

SPEECH OF DIRECTOR CBI & HEAD OF NATIONAL CENTRAL BUREAU (INTERPOL - INDIA) IN THE SPORTS WORKSHOP ON THE SUBJECT “TACKLING MATCH FIXING & CORRUPTION IN FOOTBALL”

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It is indeed a privilege for me to deliver the keynote address during this first ever National Workshop on Integrity in Sport organized by the INTERPOL and FIFA.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is something about sports that invokes a feeling of purity, fairness and integrity in everyone’s heart. In today’s world, when certain amount of permissiveness has crept into different aspects of life, there is one sphere of sports in which we want nothing less than absolute integrity, competitiveness and fair play. During those short moments, when a sportsman is in the arena, he is a symbol of pristine human endeavor testing his limits and attempting to breach the boundary that divides the human and superhuman. No wonder, sports cuts across barriers of race, religion and geography and attracts worldwide followers.

However, sports today is no longer a recreational activity pursued by millions of enthusiasts across the globe for physical fitness as well as personal fulfillment. It is now a multi-billion dollar global industry which attracts megabucks in corporate sponsorships, television rights, endorsement deals, prize money and salaries of players. Top players are superstars who command huge fan followings.

Such huge money at stake is bound to attract the criminals and racketeers. Over the last half century, the sporting world has developed links to the underworld. The operators of this underbelly work to ensure favourable outcomes through match fixing and other performance manipulations. This corruption in sports is financed and managed to a very large extent by the betting industry, both legal and illegal, with close links to worldwide organized crime syndicates. Regular exposé involving players and bookies have started to disillusion an average sports enthusiast and have instilled a sense of cynicism. Left unattended, the cancer of corruption has the potential to destroy sport itself.

In order to restore the faith of public in competitive sports and to reduce the currently prevailing trust-deficit, the sports administrators are stepping up efforts to tackle this global menace. I see today’s workshop as a major initiative in this direction.

Ladies and gentlemen, Football – which is lovingly called “the beautiful game” – is, without doubt, the biggest sport in the world. The FIFA currently has 209 countries as its members, which is larger than the number of members of

the United Nations. It is often said that the biggest religion in the world is Football. Simple rules, minimum requirement of infrastructure and just the right balance of physicality and artistry makes it the leisure of choice for millions and millions. TV channels dish out non-stop content of football programming in an attempt to meet and cash in on the insatiable need for more and more football to its die-hard fans. While hundred years ago, 5 football players were transferred between clubs, today more than 10,000 players from 167 countries are transferred between clubs involving more than 2 billion euros.

With this expansion in football operations, the betting industry has also grown exponentially. The operations have mutated and evolved to become more and more accessible to the interested public. Online betting, in-play gambling, mobile gambling, social gaming etc. are new and still evolving forms of betting, which are proving very hard to track. The scale of operation is so large that a single game of 90 minutes between clubs like Liverpool and Chelsea can easily involve betting of nearly a billion euros.

Now, if we come to India, it is a well-known fact that ours is a cricket-crazy nation. But this is changing rapidly. Exposed to the live matches by top football clubs of Europe and South America, today's generation has become infatuated with football. More and more football clubs are coming up with corporate sponsorships and the matches between these clubs are being played to packed stands. India has also been chosen to host the 2017 Under-17 World Cup, where it pipped very strong rivals like Ireland, South Africa and Uzbekistan. This championship has created quite a buzz and with its related expansion in infrastructure, it is expected to further boost the following of the game in India. If the present trend continues, it is expected that, in the next decade or so, football may match cricket in popularity.

Ladies and gentlemen, in India, match fixing and other forms of sports frauds have so far been largely confined to cricket. It is now known to all law enforcement agencies that the illegal betting networks operate very smoothly and efficiently in the country with their tentacles spread even to small towns. The advancements in communication technology have facilitated this growth. However, from a law enforcement perspective, it will be a mistake to conclude that corruption in sports in India is limited to cricket alone. The extremely well-oiled betting and organized crime networks have to just change their focus from cricket to football and the entire football world will have a formidable adversary to deal with. The recently arrested persons in Singapore like Kurusamy, Perumal and Santia Raj who were found guilty of match fixing are all of Indian origin. It wouldn't take these networks long to start similar operations in India. In addition, studies have suggested that with increase in disposable income, the nucleus of betting world has shifted to Asia and the Middle-East. Thus, law enforcement professionals in India have to focus on the architecture of

corruption and see sports corruption in a generic context with capacity to affect any sport.

Ladies and Gentlemen, another law enforcement aspect relevant to India is the absence of a dedicated law to criminalize acts of match-fixing and other corrupt practices in sports. This makes it very difficult for law enforcement agencies to take effective legal action against the perpetrators of these crimes. However, our concern of rising incidents of corruption in sports without a dedicated piece of legislation to combat it, is also shared by the Government of India. The Department of Sports is already working on a bill to criminalize sporting frauds which is in last stages of drafting. Once this bill is enacted as a law, it shall provide the much needed teeth to various agencies to take stringent action which would also stand legal scrutiny.

Today's workshop, in my opinion could not have been better timed for India. The menace of match fixing and corruption in sports, can only be tackled through coordinated and concerted efforts by all the stakeholders.

Just as Interpol was the right body for FIFA to partner with, the CBI can play the ideal role as nodal agency for this initiative in India. In the year 2000, the CBI took the lead to probe match-fixing in cricket and based on its findings, five top players were banned for life by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. The CBI is the premier investigative agency of the country and is well known for its professionalism and investigative capacity. The CBI is also the point of contact for INTERPOL in India as the National Central Bureau. It has a pan-India presence and is already coordinating with all state police forces on several other issues as the nodal agency.

We, in the CBI, have taken due notice of the growing menace of corruption in sports in general and the challenges of the same in football and other sports in future. It was with this concern that we organized a special session on "Integrity in Sports & Role of CBI" on 12th of November, 2013 as a part of an International Conference. The session was attended by leading experts and was a great success. In the last two months we have been engaged in doing the necessary groundwork for setting up a dedicated Sports Integrity Unit. Today from this platform I would like to announce that very soon, we shall set up a Sports Fraud Investigation Unit in CBI under one of the Special Crimes branches. This unit shall aim at acting as the repository of intelligence and data related to corruption in sports. It shall coordinate with other law enforcement agencies of the world and act as the nodal agency to coordinate between state police forces. It shall also be our endeavor to liaise and coordinate with sports federations to build capabilities to tackle match fixing and other corrupt practices. It shall also try to work closely with the Department of Sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, to help frame policies that would build

deterrence in the system. With passage of time, as our capabilities are built up, we also intend to act as resource persons and help other agencies in their training and education.

Dear Friends, today marks the beginning of an initiative in India to preserve the Beautiful Game. It is now up to each and everyone of us who are stakeholders in one way or the other to make the most of this workshop. I urge you all to forge new relationships here and ensure that this two-day interaction develops and blossoms into a potent and powerful partnership in days to come. We should attempt to build systems which function and which ensure that the objectives of the initiative are met regardless of the individuals in-charge.

I once again thank the FIFA – INTERPOL Initiative and all the office holders for inviting me to this extremely topical and well-timed workshop. I am sure that the successes achieved by this Initiative in Europe and other continents will be replicated in India also. The CBI, as I had said earlier, is committed to the cause and shall never be found wanting in playing its due role. Here, I would like to make special mention of Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran, Regional Development Officer of FIFA and the officers of the All India Football Federation who had been extremely prompt in their responses and who have shown excellent organizational skills.

I wish the Workshop all the success.

Thank you.
