffering readers, I do not have space in this week's column to go into further detail as to how football could be shaped up.

If I get enthusiastic feedback, I can devote a future column to tasers to ensure that walls stay ten yards away at free kicks, sin-bins, capital punishment for acting/diving, etc.

On the other hand, if this article elicits only howls of outrage or an embarrassed silence, then you're off the hook!

Zafar Sobhan is Editor, Editorial & Op-Ed, The Daily Star.

The Monetary Man

The Monetary Man reeks with the odour of his money. The pathologist reeks with suppuration, the realtor with ruthlessness, the politician with deception, so forth and so on. But money has outsmarted man. No matter how it is made, we cannot smell it.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

NO matter who wins the football World Cup next week, Fabio Capello, the manager of England national football team, is my favourite. He has pointed out something that in a nutshell explains what is wrong with the world. Money is spoiling the game, he said. That hits many nails on the head.

Money is spoiling the game, indeed. In so much as it applies to rest of the world, it probably applies more to us than anywhere else. The man makes money in other countries. Here money makes the man.

Money works like magic in this country. The police will protect, the teacher will teach, the doctor will treat, and the judge will give his verdict. But it all depends on money, not to say in every profession there are a handful of people who are like an island in a ruffled sea. Exception proves the rule. A few good apples only show that rest of the barrel is rotten.

Paul Clitheroe, Australia's leading commentator on financial issues, has a clear

understanding of money. He says that the laws of money gravity are the laws of money gravity, and one must spend less than one earns. That also reminds us of Charles Dickens, who explains that an annual income of £20 and an annual expenditure of "£19 and six" means happiness, but an annual income of £20 and an annual expenditure of "£20, nought and six" results in misery.

In this country, misery has become the source of happiness. Nobody likes to cut his coat according to his cloth, because the credo of modern life is to shop until you drop. Tomorrow's life must be lived today. And credit comes in to fill the gap. Cars, flat screen televisions, foreign trips and all other conspicuous consumptions are the milestones on the road to instant gratification.

There are as many reasons why money is important, as there are ways to spend it. The worst thing is that money can buy even human considerations. If this civilisation is ever destroyed by anything, it will be because the very essence of man has become a commodity. It is not about ser-

vice, loyalty, trust or gratitude. It is about the purchasing power of money that has turned every human being into a convenience store.

It is not a surprise that the bane of this civilisation should come in the form of a financial disaster. Abundance of credit has created a trap as spending perpetuates spending. Paul Krugman, the economic guru, believes the world has entered the early stages of a third depression. Millions of workers will lose their jobs and many of them will never work again, he predicts.

Disturbing as it may sound, the history of mankind suffers from the same futility as Sisyphus pushing the stone uphill. Centuries of human struggle for freedom and dignity have brought the human race to produce chattels. And these chattels are neither weak nor needy. Intelligent, educated, ambitious, sophisticated and fashionable, these men and women are willing to be bought and sold because they are greedy.

These chattels are reversing history and returning human spirit to where it started, perhaps even further back. Millions have died for freedom, because it was the mother of human dignity. Again, what formulated freedom were the rights of man to exist and express himself. Tyrant's torture, autocrat's audacity, and dictator's deviousness have tried for generations to deny man his God-given individuality. But now man has surrendered that

individuality, because money is more important than dignity. Civilisation, like a misguided genius, has created the animal while experimenting with the rational. The new man is sleek and selfish. He thinks rationally, but acts animally.

This man lives on double standard. He preaches what he does not practice; incessantly hollowing out himself to think he is happy. Money has made him arrogant, conceited, foolhardy and conniving. He is more focused on the quantity of the medium than he is on the quality of the exchange. The Monetary Man is known by his face value, his worth determined by how much money he has, or how much money can have him.

The story goes that Titus, the eldest son of the ninth Roman Emperor Vespasian (AD 979), had objected to a tax levied on public latrines. In response the father is said to have held a coin to the son's nose, and asked him to smell it. When the son replied that the coin did not have a smell, the father's riposte was: "That's made from urine."

The Monetary Man reeks with the odour of his money. The pathologist reeks with suppuration, the realtor with ruthlessness, the politician with deception, so forth and so on. But money has outsmarted man. No matter how it is made, we cannot smell it.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com.