

# Time to take sports seriously

*We should prioritise sports in the national budget and development policy*

MD ASHADUL ISLAM

BA NGLADESH has always been a sports-loving nation. Sports brings people together irrespective of religion or social and economic background. Our women's football or cricket teams are obvious examples of how sports can promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Bangladesh's women footballers are now competing with foreign women football leagues which was unthinkable even a few years ago. Sports has numerous positive impacts on education, health, trade, tourism, industrialisation, technology and social cohesion. So it goes without saying that sports must be given priority in the national budget.

In 2017 the global sports market generated revenue of around USD 91 billion. All large sporting goods (apparel, shoes, gear, etc.) manufacturers are based in West Europe and North America where sports science and technology are much advanced. Latest sports gear, equipment and accessories are essential for attaining high performance. But sports gear and equipment are usually quite expensive, especially for the kinds of sports we have high potential in such as golf, shooting and archery. Often, the costs of acquiring and maintaining them are so high that many sports federations cannot even afford them. For example, electronic scoring target costs Tk 15,17,733).

Technology makes sports fairer and safer, but costlier too. This high-value-adding sports technology is almost out of reach for developing countries. Emerging economies like China, Thailand and India are striving to get a share of the market.

In Bangladesh, the study of sports science is now at a nascent stage. A handful of public and private universities offer courses on sports science. BKSP has introduced sports science in limited spheres. Despite the positive economic, social and

environmental impact of sports, this is yet to be mainstreamed in national development policies in many Commonwealth countries. In the recently held 9th Commonwealth Sports Ministers' Meeting in Gold Coast, Australia, emphasis was given on sports to be mainstreamed in national development policies, and sports policy to be aligned with national development priorities (and ultimately to the Sustainable Development Goals).

Officially, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is mandated to regulate sports federations, create sports infrastructure, formulate sports policy, and facilitate sports development in the country. The country's sports budget is currently being prepared largely on an ad-hoc basis that cannot advance sports. The ministry receives a lump sum allocation in the budget for participation in sporting events which falls short of the actual requirement of sports federations. Additional money is required to organise a sports event or participate in sports competitions at home and abroad. Given the resource constraint and budgetary discipline, there is limited scope to provide extra money out of the budget. Sometimes, the complicated process of sanctioning additional money can cause delay in actual training or procuring necessary sports equipment for meaningful participation in sports competitions.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has taken initiatives to streamline the sports budget stressing the importance of training, organising and participating in sports competitions. Traditionally, these are the areas which have been receiving less allocation in the budget.

All the sports federations should be able to formulate their multi-year strategic planning for the future and a framework of how to deploy resources, both human and financial, to achieve that. Federations will be asked to prepare the annual demand based on their operational plan, essential to implement the strategic plan. The ministry will rationalise the

demand through consultation with the sports federations before sending the aggregate demand to the finance division. Federations must have set goals to achieve from international competitions if they intend to avail funding from the ministry for this purpose. The ministry will develop a monitoring framework to oversee the expenditure of additional sports budget as a precondition of the finance division. Priority can be given to the sports disciplines where our athletes have high potential of winning medals. Smartly prepared

crossed USD 1 billion in India. Some corporate houses and sports-loving persons generously sponsor our sports. But there is no credible data on the total market value of sports sponsorship in Bangladesh. Sports sponsorship should also be taken into account when we talk about the national sports budget.

Our current sports policy dates back to 1998. It therefore needs to be upgraded bearing in mind the changing scenario of global sports, national sports needs and, more importantly, the national and global

ICC World T-20 when Bangabandhu National Stadium, Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium and Sylhet Cricket Stadium were upgraded. Modern sports infrastructure fitted with the latest technology and amenities is vital for high performance of the athletes. National Sports Council is responsible for providing sports facilities in Bangladesh. At present, NSC manages eight cricket stadiums, two football stadiums, 64 district stadiums, 21 swimming pools, two indoor stadiums, seven indoor practice

popularity of other forms of entertainment in this age of advanced technology. Social media is more popular among youngsters than outdoor sports activities. Rapid disappearance of open spaces is making the situation worse. In a countrywide survey by Sports Directorate, a total of 5,117 playgrounds were identified under public, private and organisational ownership. We have legal instruments to safeguard the open spaces but their number is declining alarmingly. Proper enforcement of law and public awareness are essential to protect the open spaces. Upon an initiative of the honourable prime minister, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is implementing a project to construct a Sheikh Russel Upazila Mini Stadium at all upazilas of the country. The upazila mini-stadium built on a minimum of three acres of land will facilitate sports activities of youth living in these upazilas. These stadiums will have no galleries, but there will be a number of benches allowing people to easily watch and get inspired to participate in games.

Since Bangladesh has become eligible for graduation from LDC status, there is no way of keeping sports sidelined. In line with the recommendations of the recent Commonwealth Sports Ministers' Meeting in Australia, sports has to be mainstreamed in the national development plan with utmost priority. In addition to sufficient sports budget, well-maintained sports infrastructure, robust sports policy, adequate sports facility, participation of women in sports, capacity building of National Sports Council, and well-governed sports federations are fundamental to achieve coveted success in prestigious international sports competitions like the Olympics as well as to contribute towards achieving SDGs.

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Siddikur Rahman in the Asian Tour tournament in February 2017.

PHOTO: AFP

sports budget could be a good business case for enhancing the budget of the ministry, which currently accounts for 0.03 percent of the national budget. Training and participating in competitions and organising sports events are directly related to the performance of the players.

Sports sponsorship is the most significant source of revenue for sports across the world. Currently, the global sports sponsorship market has an estimated value of almost USD 64 billion. In 2017, sports sponsorship

agenda of development. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has already finalised the technical assistance (TA) proposal of Commonwealth Secretariat to upgrade the national sports policy incorporating both sports and non-sports development issues in the policy.

Hosting international sports events like Olympics, FIFA World Cup or ICC World Cup has always been a privilege of the rich nations as it requires huge investments in sports infrastructure. Bangladesh hosted ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 and 2014

stadiums, one hockey stadium, 35 gymnasiums and five women's sports complex. Valuation of these facilities is needed to calculate their maintenance cost. As per standard practice it should be at least 10 percent of the total value of these assets created over the years. We should bear in mind that well-maintained sports infrastructure is an integral part of good sports management in a country.

Getting young people to participate in sports, however, is a challenging task in the wake of the

# BJP's Hindutva vs regional identity dilemma

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

IT is a bit surprising that the issue of the Indian government's proposed law to give citizenship to six "persecuted" religious minority groups in Bangladesh, Afghanistan and India hasn't got much traction in Bangladeshi media. Why it should have got traction is that the bill, brought forward by the Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2016, to amend the 1955 Citizenship Act has created unrest in all the seven northeastern Indian states, most of which share their borders with Bangladesh. The uproar further sharpened the linguistic, ethnic and communal fault-lines among the communities in the region, particularly in Assam. There had been widespread street protests in all the northeastern states against the bill for almost a week from May 7. In Assam's Barak Valley, including Silchar, people hit the streets in support of the proposed legislation.

People from six religious groups named in the bill would be eligible for Indian citizenship: Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists and Christians. The Indian Citizenship Act in its current form allows people from the six groups of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh to seek citizenship if they have lived in India for 11 of the last 14 years. The amendment bill, tabled in parliament in July 2016, brings down the cut-off mark from 11 years to six years of the 14 years.

What set off the last bout of unrest in the northeast was the three-day visit of the joint parliamentary committee, headed by BJP

lawmaker Rajendra Agrawal, to elicit the opinion of a cross-section of the population in the northeast. The committee visited Assam and Meghalaya, the epicentre of the street protests against and for the bill. The committee comprises 16 lawmakers drawn from different political parties.

The bill has once again brought to the fore issues related to ethnic differences in the entire northeast. In Assam, it has additionally triggered the linguistic divide. The Brahmaputra Valley in Assam is dominated by Assamese-speaking people and the Baraka Valley by people whose mother tongue is Bengali. The Baraka Valley is largely inhabited by Bengali-speaking Hindus who found themselves in Assam after the division of Sylhet, one part of which was merged with India.

Supporters of the bill say that in light of the huge human catastrophe brought on by partition, the people of Barak Valley have nowhere to go. Critics of the legislation point out that the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 militates against the 1985 Assam accord between the Indian government and the leaders of violent agitation against "foreigners" in the state spearheaded by the powerful All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in the late 1970s and through much of the 1980s. One of the main reasons that opponents of the bill have cited is that the Assam Accord sets out that anyone who settled in Assam after March 24, 1971 would be considered a "foreigner."

The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War

brought about another round of influx of Hindus into Assam. The launch of Operation Searchlight by the Pakistan army in Bangladesh on March 25, 1971 led to many Hindus and Muslims fleeing the country and taking shelter in India with many of them staying back. There is no official estimate as to the number of people who stand to benefit and gain citizenship if the bill gets parliamentary nod. But a back-of-the-envelope calculation puts the figure between 15 to 20 lakh.

In an article in *The Indian Express*, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University, wrote that the bill makes illegal immigrants eligible for Indian citizenship based on their religion. "It clearly violates Article 14 of the Constitution," says Mehta. Article 14 and Article 15 both pertain to the fundamental rights of an Indian under the Constitution which state that there must be equality before the law and there cannot be any discrimination on grounds of religion among others. Article 15 is specific about prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. So, by amending the Constitution, if a new provision is added granting citizenship to one religious group, wouldn't keeping other religious groups out of it violate the two abovementioned Articles? This is an argument put forward by those opposing the bill.

What has caused further anxieties in Assam is that the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 has come at a time when the 1951 National Register of Citizens in Assam is being revised

in a long-drawn and difficult exercise that threatens to leave thousands of people, including Hindus and Muslims who have been living in the state since long, "stateless."

The bill has also caused fissures among BJP leaders centred on linguistic lines and strains between the saffron party and its ruling alliance partners in Assam (Asom Gana Parishad) and Meghalaya. AGP leader and former chief minister of Assam has led a procession against the bill. Given these complexities, Assam's incumbent Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has so far been extremely circumspect in reacting to the bill. After all, it is his party, BJP at the centre, which has piloted the bill and wants to be a messiah of religious minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is a piquant situation for Sonowal. He was one of the key figures in the fight against the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 which was struck down by the Indian Supreme Court in 2005. And now he is under pressure from AGP in the face of a move to give citizenship to migrants from Bangladesh. Incidentally, the bill has been opposed by Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA), BJP's ruling alliance partner in Assam's neighbouring Meghalaya state.


Publicly, Sonowal's refrain so far has been that his government will not do anything that goes against the interests of Assam. As chief minister, he is stating the obvious. Sonowal was once the hero of a movement against illegal immigration into Assam. What will he

do now at a time when, as Mehta suggests, "the imperatives of BJP's national (Hindutva) agenda have run against regional identity"? But Sonowal privately is a worried man. Added to his worry is the threat by the anti-peace-talk faction of insurgent outfit United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) led by fugitive Paresh Barua to derail peace in Assam. Obviously, the chief minister does not want insurgency to rear its head again in Assam. That was what brought him to New Delhi where he met Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh to discuss the issue on May 30. The chief minister was told that the federal government would set up a committee to ensure enforcement of a clause in the Assam Accord that provides for constitutional, administrative and legislative safeguards for—protection, preservation, and promotion of cultural, social and linguistic identities and heritage of Assamese-speaking people. It clearly indicates the BJP-led federal government's determination to go ahead with the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016.

Assam, or the entirety of northeastern India for that matter, cannot afford a dangerous mix of linguistic, ethnic and communal divides as peace has returned there after much effort and development are trying to take wings. So far there is no alternative to sustained talks among all sections of society.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent to *The Daily Star*.

QUOTABLE  
Quote



**HAROLD LASKI**  
British political theorist, economist, author, and lecturer

A healthy loyalty is not passive and complacent, but active and critical.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH


ACROSS	27 Mysterious	8 Cote d'Azur setting
1 Grant an appeal for	29 Dojo blow	9 Shows clearly
7 Warring god	33 Clamorous	10 Like some peanuts
11 Smith grad	34 Radiated	16 Stopped moving
12 Singing star	35 Flamenco cries	18 Move smoothly
13 Rocker ted	36 Raspy	20 Like cacti
14 Malevolent	37 Thinker	22 One out early
15 Cherish	Descartes	23 Age-old
16 Michigan city	38 Bread-winner	24 President before Millard
17 Thomas Hardy	39 Hardens	25 Fancy homes
heroin	40 Secret meetings	28 Cart pullers
18 Turkey neighbor	DOWN	30 Brass section members
19 Capital on a fjord	1 Charged	31 Dawn
21 Blushing	2 Dodge	32Jury makeup
22 Deep pies, of a sort	3 Sci-fi awards	34 Fly high
25 Chess piece	4 "Nature" essayist	36 -- up (agitated)
26 Inkling	5 Last Stuart ruler	
	6 Informer	
	7 "Hello" singer	

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BEETLE BAILEY  
BY MORT WALKER



12-16

BABY BLUES  
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