ASIAN
FOOTBALL
CONFEDERATION

INFORMATIVE NOTE ON THIRD-PARTY INTERFERENCE IN FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS

2024



INFORMATIVE NOTE ON THIRD-PARTY INTERFERENCE IN FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS

2024

CONTENTS

AFC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 7

AFC ASSOCIATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE 9

AFC GENERAL SECRETARY'S MESSAGE 11

INTRODUCTION 12

WHO ARE WE? 13

HOW FOOTBALL IS ORGANISED: THE FOOTBALL PYRAMID 14

THE AFC MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS AND RECOGNISED REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS 16

MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS' OBLIGATIONS 17

RELATIONS BETWEEN MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT 18

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL INTERFERENCE 18

COMMON REASONS FOR AND EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE 20

RISK AND CONSEQUENCES OF INTERFERENCE 21

NORMALISATION COMMITTEE 22

CONSTITUTION OF A NORMALISATION COMMITTEE 23

SUSPENSION 24

CONCLUSION 25



AFC President's Message

Over the years, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has benefited from a level of solidarity and unity that has been admired around the football community – especially having delivered such spectacular benefits for the game in Asia.

As we have reiterated, the AFC is only as strong as its Members and our commitment to improve the foundations of good governance for our Member Associations and Regional Associations has never been stronger than in recent years.

The AFC's Vision and Mission has underlined our objective of becoming a model Confederation and ensuring our Member Associations and Regional Associations uphold the highest standards of governance is essential in achieving our ambitions.

To bring this to life, we have a collective responsibility to guarantee that all Member Associations and Regional Associations are free to exercise their rights for the good of the game.

In football, the rules and regulations must be respected and the decisions we take must always be in the best interests of our players our passionate fans and our standing in the game.

The AFC's investment in football and its Member Associations and Regional Associations has allowed the Asian football family to make a positive impact and build an admired portrait and reputation over the last six years.

Underpinned by the values of transparency, professionalism and integrity, the AFC's governance has been overhauled and today, we are proud to be a leader among Confederations.

We must continue to stand together against third-party interference and defend the principles of autonomy. This Informative Note on Third-Party Interference reinforces our position that we cannot allow anyone to destroy what we have worked so hard to build together.

With the continued spirit of unity and the unwavering commitment of our Member Associations and Regional Associations, I am confident that we will continue to be at the forefront of good governance, which will pave the way for even greater growth and progress in the coming years.

Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



AFC ASSOCIATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

Asia is a vast Continent with diverse cultures and each nation consisting of its unique and distinct system of governance and socio-political landscape.

As part of the global football family under the membership of FIFA and the AFC, Member Associations have an obligation to follow the principles of good governance regardless of their system of governance in their respective countries.

Conceptualised by the Associations Task Force, the AFC established a dedicated team of advisors to tackle the challenges brought about by third-party interferences before the AFC Associations Committee was formed in August 2017.

Since the very beginning, the Committee has been addressing several cases involving third-party interference as well as suspensions and induction of the Normalisation Committee in our Member Associations.

One of the key findings from the process was that the entities responsible for most of the interference were not part of the football pyramid but from a third-party.

We acknowledge the importance and value of third-party entities to a certain extent, particularly the role of Governments in the development of the game, but they should be discouraged from interfering in the internal affairs of the Member Associations and Regional Associations.

The Associations Committee has a responsibility not only to uphold our principles of unity between the AFC and its Member Associations and Regional Associations but also to ensure their adherence to their respective Statutes and the AFC Statutes.

Therefore, it is imperative that we establish a user-friendly document which clearly spells out the AFC's zero-tolerance policy on third-party intervention.

For the stakeholders who are reading this Informative Notes on Third-Party Interference, I would like to emphasise that football is possible only with the support of its different stakeholders. We welcome and appreciate support from several entities including the Government, but we also should avoid interference at all costs.

The principles of Good Governance outlined in the AFC Statutes, and other rules and regulations, serve as checks and balances to ensure its Member Associations and Regional Associations are transparent and adopting financial and administrative best practices.

Member Associations comprise elected members who have been given the mandate to govern through the principles of representative democracy, ideally with a fair representation of all stakeholders within the football community.

Therefore, it is vital that they are given the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights, to engage the various football stakeholder groups and to focus purely on the development of the game.

Hachem Haidar
Chairperson
AFC Associations Committee



AFC GENERAL SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

There is no denying that success in football, at all levels, requires our Member Associations and Regional Associations, their respective Governments, and all stakeholders to cultivate strong partnerships and forge a collective sense of purpose.

In order to fulfil Asia's potential, we must ensure that our Member Associations and Regional Associations continue to be professionally run through good governance and receive the necessary support to develop to their full capacity.

Therefore, this Informative Note has been carefully prepared to provide greater clarity to our Member Associations and Regional Associations on their obligations and to educate and raise awareness to ensure that their Governments, and the relevant stakeholders are working hand-in-hand to achieve common outcomes for football in their countries to flourish.

This document is also a guideline for those stakeholders who are key players in the development of the game but are not directly associated with the Member Associations or Regional Associations.

We acknowledge that some issues are more complicated than others, and while we recognise that each Member Association or Regional Association is unique, we must act to protect the future of football.

As outlined in this report, the consequences of external interference in the affairs of Member Associations, often through no fault of their own, have led to some grave and damaging consequences not only in Asia, but across the world of football.

From the loss of commercial income, as well as funding from the AFC and FIFA to the loss of livelihoods and the suspension of major development projects and programmes, the detrimental impact on the growth of football is clear to see at all levels and in the worst cases, can take several years to rebuild.

We must work towards avoiding such scenarios at all costs and it is our hope that our Member Associations, Regional Associations and all parties concerned see the benefits of this informative note and continue to create a conducive and progressive environment for open dialogue and cooperation.

We may have different views and approaches, but our objective should always be to create a better game for future generations.

The AFC will always stand firm in support of our Member Associations and Regional Associations in the face of interference and intervention from their Governments and other third-parties.

Datuk Seri Windsor John
AFC General Secretary

INTRODUCTION

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is the international governing body of football and has 211 affiliated Member Associations. These Member Associations receive financial and logistic support from FIFA through its various programmes. As representatives of FIFA in their territories, the Member Associations are obliged to respect the FIFA Statutes and to promote and manage the sport of football in line with FIFA's objectives and ideals.

Over the years, FIFA and the AFC have faced a number of cases of third-party interference in football, which had impacts on the development of football in the relevant Member Associations.

Many of these cases are the result of a lack of understanding of the manner in which football is organised throughout the world and the obligations that the Member Associations must comply with, namely, to manage their affairs independently and without third-party influence.

This document will explain how football is organised (i.e. the pyramid structure of football), the relationship between the Member Associations and their Governments, and the possible consequences of third-party interference in the Member Association's affairs, with some examples from the AFC Member Associations.





WHO ARE WE?

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is an association registered under the laws of Malaysia with its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

The AFC is the governing body of football in Asia, comprising of 47 Member Associations. Five Regional Associations in Asia are also recognised by the AFC. The rights and obligations of each of the AFC's Member Associations and Regional Associations are set out in the AFC Statutes.

The objectives of the AFC include, inter alia, to improve the game of football constantly and to promote, regulate and control in Asia in the light of fair play and its unifying, educational, cultural and humanitarian values, particularly through youth and development programmes.

In addition, pursuant to the AFC Statutes, the role of the AFC is also to protect the interests of its Member Associations and Regional Associations, including but not limited to protecting them from third party influence in their affairs.

Safeguarding Member Associations is the top priority for the AFC as we believe that by having strong and independent Member Associations, the AFC will achieve its Vision and Mission.

This informative note has been produced specifically for stakeholders of the AFC's Member Associations and other entities which are very closely connected with football in the territory of an AFC Member Association (e.g. national, regional and local Government and Governmental agencies/authorities).



HOW FOOTBALL IS ORGANISED: THE FOOTBALL PYRAMID

FIFA and the AFC

As mentioned above, FIFA is the global governing body of football.

The AFC is the governing body of Asian football and one of the six Confederations recognised by FIFA. The AFC's ordinary members (46) are also Member Associations of FIFA. The AFC provides support to FIFA without encroaching on the rights of the Member Associations.

The FIFA Council is the strategic and oversight body of FIFA and is composed of 37 members: the FIFA President and 36 representatives of the six Confederations (including the AFC). The AFC is represented by seven members, including the AFC President, Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, who currently is the FIFA Senior Vice-President.

FIFA is an association of associations with a not-for-profit purpose that distributes significant funds to all its 211 Member Associations across the globe (directly and/or partially through Regional Associations and Confederations) in the pursuit of its statutory objectives, which include developing the game of football around the world, organising its own international competitions (including the FIFA World Cup), and drawing up regulations for Association football and ensuring their enforcement.



One of the main statutory objectives of the AFC is to control all types of football in Asia and to ensure compliance with - and prevent infringements of - the Statutes, Codes, Rules, Regulations, Standing Orders, Directives and Decisions of FIFA and the AFC, as well as the Laws of the Game.

The AFC interacts with FIFA in many areas of common interest, such as football development, the implementation of the principles of good governance in the Member Associations, and the organisation of football competitions (such as the Joint Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup and the AFC Asian Cup).

Like FIFA, the AFC is also an association of associations and non-profit making in nature. The income generated by the AFC is redistributed to the Member Associations (and partly to the Regional Associations), primarily for football development purposes.

It is noted that, pursuant to the AFC Statutes, the AFC shall provide the necessary institutional means to resolve any dispute that arises between its Member Associations and/or their affiliated Clubs, Officials and/or Players on the territory of the AFC. The AFC shall help promote friendly relations between its Member Associations and their affiliated Clubs, Officials and Players, and in society for humanitarian objectives. Every person and organisation involved in the game of football in Asia is obliged to observe the AFC Statutes, AFC Regulations and the principles of fair play, as well as the principles of loyalty, integrity and sportsmanship.

THE AFC MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS AND RECOGNISED REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The AFC has 47 members across Asia. The Member Associations meet at least once per year at the AFC Congress, which is the supreme and legislative body of the AFC, to decide on matters related to the AFC.

As mentioned above, the ordinary members of the AFC (46) are also members of FIFA and are the governing bodies of football in their respective territories.

A total of five Regional Associations are also recognised by the AFC pursuant to the AFC Statutes. These Regional Associations are formed based on the AFC's five geographic Zones.

WEST	SOUTH	CENTRAL	ASEAN	EAST
Bahrain	Bangladesh	Afghanistan	Australia	China PR
Iraq	Bhutan	IR Iran	Brunei Darussalam	Chinese Taipei
Jordan	India	Kyrgyz Republic	Cambodia	DPR Korea
Kuwait	Maldives	Tajikistan	Indonesia	Guam
Lebanon	Nepal	Turkmenistan	Laos	Hong Kong, China
Oman	Pakistan	Uzbekistan	Malaysia	Japan
Palestine	Sri Lanka		Myanmar	Korea Republic
Qatar			Philippines	Macau, China
Saudi Arabia			Singapore	Mongolia
Syria			Thailand	Northern Mariana Islands
UAE			Timor-Leste	
Yemen			Vietnam	
12	7	6	12	10

TOTAL: 47 Member Associations

Regional Associations representing five geographical Zones:

ASIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

CAFA

EAST ASIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION EAFF

SAFF™

WAFF
إتحاد غرب آسيا لكرة القدم
WEST ASIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS' OBLIGATIONS

The rights and obligations of the Member Associations are set out in the AFC Statutes and FIFA Statutes. An important obligation of being a member of FIFA and the AFC is that a Member Association must manage its affairs independently and without undue influence from third parties. Each Member Association has an obligation to implement this principle in their respective statutes in order to be aligned with FIFA and the AFC.

In this context, the executive body of each Member Association shall be duly elected by its congress. FIFA and the AFC do not recognise any body of a Member Association if the body has not been elected at the Member Association's congress (even on an interim basis), except if the executive body is established as a Normalisation Committee by FIFA in consultation with the AFC. More details on Normalisation Committees are set out on a later page of this document.

The statutes of the Member Association shall also ensure a democratic election procedure that guarantees a transparent and fair election. FIFA and the AFC representatives attend and monitor the electoral processes at the Member Associations' congresses to ensure that the elections are held in a transparent and democratic manner as per the statutory provisions.

The following important obligations of each Member Association relating to the management of its affairs are set out in the AFC Statutes:

- To comply fully with the Statutes, Codes, Rules and Regulations, Directives and Decisions of FIFA and the AFC, and to ensure that these are also respected by its own members, clubs, officials and players.
- To ensure the election of its decision-making bodies.
- To convene its supreme and legislative body (usually a congress) at regular intervals and to ratify statutes that accord with the requirements of FIFA and the AFC Statutes.
- To manage its affairs independently without influence from any third parties, even if such third-party influence was not the fault of the Member Association concerned.



RELATIONS BETWEEN MEMBER ASSOCIATION AND THE GOVERNMENT

The role of Governments:

It is an undeniable fact that football in a Member Association cannot prosper without the necessary support of the territory's respective Government. The Member Associations are often connected to the various arms of Government (legislative, executive and judicial) in one way or another.

The AFC comprehends that for the Member Associations to host international competitions/events to the high standards imposed by FIFA and/or the AFC, collaboration between Member Association(s) and the respective Government(s) is paramount.

This is especially true when, as in many territories, key football facilities and infrastructures are owned by the respective Governments, and not the Member Associations themselves.

For the avoidance of doubt, the AFC is not against Governments assisting the Member Associations and Regional Associations, nor are we encouraging the Member Associations and Regional Associations to stand in opposition to their respective Governments.

On the contrary, the AFC encourages its 47 Member Associations and five Regional Associations to collaborate and work hand-in-hand with the respective Governments, in order to establish a meaningful and trustworthy working relationship.

In the AFC's experience, good relationships between the Member Associations and their Governments can yield a positive and productive outcome. Therefore, the important role of a Government in supplementing the role of FIFA and the AFC in the development of the game, cannot be overemphasised.

It is important to take note that interference may not only come from the political sphere but also from other entities, such as organised crime (e.g. match-fixing and manipulation), commercial entities (e.g. in marketing and financial matters) and sporting bodies (like the National Olympic Committees).

GOVERNMENT / POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

One of the mission statements of the AFC is to implement good governance and professional administrative standards within the AFC.

The Member Associations and Regional Associations, as well as all the stakeholders involved in Association football in Asia, play an important role in achieving this aim.

Member Associations and Regional Associations are legally recognised and registered entities in their jurisdiction and must therefore comply with the local laws applicable within their respective countries as long as the applicable local laws are not in contradiction with the principles of good governance and the FIFA and the AFC Statutes.

FIFA, at the global level, and the AFC, at the continental level, have the mandate to control all aspects of Association football. This mandate is then delegated to their Member Associations who are accordingly then responsible to control and manage all aspects of Association football at the national level.

Controlling and managing Association football includes regulating and developing football in the respective territory.

Good governance principles are applicable in football administration throughout the football pyramid, amongst FIFA and the AFC, as well as the Member Associations, the Regional Associations and their respective members.

The AFC Statutes provide as follows:

Article 15 - STATUS AND RECOGNITION OF MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

1. The executive body of a Member Association shall be elected by the Congress, even on an interim basis, within the Member Association. The statutes of a Member Association shall provide for a democratic election procedure that guarantees the complete independence of the election.

2. The AFC shall not recognise the executive body of a Member Association, even on an interim basis, if it has not been elected in accordance with Article 15.1, except if the executive body is established as a Normalisation Committee.

3. Only decisions passed by bodies that have been constituted in accordance with Article 15.1 and 15.2 may be recognised by the AFC.

4. Member Associations shall manage their affairs independently and without undue influence from third parties."

Article 16 - STATUS OF CLUBS, LEAGUES, DOMESTIC ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER GROUPS OF STAKEHOLDERS AFFILIATED TO A MEMBER ASSOCIATION

1. Clubs, Leagues, Domestic Associations or any other stakeholder groups affiliated to a Member Association shall be subordinate to and recognised by that Member Association. The Member Association statutes shall define the scope of authority and the rights and duties of these Clubs and groups. Their statutes and regulations must be approved by the Member Association.

2. Every Member Association shall ensure that its affiliated Clubs and groups take all decisions on any matters regarding their membership independently of any external body. This obligation applies regardless of their corporate structure."

In light of the above, when a Government fails to adhere to the independence principle and seeks to gain control or interfere in the affairs of a Member Association (for example, by appointing or seeking to appoint its preferred members to the executive body of a Member Association), the relevant Member Association would no longer be able to manage its affairs independently and without undue influence. This may lead to severe consequences, which are set out in more detail below.

COMMON REASONS FOR AND EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE

- Football is an extremely popular sport worldwide and the success of a country's national team carries much importance for the Government and/or political parties, as the success of the national team may be used to boost their political influence and/or individual careers. Therefore, the Governments and/or political parties tend to keep a close watch on the Member Associations which often leads to unnecessary interference.

- There are various reasons for the Government's interference in football. The most common case is when a Government perceives that the executive body of the Member Association is not performing well enough and decides to take action against the democratically elected executive body members, by removing and replacing them with its 'own' people through appointment.

- When the national team does not perform well in competitions and the results are not favourable, the Government may interfere and appoint, or seek to appoint, someone else in-charge of the Member Association.

- Some Governments may want to organise their own competitions outside of the football pyramid. It must be remembered that all matters and entities under the jurisdiction/purview of a Member Association are considered as being part of the football pyramid. Accordingly, Governments cannot simply organise their own football competitions.

- In other instances, the political affiliations of the democratically elected President of the Member Association may lie with the opposition party to the ruling Government. This may trigger the ruling party to remove the Member Association's President and replace him/her with their favoured candidate without following the democratic process prescribed by FIFA and the AFC.

- Governments may revise the country's laws in order to take control over all sporting organisations, including football, and this would also be considered as interference.

- Aggrieved parties often resort to judicial action in the local courts, which goes against the statutory principles set out in the AFC Statutes.

- In some countries, the relevant Governments have departmental clubs which are competing in the leagues. These clubs are controlled and significantly influenced by the Governments, and in some instances, the Governments may appear to be favouring their clubs in their decision-making process.

Article 65 (1) of the AFC Statutes provides that:
"Member Associations shall insert a clause in their Statutes or regulations stipulating that it is prohibited to take disputes within the Member Association or dispute affecting Leagues, Clubs, Member of Clubs, Players, Officials and other Member Association Officials to ordinary court of law, unless, FIFA regulations, AFC regulations or binding legal provisions specially provide for or stipulate recourse to ordinary courts of law."

Such disputes shall be decided by the competent football/adjudicatory bodies in accordance with the applicable regulations.

- Governments may intervene in the respective Member Association's affairs to exert pressure and to influence the electoral process of the members of the executive body at FIFA or the AFC, or in the decision-making process for determining the host country of a particular football tournament, such as the FIFA World Cup or the AFC Asian Cup.

- Governments may sometimes take action against the respective Member Association when the Member Association is not within its "control" (for example, if it does not follow the Government's instructions or does not share the same position/opinion as the Government). These situations may lead to the members of the Member Association's executive bodies or the General Secretary being forced to resign from their respective positions.

- A Government may subtly influence a Member Association by interfering in the decision-making process of the Member Association's independent judicial bodies, for example, by applying pressure to pass verdicts which are in line with the Government's interests.

RISK AND CONSEQUENCES OF INTERFERENCE

Both FIFA and the AFC have a zero-tolerance policy on third-party interference in football. FIFA and the AFC act together when it comes to protecting their Member Associations and combatting external (Government) interference in the Member Associations, always with the declared aim of preserving the integrity and autonomy of football.

Since such external interference can – and often does – ultimately lead to the suspension of the Member Association, even if the Member Association is not at fault, FIFA and the AFC are constantly working together by analysing these situations carefully before preparing a roadmap for a sustainable solution for the distressed Member Association.

The general approach of both FIFA and the AFC is to initiate a dialogue with the various stakeholders when a problem arises. If the issue centres around the enactment of laws, which are contrary to the Statutes of FIFA and the AFC, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is also engaged and included in the dialogue process.

FIFA and the AFC liaise with the Member Association and other stakeholders, and if necessary, with the respective Government, to understand and analyse the issues at stake. In some cases, many Governments are not aware of the principles of good governance applicable to organised football and the damaging consequences of a Government interfering in football administration.

In the event of Government interference, both FIFA and the AFC would initially propose to the stakeholders involved in the dispute to solve the issues through mediation. However, if the Government fails or refuses to refrain from interfering in the affairs of the Member Association then that Member Association risks being sanctioned by FIFA and the AFC. (This can lead to a suspension until such time as the Government interference is deemed to no longer exist).

Suspension of a Member Association results in a complete cessation of all development funds, a prohibition on sporting activities at the international level, and a prohibition on sporting contact with other Member Associations. The effects of suspension by FIFA and the AFC on a Member Association due to external (Government) interference are undoubtedly devastating and have a retrograde effect on football in the relevant territory.

When FIFA and the AFC are made aware of third-party / Government interference in a Member Association, both organisations would take the following steps:

- Assessment of the situation;
- Negotiation: meetings will be organised with different stakeholders (including the Government) to discuss the prevention of interference as well as the potentially damaging consequences to the Member Association if the interference persists;
- Appointment of a Normalisation Committee or suspension: If the situation does not improve, there are two options – induction of a Normalisation Committee or the suspension of the Member Association.

NORMALISATION COMMITTEE

The FIFA Statutes and Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes give FIFA the power to induct a Normalisation Committee anytime they deem necessary.

Such power is used when FIFA, after consultation with the relevant Confederation, concludes that the existing executive body of a Member Association cannot cope with the crisis they face.

Pursuant to Article 3.1 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes; "The objective of a normalisation committee is to support and assist a member association and to protect its rights and interest."

According to Article 8.2 of the FIFA Statutes; *"Executive bodies of member associations may, under exceptional circumstances, be removed from office by the Council in consultation with the relevant Confederation and replaced by a normalization committee for a specific period of time, as established in article 3 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes."*

The exceptional circumstances referred to include, for instance, the Member Association's failure to manage its affairs independently and its failure to ensure that its affairs are not influenced by any third parties.

The Member Association in question may argue that the third-party interference is beyond its control. However, the Member Association will still be held responsible, as provided clearly in Articles 14.1 (i) and 14.3 of the FIFA Statutes, as follows:

"14.1. Member associations have the following obligations:
i) to manage their affairs independently and ensure that their own affairs are not influenced by any third parties in accordance with art. 19 of these Statutes;

14.3. Violations of par. 1 i) may also lead to sanctions, even if the third-party influence was not the fault of the member association concerned. Each member association is responsible towards FIFA for any and all acts of the members of their bodies caused by the gross negligence or wilful misconduct of such members."

In most cases, the appointment of a Normalisation Committee solves the issue of Government interference in a Member Association.

However, in more serious cases, if FIFA considers that a Normalisation Committee alone cannot restore the independence of the Member Association, FIFA may decide, in consultation with the relevant Confederation, to suspend a Member Association if it is unable to demonstrate its ability to comply with the requisite principles of good governance.

In recent years, FIFA has relied on the appointment of Normalisation Committees in many Member Associations including AFC Member Associations such as Maldives, Thailand, Kuwait, Pakistan and Iraq to solve the issue of government interference.

CONSTITUTION OF A NORMALISATION COMMITTEE

Normalisation Committees are composed of an appropriate number of members identified jointly by FIFA and the AFC from the football stakeholders of the relevant Member Association.

Throughout the process of appointing the members of a Normalisation Committee, FIFA and the AFC shall remain impartial and independent. The members of a Normalisation Committee are decided based on their knowledge, experience, accountability and eagerness to serve as Normalisation Committee members.

The members can have different skill sets but a football administration background, legal and financial knowledge are expertise that are considered in the selection process. FIFA and the AFC retain the right to add or remove any member of a Normalisation Committee if it deems it necessary.

In accordance with the FIFA Governance Regulations, members of the Normalisation Committees are required to pass the FIFA Eligibility Test in order to assess their integrity to be a member of a Normalisation Committee. Such a test is conducted by the FIFA Review Committee.

The mandate of a Normalisation Committee and the duration of such mandate are set by the FIFA Council. Usually, the mandate is to hold transparent and fair elections following a democratic electoral process. In this respect, the Member Association's statutes may be required to be amended in order to comply with FIFA and the AFC Statutes, setting out the principles of good governance applicable to the electoral process. During elections, a Normalisation Committee acts as an Independent Electoral Committee in charge of conducting and monitoring the elections, with the support of FIFA and the AFC.

It is important to note that, since conducting elections of the new executive body members is the ultimate target of a Normalisation Committee, members of a Normalisation Committee are barred from running in any election that they conduct.

In addition, the existing executive body members must vacate their positions once a Normalisation Committee is inducted, as the Normalisation Committee takes over and acts as the executive body of the Member Association in question. The Member Association's administration must report to the Normalisation Committee on their activities, and the Normalisation Committee has the power to make decisions within its competence as set out by the FIFA Council.

The term of the Normalisation Committee varies on a case-by-case basis due to the specific nature of each situation and the tasks allocated by the FIFA Council to the relevant Normalisation Committee. In certain cases, if the statutes of a Member Association comply with the FIFA and the AFC Statutes, the Normalisation Committee can conduct elections within the stipulated time in the Statutes of its appointment. However, in other instances, where statutes have to be reviewed, amended and then ratified by the congress of a Member Association before any elections for a new executive body can be held, such process will take longer and can last several months.

The mandate of a Normalisation Committee can be extended by the Bureau of the FIFA Council.

SUSPENSION

In serious circumstances, a Member Association can be suspended by the FIFA Council and/or the AFC Executive Committee until the next FIFA or AFC Congress (as appropriate) where the suspension will either be confirmed or lifted.

Such a suspension will undoubtedly have a negative impact on football in general in a Member Association. A suspension affects the football development of the Member Association in question and it takes a significant amount of time to recover.

Articles 16(1) and 16(3) of the FIFA Statutes, which mirrors Article 11 of the AFC Statutes, states the following with respect to the suspension of a Member Association:

"16.1. The Congress may suspend a member association solely at the request of the Council. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Council may, without a vote of the Congress, temporarily suspend with immediate effect a member association that seriously violates its obligations. A suspension approved by the Council shall be in effect until the next Congress, unless the Council has revoked such suspension prior to such Congress.

16.3. A suspended member association may not exercise any of its membership rights. Other member associations may not entertain sporting contact with a suspended member association. The Disciplinary Committee may impose further sanctions."

If a Normalisation Committee is appointed, day-to-day football activities, both on and off the field, may continue. However, if a suspension is pronounced against a Member Association, it puts that Member Association in a standstill state.

A Member Association loses its membership rights, both at FIFA and the AFC, and at the Regional Association levels during the suspension period. All its national teams (men's and women's senior and youth teams) are prohibited from having sporting contact with other Member Associations (which includes participating in FIFA and the AFC competitions). The suspension also prohibits a Member Association's members and officials from benefiting from any FIFA and the AFC development programmes, courses and training during the period of the suspension.

In Asia, during the past few years, many Member Associations have been suspended. However, when the conditions/requirements imposed by FIFA and the AFC were met, the suspensions were lifted accordingly.

For instance, a Member Association was suspended by FIFA on 30 May 2015 after its Government tried to influence an elected executive body by giving the National Olympic Committee the responsibility of handling the national football team.

The Government also decided to create a parallel league with its own club licensing regulations which resulted in the Member Association's licensed clubs not being able to participate in the new league.

FIFA suspended the Member Association and instructed that the elected executive body members be reinstated so that they could manage the affairs of the Member Association independently without any external interference.

Furthermore, FIFA instructed that the Member Association's club licensing system had to be followed and the management of the national football teams had to be returned to the Member Association. After a year, when the Government agreed to comply with all FIFA's conditions/ instructions, the suspension was lifted by FIFA.

Similarly, another Member Association was suspended by FIFA in October 2016 following Government interference through the approval of a new law which contradicts the autonomy and independence of sports associations in that particular jurisdiction, despite strong warnings from FIFA and the AFC against such action.

The consequence of the suspension in this case resulted in the Member Association being unable to participate in the 2018 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

The suspension was ultimately lifted in December 2017 when the relevant Government reversed its decision, and a Normalisation Committee was appointed in February 2018. By May 2018, the Member Association had elected a new leadership following free and independent elections which had been conducted by the Normalisation Committee.

CONCLUSION

Being the football governing bodies in their respective countries and territories, the Member Associations are the main entities in the football pyramid.

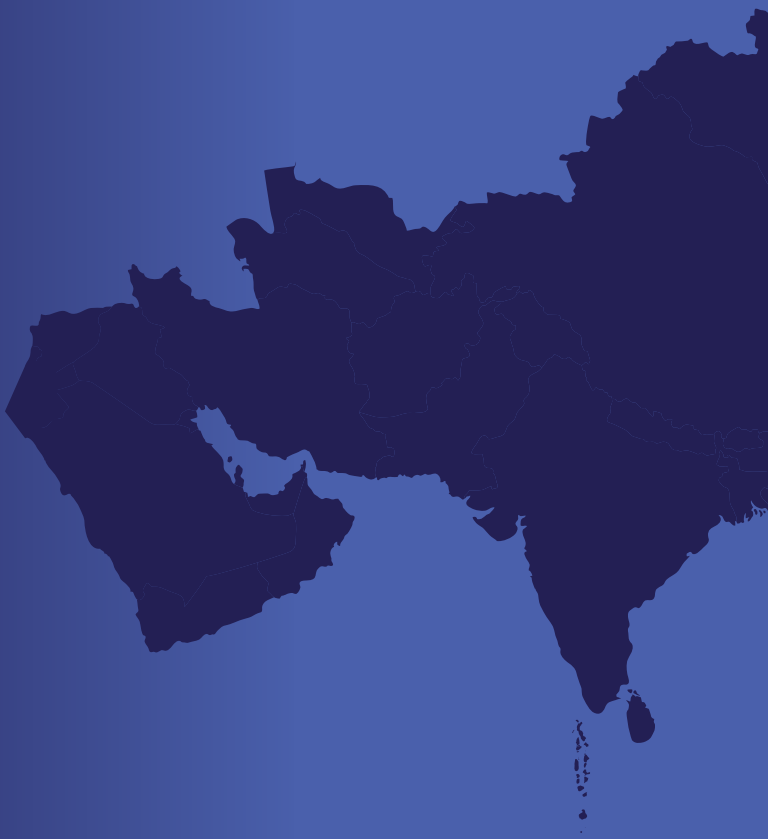
The Member Associations of FIFA and the AFC are obliged to comply with the Statutes, regulations, directives and decisions of FIFA and the AFC at all times.

The Member Associations must also comply with the principles of good governance, which require them, among other things, to be independent and to avoid any form of third-party interference.

Member Associations may face sanctions even if the third-party influence is not their fault.

It is strongly recommended that all stakeholders in football in Asia act in accordance with the principles of good governance set out in the FIFA, AFC and Member Association's Statutes and do not interfere with the operations and activities of Member Associations.

In the event of any inquiry or request for support, please contact us at the following email address: **ma.division@the-afc.com.**







AFC House, Jalan 1/155B,
Bukit Jalil, 57000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
T: +603 8994 3388

the – AFC.com