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Sport policy in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Pakistan's sports policy, from the design, development and delivery phases through to its public evaluation. In doing so, we identify and address the emerging trends and associated challenges facing sports organisations in a large politically unstable developing nation. Ten interviews and an analysis of over 15 policy documents, including annual reports, were conducted over the three-year period 2019–2021. This critical case study documents the sport-politics nexus in Pakistan, including the ongoing impact of the 2011 18th constitutional amendment on sport. The key conclusions from this study are that the development and delivery of sport policy, at both a domestic and international level, was negatively affected by administrative inefficiencies in organisational structures and the devolution of the Pakistan Sports Board. A lack of public and private sector investment and an unjust distribution of funds were also found to have hindered the nation's ability to use sport as a vehicle for socio-economic development and soft power projection. In sum, Pakistan's sports policy and underlying structures fall short of modern international sports requirements, and reform is strongly recommended.

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Pakistan; sport policy; politics; soft power; sport

Introduction

Pakistan is the world's 33rd-largest nation and one of the largest countries located in South Asia. It borders the Arabian Sea, between India on the east and Iran and Afghanistan on the west. The nation is divided up into five regional provinces, covering an area of 770,880 (*World Population Review*, 2022). Pakistan's Islamic history began with the arrival of Muslim traders in the 8th century. The British came to dominate the region in the 18th century, and, by the early 20th century, British India included all of modern Pakistan (*Pakistan: Country Review*, 2021). Whilst alternating periods of civilian and military rule over the past half a century have hindered political stability, Pakistan is currently one of Asia's five fastest emerging economies, with a growth rate of over 5.7% in 2018 (Government of Pakistan 2016, *Pakistan: Country Review* 2018). According to a 2017 United Nations Human Development Report, Pakistan is also in the midst of an unprecedented youth bulge, with 64% of its 200 million population aged 29 or under and 30% between the ages of 15 and 29 (UNDP 2017).

A recent review of the country profiles published in the *International Journal of Sports Policy and Politics* revealed a concerning lack of knowledge when it came to national sport systems in South Asia (the sub-continent). There are insufficient data available regarding structure or programmes for the development of sports in Pakistan (Ganjera and Hess 2019). This study of Pakistan's national sports policy not only helps to fill this gap but also uncovers the extent to which the nation's sports

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systems have been developed, funded and governed since the turn of the century. Due to the lack of secondary data available, the information for this paper is primarily based on empirical data gathered from interviews with senior officials and policy makers within Pakistan sport system including Ministry of Interprovincial Coordination (MIPC), Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) & Provincial Sports Boards, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF), Pakistan Olympic Association (POA), Pakistan Football Federation (PFF), and academic literature, policy documents and annual reports from national sports federations (NSFs). The pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

The article is structured into six sections. The first section begins with the brief history Pakistan's sporting heritage, followed by an overview of government involvement in Pakistan's sports sector. The following section summarises national sport policies, their development and administrative and organisational structure of sport in Pakistan. The succeeding section discusses the sport funding resources, their availability and dissemination at federal and provincial level. Next, we discuss the sport and politics nexus in Pakistan and how it impacts the sport performance and administration, followed by the emerging challenges faced by Pakistan sport. In the end, the recommendations based on our analysis of the data, findings and summary of conclusion is provided.

Pakistan's sporting heritage

Pakistan's first National Games were held at Polo Grounds, Karachi from 23 to 25 April 1948, a year after the nation secured its independence. Athletes and officials from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and all the integrated Provincial units of West Pakistan participated in these games. The total number of athletes was 140. No competitors were, however, invited from any foreign country. Competitions were held in track and field athletics, basketball, boxing, cycling, volleyball, weightlifting, and wrestling. Pakistan's first Summer Olympic Games appearance also occurred in 1948, at the Games of the XIV Olympiad hosted in London. The nation's first appearance at a Winter Olympic Games did not occur until in 2010.

Pakistan's performance in elite-level sporting competitions contradicts its population size and economical basis and, since past two decades, the nation's best athletes have routinely struggled to compete on the international stage. In 2018 Asian Games, Pakistan returned home with four bronze medals, and finished 34th (out of 37 nations) and 3rd among South Asian countries, after India and Nepal. More recently, it was represented by ten athletes at the delayed 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games, competing in six sports, and only one at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games. Of these athletes, only two qualified for the finals of their sport. In the 2022 Commonwealth Games, however, Pakistan finished eighth on the medal table (2 gold, 3 silver & 3 bronze).

In terms of a national sport, cricket is played in almost all districts of Pakistan, and, like India, people of Pakistan origin are often described as being obsessed with it (Bandyopadhyay 2021). On the international stage, Pakistan's men's team have made the final of their World Cup on two occasions, 1992 and 1999, winning the 1992 tournament. They have also made the ICC Twenty20 men's World Cup Final on two occasions, claiming the title of World Champions in 2009. In contrast, the Pakistan men's field hockey team have won a record four world titles, with the most recent being in 1994. A Pakistan hockey team also competed in five consecutive Men's Olympic Finals, between 1956 and 1972, securing the gold medals in 1960 and 1968. In fact, the record books reveal that eight of Pakistan's ten Summer Olympic Games medals have been won on the hockey pitch, including the nation's last medal (a bronze at the 1992 Games in Barcelona).

Squash, a non-Olympic sport played all over the world, has also been an arena for Pakistani male athlete success. Jansher Khan, ranked number one in the world for six years, won the World Open eight times and the British Open six times (Mitchell 2020). Other squash titles and trophies were won at the 1984, 1993, 1996 and 2003 Men's World Open Squash Championships, the 1989 and 2004 South Asian Games, the 2008 Asia Cup and the 2013 Men's Asian Individual Squash Championships. In 2013, a female Pakistani secured a medal at the Women's Asian Individual Squash Championships.

Whilst Pakistan's success in cricket, hockey and squash provides a poignant reminder of the nation's colonial heritage. In 2020, Pakistan hosted and won the Men's Kabaddi World Cup for the first time (Mahmood 2020). Kabaddi, a contact sport of Indian origins that has indoor and outdoor versions and is played by male and females, is the most popular traditional sport of South Asia (Rehal 2022). Other traditional sports played in Pakistan include the Chirpiest Partridge competition, Desi Kushthi (Mud Wrestling), Dog and Hare Race, Gulli Danda, Horse Dance, Kabaddi, Kite flying (Patang bazi) Malakhra (a form of wrestling), Mukha (Archery) Pitthu Garam, Slingshot, Shooting Volley Ball, Stone Lifting, Tent Pegging, and Veeni (Wrist grabbing), Yak Racing and Yak Polo (Tareen 2021). The Traditional Sports and Games Pakistan Association (TSGPA) is affiliated with the International Council of Traditional Sports and Games (TSG) (Traditional Sports & Games Pakistan Association n.d.).

Having provided a brief overview of Pakistan's sporting heritage, the following section will focus on the government's role in sports.

Brief history of government involvement in sports

Sports has been an important part of the Pakistan government's policy since the nation came into being in 1947. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, had a great love for sports and an appreciation of the vital role it can play in the development of nations and the inculcation of discipline among the masses. At the time of independence, like many other countries, Pakistan lacked sports infrastructure and the delivery arrangement for the development and promotion of sports. In a meeting with the Organizing Committee of the First National Games, the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah said to the first President of Pakistan Olympic Association, Mr Ahmed E.H. Jaffar:

Dedicate yourself to sports promotion, for when you and I are gone, leadership will go into the hands of Youth, and Youth is our wealth, a raw material, that must be hammered into shape, into burnished steel to strive and smite in defence - the defence of the integrity and solidarity of Pakistan - the defence of the ideology of Pakistan (Pakistan Sports Board & Islamabad, n.d.)

In the newly formed state of Pakistan, the Ministry of Education was responsible for sport between 1947 and 1958. With the expansion of sports activities in 1958, the formation of a dedicated sport body was deemed necessary. The Pakistan Sports Control Board (PSCB) was formed in 1959 to manage and promote sports at the national level. In 1962, through ordinance No. XVI,¹ the PSCB was granted more functions and power. Now with more independence, the PCSB now exercised the authority of central government throughout Pakistan (Report of the Cabinet Committee on Promotion and Development of Sports 1983).

The Pakistan government was now directly involved in matters related to sports and policy development. The PSCB was the first formal management structure to manage, promote and regulate sport system in Pakistan. The Board comprised a general body consisting of 41 members responsible for laying down policies. The PSCB Executive Committee comprised 14 members and were tasked with initiating executive actions and implementing policies. A Directorate of Sports carried out the executive work of the board whilst providing advice to the Secretary of the Board (also the Deputy Education Advisor at the Ministry of Education).

Superseding the PCSB was the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB). The PSB was created in 1962 by the Ministry of Education as a corporate body for the purposes of promoting and developing uniform standards of competition and controlling sports on a national basis. The PSB controls all 41 sporting federations with the support of the Pakistan Sports Trust, which assists struggling players and associations to participate in sports. Since 2011, the Ministry of Interprovincial Coordination has control over the PSB (Dawn 2011).

The National Sports Committee (NSC) was formed by the Pakistan government in 1967 to observe and evaluate the performance of PSB, especially with regard to elite sport and to provide suggestions for improvement of support standards at domestic and international level. The NSC conducted

personal interviews, surveys and seminars in all the major cities of Pakistan focusing in the questions related to the role of sports in society, organisation and administration of sports, deterioration of sports standards, coaching training and selection of athletes for international competitions, funding and sport competitions. The recommendations provided by NSC were extensive and comprehensive, ranging from the creation of codes of ethics, the development of physical education institutions and national coaching centres for male and female athletes, through to the building of stadia and the development of financial investment plans connected to sponsorship and event-based revenue (Ganjera 2007).

However, many of the NSC recommendations were never adopted. A decade later, the PSB's responsibilities was transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. In fact, despite the 1967 National Sports Committee Inquiry, and the hosting of National Sports Conferences in 1997 and 1999, Pakistan's Government did not have a comprehensive sports policy until 2001. Furthermore, out of five provinces, only Punjab (2020) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2018) later developed sports policies.

The 18th constitutional amendment and Pakistan sport

The 18th amendment to the constitution of Pakistan was passed in 2010 and redefined the federal–provincial relations. The amendment introduced the largest structural reforms in the history of Pakistan since inception. The substantial changes included a review of 102 articles in the constitution, 47 subjects plus 18 federal ministries were devolved to provinces, holding of elections for local governments by Election Commission of Pakistan was made obligatory (Seidle & Khan 2012, Ahmed 2020). This constitutional change in the federal system of government faced challenges during its implementation process despite the hard work of the Implementation Commission.

The following two quotes, recorded in 2021 as a part of a wider study into the Pakistan sport, highlighted some issues:

The 18th amendment is more in show than it is in force. Islamabad is not ready to relinquish authority and power, and funds. And when it gets to the provinces, then the provinces are not ready to do the same with local government, and all sporting activity must start at the local level (Sabir, Personal communication, 13 February 2021)

After 18th amendment, there is a lot of confusion going on between the Federal Government and Provincial Government and sports federations as well. The confusion is directly related to the finances because after 18th amendment all the finances went to the provinces and the federations are left with no options and they just have a role of monitoring national federations only (Baaqir, Personal communication, 11 March, 2021)

As (Shafqat 2011) states, '[the] general tenor of the 18 amendment was to ameliorate the power-retentive effects of the previous amendments and to diminish, to every extent possible, the feeling of distrust that the provinces had been feeling for each other in the absence of any form of power-sharing and autonomy from the centre'. In July 2011, control was transferred to the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (MIPC) (Laar *et al.* 2021). The MIPC bridges provinces and the federal government for resolving disputes, and to promote and develop Pakistan sports at international standards. Over the past decade, the PSB works as an autonomous body with administrative control by the IPC ministry.

The Ministry of Sports was one of the 18 federal ministries transferred to provinces after the devolution of the social sector under the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The individual provincial plans, policies and programmes have to converge at one point to reflect a broader national charter. These sectors are financed, promoted and protected by the provinces, but the federal government is still responsible for signing the conventions, agreements and treaties with international bodies and organisations. The need for a national sports and tourism policy is imperative in this scenario. Sport has always been a top priority on the national agenda and so is tourism. Similarly, the Prime Minister at the time announced a package of far-reaching consequences for the youth empowerment

through several financial incentives. One of such initiative to engage youth in sports and promote grass root sports is Kamyab Jawan Sports Drive.

Kamyab Jawan sports drive (Successful youth sports drive)

In June 2020, the government reconstituted the PSB, reducing it from 35 members to only 11 members responsible for taking policy decisions, as a larger group of members made it administratively difficult (Abbasi 2020). The new sports board members include representatives from the MIPC the Director General of the PSB, the Chairman of the Higher Education Commission, the Managing Director National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) or his nominee, the President or Secretary of Pakistan Athletics Federation, the President or Secretary of the Pakistan Football Association, the President or Secretary of Sports Control Board and the President of the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA). Two prominent businessmen of the country – Aqeel Kareem Dhedhi and Shafiq Abbasi, are also part of the new board (Abbasi 2020).

In December 2021, MIPC started working on a new sports policy 2020 and a final draft of a 2021 NSP was submitted to the Ministry of Law for approval. It also launched the 2021 Kamyab Jawan Sports Drive (KJSD), a multi-phase initiative aimed at reviving grassroots sports and promote the nation's sports culture. A collaboration between the Government, the MIPC and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (Hayder 2021), the KJSD is expected to be the biggest sports programme in the country's history. Phase One is focused upon growing the following twelve sports: athletics, boxing, cricket, football, handball, hockey, judo, skiing, squash, volleyball, weightlifting and wrestling. Female athletes will also have an equal opportunity to compete and participate in these sports, except weightlifting and wrestling. The young athletes, aged 11–25, will be selected through trials from 25 regions across the country. The selected athletes would be trained to compete at the national-level leagues of these sports.

A budget of Rs. 897.985 million (\$5 million) has been allocated to the KJSD, out of which Rs.200 million (\$1 million) was released in 2021 (Planning Commission 2021). The establishment of High-Performance Centres (HPCs) in 12 universities across Pakistan for sports performance and training purposes is also a part of the KJSD. Those responsible for delivering phase one have also engaged Global Soccer Ventures (GSV), who arranged for UEFA Pro-licenced coaches from an Irish Football team, St Patrick's Athletic AFC, to host trials which commenced in January 2022 (The News 2021). These talent identification sessions provide an opportunity up to 20 players to travel to Dublin, Ireland, to train and play with the Academy and potentially First Team of St Patrick's Athletic (Wasim 2022). Furthermore, GSV and NED University of Engineering & Technology (NED), located in Karachi, have signed a 10-year agreement to create the first international standard soccer city stadium in Pakistan.

Pakistan sport policy (2001-present)

Pakistan's first sports policy was announced in 2001. It was later amended in 2005. Moreover, after the 18th constitutional amendment in 2010, sports were devolved to provinces and Pakistan Sports Board's (PSB) powers were reduced. Whilst this provided the five provinces with greater autonomy, the PSB also lost its capability to provide funds to sports federations. A revision of Pakistan's 2005 national sports policy was submitted to the Ministry of Law for vetting in December 2021 (Pakistan Today 2021).

The aim of the 2001 National Sport Policy (NSP) was to change Pakistan's sport system and focus on sports at the grassroots level. In 2004, the policy was formally reviewed by the Ministry and, as noted above, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism instructed provinces to implement the revised sport policy in the same year. However, sport policy and strategy were not implemented faithfully by the provinces, prompting a government-initiated task force to review the progress of national implementation on a quarterly basis. In 2012, after the decision by the Supreme Court of

Pakistan, all National Sports Federations (NSFs) were required to implement the 2005 NSP (Shahbaz 2015). In case of negligence, the NSFs risk losing affiliation and financial support by Pakistan Sports Board (PSB).

The Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) has been critical of the 2005 NSP, on the basis that it contradicts the IOC Charter. The contradiction, and the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of NSFs, has affected all sports activities in Pakistan over the past decade. Pakistan's NSFs can essentially be divided into two groups; those who support the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism NSP (i.e. the government) and those who support the POA. Because of this divide, some training programmes are not supported by the government, whilst the POA refuses to grant permission for some athletes to participate in some programmes (Shahbaz 2015). Furthermore, after the 18th amendment-related devolution, there was confusion regarding powers and roles of these sports organisations.

The 2021 NSP addresses the domestic conflict and confusion and includes a dispute resolution mechanism. It also outlines the different roles of the PSB, the NSFs and the provincial sports boards, and seeks to improve the management, accountability and transparency of NSFs. Moreover, the 2021 has set organisations targets related to the UNESCO's International Charter of 'Physical Activity, Sport and Physical Education' and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As with the 2001 and 2005 versions, the 2021 NSP has primarily focused on grassroots sports. This latest version, however, also entails the establishment of an Anti-Doping Surveillance Cell at the PSB, and a National Anti-doping Organization of Pakistan (NADO-Pakistan). The Anti-Doping Surveillance Cell and NADO-Pakistan will follow the protocols of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to check the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Pakistan's 2021 NSP also acknowledges the need to support previously neglected areas, including women's sports, special and Paralympic sports, winter sports, E-sports and local/traditional sports (e.g. Kabaddi, Malakhra and Free-Style Polo). In terms of school sport, the 2021 NSP has made it mandatory for all educational institutions to facilitate at least two periods in a week dedicated to sports activities and to participate in six games of their choice, whilst all colleges must have at least six sports teams. The educational institutions are expected to create their own sports facilities. However, if that is not possible, they need to become affiliated with an existing local sports complex or facility. The ministry of education will create a sports cell to monitor sports activities of the Board of intermediate and secondary education and higher education commission will monitor university sports. Finally, 2021 NSP includes the establishment of a National Sports Database and strategies focused on the commercialisation of sports through private investment and joint ventures. The Pakistan Super League (Cricket), for example, demonstrated the importance of engaging media for the promotion of local/domestic sports and games. This provides a suitable bridge to the next section, in which we look at how sport is funded in Pakistan.

Sport funding in Pakistan

In most of the developed countries, sports funding is monitored and evaluated to ensure the right use of taxes (Hoye and Nicholson 2009, Skille and Säfvenbom 2011, Fahlén and Stenling 2016, Zheng *et al.* 2018). There is not much credible literature or research conducted on the subjects of Pakistan sports budget, which is reported to be the lowest in South Asia (Hussain 2022). The funding and the figure mentioned in this paper are extracted from the Pakistan sports board annual reports MIPC year books. These accounts show a gradual decrease in funding in sports sector since 2005–6, which has reportedly led to the underdevelopment of sports in Pakistan (Hussain *et al.* 2011). Hussain *et al.* (2011) reveal that, in Pakistan, the trend in funding allocation to sports exposes the fluctuations and uncertainties in these allocations from 1988 to 2010. For example, the allocated state funds in 2003 and 2004 were Rs.433.7 million (\$7.5 million) and Rs.209.1 million (\$3.6 million). In the three years that followed, however, the funding varied from Rs.329.1 million (\$5.6 million) in 2005 to Rs.340 million (\$5.7) in 2006 and 425.8 million (\$7 million) in 2007. Hussain *et al.* (2011, p. 114) also

note how the public sector development fund for sport was cut by '67.1% in 2008 and then enhanced by 42.9% and 14.5% in 2009 and 2010, respectively'.²

The principal source of public funding for the national sports organisations in Pakistan is grants-in-aid from the Federal Government and, after 18th Amendment, the provincial governments are responsible for distributing these funds within their region. The Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) receives direct funding from the Government through the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (MIPC) and then disseminates it to financially support the National Sports Federations (NSF) ("Pakistan Sports Board & Islamabad, n.d.). The government provides an annual grant to the NSFs, or special grants for international competitions. Besides that, the government also bears the expenditures of sending teams to compete in major international (e.g. Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, SAARC games, Islamic Solidarity Games, Beach Games, Winter Games). In year 2012–2013, Pakistan's overall sport budget allocation was Rs. 784.312 million (\$8.4 million) (MIPC 2013). In 2020–2021, it was reported to be Rs. 929.492 million (\$5.7 million) (MIPC 2021).

In terms of how the PSB money is spent, there was a consensus amongst the administrators interviewed for this study that the nation lacks an effective system to hold the NSFs accountable. According to one source, most of the money provided to them is misspent and allegedly shared with PSB officials in some cases in the form of cash, shopping and costly gifts (Saqib, Personal Communication, 7 June 2020). According to another, expenses are typically justified through a self-styled audit that is never rechecked by the PSB (Mahmood, Personal Communication, 7 June 2020). A senior sports administrator also noted how much money is spent annually on high performance training camps, where players are offered lucrative cash incentives to win medals at major events (Saqib, Personal Communication, 7 June 2020).

Pakistan's inability to host international sport events, for reasons discussed later in the article, has restricted several NSFs from securing sponsorship revenue. One interviewee noted how it was hard to collaborate with big businesses without the lure of an international mega sport event to showcase their brand (Baaqir, Personal Communication, 11 March 2021). The sponsorship funds secured for domestic hockey, for example, help cover the costs for that competition, but the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) is heavily reliant upon grants by the Federal and Provincial Government. On the contrary, Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) receives the majority of its funding from FIFA and AFC (Asian Football Confederation) and is therefore less dependent upon local or national government support. The PSB has funded some football events, but according to one source, there is not a significant amount of funding available at PSB for the development of football or any other sport (Kashif, Personal Communication, 28 February 2020).

As noted earlier, The National Olympic Committee of Pakistan (POA) claims to accept no funds from the Government of Pakistan, with the only exception being when teams are participating in an international competition (Muzamil, Personal communication, 26 February 2020). One of the administrators interviewed for this study acknowledge that, when it came to athletes seeking to qualify for an Olympic or Commonwealth Games, private sponsorship was either not considered or rarely offered. Furthermore, the revenue that is generated through sponsorship is barely sufficient to cover the athletes' travel costs, let alone their training programme (Harris, Personal communication, 26 February 2020).

As one may expect, given its popularity, cricket in Pakistan reflects a completely different picture in terms of funding by federal or provincial governments. In terms of media broadcast rights, for example, hosting cricket matches against India generates considerable revenues for the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Cricket is also the only sport in Pakistan that regularly contributes to the national economy through the payment of tax. As such, the PCB is not dependent upon government for funds, like many of the other codes. The PCB is, however, accountable to the government and subject to regular external audits. In terms of revenue generation, a senior administrator confirmed that the PCB is funded primarily by sponsorships and media rights income. In addition to that, as a member of the International Cricket Council (ICC), the PCB received funding over an eight-year periodic cycle linked to international tours and tournaments (Maajid, Personal Communication,

7 April 2020). According to another source, however, the ICC money was 'just sufficient' to keep domestic cricket moving forward, but 'not enough to invest in it'. In fact, prior to the launch of Pakistan Super League in 2016, the lack of high-profile home series in the last decade had left the PCB as 'on the verge of bankruptcy' (Sabir, Personal Communication, 13 February 2021).

The general consensus of the ten national sport administrators who agreed to be interviewed for this study was that sport in Pakistan had suffered significantly due to the 18th constitutional amendment. Many noted the difficulties of embedding the PSB initiatives into the provinces, which impacted sports at the central level due to limited powers of PSB, and without any reforms in national sports bodies (Dawn 2011, Safi 2020). According to an official of POA, the provinces have more budget now, but the sports facilities have not been transferred to provinces (Harris, Personal communication, 26 February 2020). However, the Minister for Interprovincial Coordination termed the unclear role of federal government in sports affairs, as the big flaw in the 18th amendment, an issue which justified the 2005 review of sports policy (Yaqoob 2020). The Minister also clarified that the revised sports policy will reflect the clearer role of federal government, provincial governments and sports federations so that sports development can occur more efficiently and effectively at all levels.

Discussion: sports & politics nexus in Pakistan

Politics in sports is often evident in the use of power by sports federations and international sporting bodies (Grix 2016). According to Grix (2016), sport politics is both the study of 'politics of sport' and 'politics in sport'. Sport is not only an efficient vehicle through which political aims are accomplished (Beacom 2000), but also a powerful agent in the imaging, re-imaging, and branding of destinations, including entire nations (Knott *et al.* 2016).

According to Pakistan's national Sport Policy and IOC charter, there should not be any political interference in sporting affairs (Abbasi 2020). According to one of the interviewees, the huge sports complex at Narowal was built to favour one of the politicians (Harris, Personal Communication, 26 February 2020). He complained that the location of the Narowal city and access to the sports facility were seriously hampered by the region's poor road network, while the local demography of the area makes it 'a bad choice for such an expenditure'. Moreover, he noted the area had 'good hostels for athletes', but 'not much for the spectators'.

Though the PSB and NSFs are apolitical, Pakistan is not unique when we discuss political influence in/over sporting codes. Khan and Khan (2013) point to a greater political pressure to appoint the chairperson of Pakistan Cricket Board and how this pressure inevitably affects team selection at both the domestic and international level. Similarly, football in Pakistan has been the victim of politics attached to two opposing factions within the national federation. In April 2021, FIFA banned the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) for the second time in four years (first in 2017) due to 'undue third-party interference' as PFF was taken over by a group headed by Syed Ashfaq Ahmed (The Guardian 2021). FIFA had already installed a normalisation committee in PFF, but the Supreme Court of Pakistan interfered and advised holding an election, and due to the results, Ashfaq Ahmed had the mandate to remain PFF's president until 2022. However, FIFA uplifted the suspension in mid-2022 (FIFA 2022).

Sport has the ability to heal sectarian rifts in every society, including Pakistan, and the same is being used for social integration in several countries as well, but this is not a practicing tool in Pakistan for the healing of social rifts in the country. According to Khan (2005), cricket can function as a 'Bridge of Peace' and 'an icebreaker'. Sports is a soft power tool, but when it comes to cricket, it plays more than that. Cricket is the one sport which totally cuts across the divides in class, religion, wealth, all of that people do not care. The sport is one of the few binding forces, one thing which actually brings people together in Pakistan.

Cricket diplomacy proved successful, as a confidence building measure in India–Pakistan relations in 1987, with the visit of a Pakistan head of state to India to watch a match (Shahid 2015). However,

political skirmishes and international politics also affect how countries compete in bi- or tri-lateral sports events or mega sports events. For example, India and Pakistan did not play cricket between 1961 and 1978 or between 1990 and 1999 due to political conflict (Bandyopadhyay 2013). Moreover, Pakistani athletes did not participate in Commonwealth games from 1974 to 1986 because of Martial Law in the country (Laar *et al.* 2021).

Conclusion: emerging challenges and debates

The socio-political tensions between India and Pakistan have certainly impacted the latter's national sport system in a major way of the past two decades, especially when it comes to cricket (Moolakkattu 2020). In May 2002, the New Zealand cricket team abandoned their Test series in Pakistan, following a suicide bomb attack outside their hotel in the city of Karachi. In 2009, terrorists attacked the Sri Lankan Cricket team, killing six of their police escorts and three civilians, and injuring seven members of the team (Davies 2022). The Sri Lankan cricket team were in Pakistan as a replacement for the Indian team, who withdrew in the aftermath of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks (which killed about 170 people in a series of terrorist attacks) (Brenkley 2009, Bandyopadhyay 2021). In September 2021, on the eve of their first match in Pakistan since 2002, the New Zealand team received a terrorist threat deemed credible enough to warrant another abandonment and an immediate departure (ICC 2021).

As noted in the funding section, the PCB have had to navigate the significant financial losses attached to its inability to host home international series (Test, One-Day-Internationals or Twenty-Twenty), estimated to be over \$200 million (Bandyopadhyay 2007, 2021, Abbasi 2013, Wigmore 2018, Labalette 2019). Furthermore, the cost of Pakistan's nation team having to travel overseas to play all of their international cricket fixtures is estimated to have cost the PCB somewhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000 USD (Maajid, Personal Communication, 7 April 2020). This is money that some officials, including politicians, have argued could/should/would have been spent on grassroots cricket, infrastructure development and the high-performance centres proposed as a part of the aforementioned 2021 Kamyab Jawan Sports Drive (Maajid, Personal Communication, 7 April 2020).

Elite sport, as Koski & Lämsä (2015, p.18) state is 'an engine of a sporting system', playing a significant role in cultural promotion, identity and success at international stage. Since the advent of modern Olympics in Athens 1896, national politicians and government-employed policymakers have used major events as an effective means to achieve state interests (Grix 2013). Events and those who participate within them offer politicians a medium to express ideas and convey messages to a wider audience (Grix 2013, Murray and Pigman 2014, Ushkovska and Petrushevska 2015, Connell 2018). Similarly, the history of international relations reveals that the use of international sporting events and competitions are used as a tool of public diplomacy (Goodhart and Chataway 1968). Examples include ping-pong diplomacy between China vs US in the early 1970s, Baseball Diplomacy between US and Cuba in the 1980s or, more recently, Football diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia in the 2000s, all of which reflect the use of sports to achieve soft power goals with the roots emanating from Nye's 'Cultural Resource' of soft power.

D'Amico (2012) suggests that sport governing bodies should seek resources from sectors other than government to ensure independence in decision-making. Use of sport, tourism and culture to project the country's soft image was an important element of foreign policy during General Pervez Musharraf's tenure as president of Pakistan (Musharraf 2006). Pakistan and India have both banked upon cricket diplomacy to initiate the reconciliation process on several occasions since 1987, with some proving more successful than others. Bandyopadhyay (2007) states 'cricket in twenty-first-century Pakistan provides a cultural space where all the dissents can converge for a Pakistani feat' (p.101).

Looking to the future, the unclear role of Pakistan's federal government in sports affairs, following the 18th constitutional amendment and devolution of power to provinces, is arguably the greatest stumbling block in Pakistan, preventing elite athletes and experienced

administrators from tasting sporting success at a national and international level. Due to past corruption, mismanagement, nepotism and indifference, sport in Pakistan has never been able to function cohesively or coherently. In fact, the evidence gathered for this study suggests that those operating within the Pakistan sport sector are frequently confronted with challenges in sport development, representation, funding and administration. At the same time, the Pakistan government has aspired to keep pace with the demands of the international sporting environment. This concluding section also aims to provide the recommendations derived from the analysis of the primary and secondary data shared in the previous sections.

In Pakistan, the establishment of a workable relationship between government and sport governing bodies is compromised by a lack of good governance and an unsustainable dependence upon government for funds. A lack of coordination and communication between sport governing bodies and the public sector was also evident. For example, the hockey stadiums, school grounds, parks, and community-based hockey grounds have all been badly damaged, if not entirely destroyed, by the consequences of corruption, especially in Lahore and Karachi (Harris, Personal Communication, 26 February 2020). To ensure the smooth development of domestic and international cricket, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has at least tried to improve the stadiums and to establish a high-performance training and research facility at Gaddafi Stadium Lahore, aiming to train the young talent and polishing elite cricketers (Bandyopadhyay 2007).

It is important for the government to implement the revised sports policy 2021 that clearly reflects the role of federal government, NSFs and provincial sports boards vis-à-vis sports. A smooth coordination between sport governing bodies would play a significant role in materialising the policy goals of the 2021 plan. In the past, the educational institutions had a special focus on sports, and dividends were being paid (Sharif 2021). The government needs to work on community, educational sports and grassroots sports as a first step in promotion of sports for its majority youth population. Educational institutions or sport governing bodies should work on giving incentives to the student athletes. It needs yearly-based forecasts of sports programmes to be conducted consistently under an organised body. It is equally important that the government offer support to those students who are exceptionally good in any one sport, so they may be able to pursue their dreams in that sport without worrying about the lack of funds. In instances where scholarships are provided by the government, they fall victim to corruption, which eradicates the meritocracy of the selection, causing genuine sportsmen to be deprived of their rights.

Pakistan's efforts and desire to host international events have a great symbolic resonance that needs reform, revision or formulation of a new sports policy serving the need of time. At the international level, however, there is a greater disparity between economically developed countries that have more government resources and investment in sports and developing countries that are merely the spectators in this medal race (Reiche 2017). Public-private partnership in sports sector, which is practiced in most countries, should be encouraged and embraced in Pakistan. Finally, the Pakistan Citizenship Act 1951 rule 41 Nationality of Competitors prohibits athletes of the Pakistani descent in the diaspora, holding other nationalities, for competing and representing Pakistan internationally (Akhtar 2017). This law needs a review to provide opportunity to non-citizen athletes to represent Pakistan.

In sum, Pakistan does not lack the policy for the promotion of sports, but the real challenge lies within its implementation. For example, the funding allocated to the nation's neglected sporting infrastructure needs to be revisited and revised accordingly. Moreover, a focus on grassroots, educational and community sport is much needed, and long overdue. With the right support, a comprehensive and pragmatic sports plan involving the community, educational institutions, departments, private enterprises, and sponsors could play a prominent role in rebuilding or repairing national pride. As such, the challenges and recommendations identified within this article offer some much-needed context and some previously lacking evidence for policymakers and sports officials to make informed choices about Pakistan's sporting future. It also offers a platform for future research.

An area that needs further exploration, for example, is the link between the policies created and the power/influence of these policies to achieve their goals.

Notes

1. The Government of Pakistan Ministry of Education and Scientific Research Ordinance no. XVI of 1962: An ordinance to regulate development and control of sports.
2. Funding in approximate US dollars is calculated according to the currency conversion rates (PKR- USD) in respective years.

Disclosure statement

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