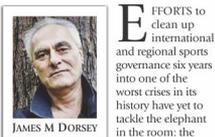


Tackling the elephant in the room

The incestuous and inseparable relationship between sports and politics



JAMES M. DORSEY

Inseparable relationship between sports and politics as indicated in Play the Game's Autonomy Index.

Sports administrators, politicians and government officials uphold the fiction that sports and politics have nothing to do with each other even when just a cursory glance at the facts tells a very different story.

The fundaments of the most recent crisis that erupted with the awarding in 2010 by world soccer body FIFA of World Cup hosting rights to Russia and Qatar are all about politics, the incestuous relationship between administrators and governments, and the fact that political corruption enables financial and performance corruption of sports.

A recently developed index that measures the degree of autonomy from politics enjoyed by national Olympic committees constitutes a first, albeit limited, stab at creating a yardstick to assess the independence of sports governance.

The index, produced by researchers, Mads A. Wickstrom and Stine Alvad, under the auspices of Play the Game, a Danish NGO that advocates greater transparency and democracy in sports, provides insight into the extent of the problem and its geographical distribution.

It also serves as a guide for broader questions underlying Wickstrom and Alvad's research that cannot be answered statistically. These questions include whether sports can be independent of politics and if not, whether political interference can be guaranteed in political systems that lack transparency and accountability and do not allow for autonomous civil society organisations and uncontrolled public space.

In effect, the index raises the question whether the Olympic Charter in its current form can guarantee the autonomy of sports without revisions that precisely its terms. Articles 27 and 28 of the charter ban national committees from activities that would contradict the charter without defining what that includes and insist on the election of committee members without determining what constitutes a free and fair election.

A clean bill of health?
On the bright side, the index that ranks 205 national Olympic committees concludes that only 15 percent or 30 panels are directly controlled by governments. With other words, the index gives the vast majority a clean bill of health.

Leaving it at that, would, however, amount to applying the charter of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) selectively, and denying the fact that violators represent autocratic, authoritarian or hybrid forms of government that rank low in terms of political freedoms and in most cases, in terms of lack of corruption. If further evidence of the incestuous relationship of sports and politics was required, the index's implicit correlation of autonomy of sports and political system provides incontrovertible proof.

The co-relationship between lack of sports autonomy and restricted freedoms is nowhere more obvious than in Asia which, according to the index, has the highest number of politically controlled committees, 16 of the region's 43. Of the 16, seven are autocratically governed Central, Southeast Asian and East Asian

Problems of political control go beyond national committees

The exemptions reflect the criteria applied by the Play the Game researchers who defined political control as the president and/or secretary general of a committee being either a senior government official or a member of a ruling family in a monarchy. In doing so, they excluded committee functionaries that hold office in governing parties or Central Asian republics like Kazakhstan that are de facto dominated by a family.

The Middle East's contribution to the high degree of political control in Asia goes beyond numbers and would have become even more evident if the index had been expanded to include international and regional sports associations. A review, for example, of

some of whom have asserted that they were not-tortured for participating in peaceful anti-government protests.

A gentleman's agreement is not enough IOC president Thomas Bach appeared to set the stage for a more open discussion when in 2014 he broke ranks with the world of sports governance by calling on associations and administrators to acknowledge their ties to politics as well as big business while at the same time ensuring that they maintain their neutrality.

"In the past, some have said that sport has nothing to do with politics, or they have said that sport has nothing to do with money or business. And this is just an attitude which is wrong and which we cannot afford anymore. We are living in the middle of society and that means that we have to partner up with the

Why we need to rethink the Organ Transplantation Act



MD MATUL ISLAM

KIDNEY failure is one of the most devastating conditions faced by thousands of Bangladeshis leading to painful procedures and early death. Thousands of kidney ailment patients are forced to undergo the painful process of kidney dialysis every second day until kidney patients to lead a normal life.

The rigorous provisions of the Organ Transplantation Act 1999 make it almost impossible for many of those unfortunate ones to opt for kidney transplant, which is one of the most common transplant operations in the US, and allows kidney patients to lead a normal life.

For many such sufferers, it means going to the hospital or clinic to go through the painful procedure of dialysis as many as three times a week. The only way they can lead a normal life is by having a kidney transplant, but the provisions of Organ Transplantation Act 1999 are standing in the way.

Section 6(1) (Ka) of the Act stipulates that the recipient of a human organ must not be above 70 years. This is a rather surprising provision. I have consulted the laws on kidney transplant of many countries and except for Bangladesh no other country has set an age limit for the recipient of the organs. What they require is that doctors performing the surgery be satisfied that the recipient's health is in suitable condition for transplantation. This provision needs to be scrapped to bring our law in line with other countries. This will help give new life to many a kidney patient but for my wife, who suffers from this condition, she will only cross the first hurdle.

The second hurdle is the provision u/s 3 which stipulates that the donors be close relatives (the definition of close relations has recently been expanded) who are in good health and can lead a normal life even after donating one of the kidneys.

In the US, where kidney transplants are one of the most common transplant operations, the donated kidney may be from: (i) a living related donor; and (ii) a living unrelated donor such as a friend.

Bangladesh should also amend the Act so that an unrelated donor like a friend, well-wisher, close associate, etc., can donate. This will bring it in line with the US law.

A third point is the provision u/s 9 of the Act prohibiting any financial benefits to the donors which is in line with the laws of other countries. Life is sacred in Islam. Surah Al-Baqarah provides: To save life one can even eat prohibited meat. In the same analogy, why should rewards for an organ to save life be a criminal act? Is it justified to penalise a donor for selling one of his organs to save another life without endangering his own and be able to lead a normal life?

In the US, the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984 made it illegal to compensate organ donors, but did not prevent payment for other forms of donations such as human plasma, sperm and egg cells. Although bone marrow is not an organ, the Act made paying bone marrow donors illegal. In 2009, a public interest litigation was filed to allow donors to be compensated for giving bone marrow harvested through a non-surgical safe procedure. In December 2011, the Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously ruled that donors giving bone marrow were eligible for compensation. Harvesting kidneys is also a safe procedure and donors should be made eligible for compensation.

Md Matul Islam is a former senior civil servant.



PHOTO: AFP

nations. Add to that Southeast Asian nations, including Myanmar and Malaysia, two nations with varying degrees of democracy that are wracked by corruption.

Equally important is the fact that more than a third of the politically controlled committees identified by the index are Middle Eastern, four Gulf autocracies and two hybrids, Iran and Jordan. That number would rise to ten or more than half of all affected Asian committees if Syria and Yemen had been included, two nations wracked by wars, as well as Lebanon where sports is controlled by competing political groups, including the likes of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite militia, and the Saudi-supported Future Movement, and Palestine where sports is dominated by a former security chief and leader of the governing political group who has presidential ambitions.

the executive committee of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), not only demonstrates that the problem of political control goes beyond national committees, but also raises questions about the possible cultural affinity between the athletic and international sports governance and its integrity given members' potential involvement in abuse of athletes' basic rights.

Of the 23 members of the AFC's committee, three, including the group's president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, are government officials in line with the index's criteria, eight others hail from countries in which sports is politically controlled, and one is tainted by corruption charges. Sheikh Salman has never been required to properly account for allegations that he played a role in a crackdown in 2011 in his native Bahrain on athletes and sports executives,

politicians who run this world," Mr Bach said. He said politicians and business leaders need to respect the autonomy of sporting bodies or risk diminishing their positive influence.

Mr Bach's statement was a first step. However, to ensure the respect he demanded, more will be needed than a gentleman's agreement or even a tightening of the criteria embedded in the Olympic Charter. Acknowledgment of the inextricable relationship between sports and politics opens the door to development of a set of governing principles and a system of independent oversight. Play the Game's Autonomy Index could be one pillar of that system.

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Un Sung Fuh Ror



NAVEED MAHBUB

HUMOROUSLY YOURS
AUNG SAN SUU KYI - what an impressive resume.

First, a trajectory similar to that of Nelson Mandela's. He spends 27 years in a high-security prison, comes out, puts an end to Apartheid, then wins the Nobel Peace Prize. Aung San Suu Kyi spends 15 years under house arrest, gets out, wins the Nobel Peace Prize and then she should get the A Lie Award. Maybe she, like Mandela, should've gone to a full-fledged prison system. Hey, it's not too late...

She receives the Nobel Peace Prize. The world bears her acceptance speech. "Ultimately our Continent, in 2017, the least desirable job in the displaced, the homeless and the hopeless, a world of which each and every corner is a true sanctuary where the inhabitants will have the freedom and the capacity to live in peace." What she says does NOT have in her utterance under her breath immediately at the end: "NOT!"

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum gives Suu Kyi the Elie Wiesel Award for her stance AGAINST hatred, genocide and abuse of human dignity. Now she should get the A Lie Award for her stance FOR hatred, genocide and abuse of human dignity. Amnesty International awards her its most prestigious honour, the Ambassador of Peace Prize is like toothpaste, once given out, cannot be taken back no matter what the subsequent performance record of the recipient is. By the

award, not to mention the award money that could have fed many a Rohingya in need today.

What's done is done. If 1991 has given Aung San Suu Kyi the Nobel for Peace, then 2018 had better give her the Oscar for Best Acting in the name of Peace.

So, what's bugging her? She claims that the Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. I think if Bangladeshis were to immigrate illegally anywhere, Myanmar would not be the top choice. We are doing just fine by jumping the ship in New York, London, Rome, Madrid, Lisbon... Why go somewhere where everything is just the same, if not worse?

client. However, the usually roaring leader of the free world is reticent despite being a man who jumps at every initiative by Kim Jong-un (though, as for the third time, Kim Jong-un becomes a father, it is for the first time that President Trump doesn't notice an initiative by the North Korean leader, nor any tweet from him such as: "If we were in power ten months ago, I wouldn't have allowed him to use his weapon of mass production!")

On the flip side, one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh, has stepped up to show that it is not how much one has, but how much one cares that makes the day. God knows how long this tragedy will go on for, but for now, at the current stage, is Aung San Suu Kyi, from being the Un Sung He Ro to now becoming the Un Sung Fuh Ror...



AUNG SAN SUU KYI

way, Nobel Committee, you can zoom out a bit and look at Europe and consider it a first her off the Shukhbari Prize that it had awarded her, all because of everything she is now not doing.

So, what do we do? How about going Back to the Future? Nah, there is no stretch of road in Myanmar for the DeLorean to speed up to 88 miles per hour; go back to 1991 and then stop the Nobel Committee from wasting an



AUNG MYE THAW

And the UN? Yes, strong words. Probably many resolutions - as effective as all those on the Middle East. Let's see what happens at the current session of the UN General Assembly, which, by the way, Suu Kyi is not attending. Reminds me of my school days: when I failed to finish my assignment, I would suddenly develop a "stomach ache" and stay absent from school.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State T Rex has roared (glorified meow) at Exxon Mobil's

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