



MESSAGE FROM THE AFC PRESIDENT



The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) approaches the second half of 2017 with a compelling mix of excitement and great confidence following our successful and acclaimed 27th AFC Congress in Bahrain in May.

As always, the second half of any season sees the finale of our club competitions with the AFC Champions League now at the quarter final stage and the AFC Cup – with its new format – about to decide the West Champions and winners from the Inter-Zone Play-offs.

We must congratulate our first three Zonal Champions confirmed so far in the AFC Cup – Central Champions FC Istiklol from Tajikistan, Bengaluru FC from India in the South Zone and DPR Korea's 4.25 SC who won the East Zone. The West and ASEAN Champions will be crowned when the AFC Cup resumes in August.

But in addition, this year there is huge interest as the FIFA World Cup 2018 Asian Qualifiers Final Round comes to an end. We must congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran who have already clinched their place in Russia with two matches to spare.



For so many other Asian nations, the dream of competing on the world's greatest footballing stage is still alive after some extremely competitive and enthralling games. I wish everyone chasing the remaining places the very best of luck.

And at the same time 24 teams have begun their journey to secure the remaining 12 places at the AFC Asian Cup 2019 in the United Arab Emirates. Again, we have seen some engaging and exciting matches.

We are also working closely with the Local Organising Committee in the UAE to ensure, as prescribed by our Vision and Mission, that the competition is of the highest calibre and provides not only the perfect stage for the players but also captivates hundreds of millions of fans across the Continent.

Returning briefly to our club competitions, we have witnessed some history this year. Firstly, in the AFC Champions League we saw Chan Yuen-ting become the first-ever female coach to lead a men's side into a continental competition when her team took on Guangzhou Evergrande, the 2015 champions. No one will ever forget those wonderful pictures of Yuen-ting with Felipe Scolari.

And then in the AFC Cup, continental football returned to Iraq with the West Zone semi-final match being played in Erbil. We thank the Iraqi Football Association in its determination to make such a game possible and now we hope this leads to further matches, where security allows, in Iraq in the future.



As always there have been challenges, whether they are political, ethical or disciplinary. But I now believe that our pursuit of good governance and our adherence to integrity have provided the AFC with the confidence that it can tackle fairly and transparently any issue that arises.

And to achieve those aims it is important that we remain united and committed. I thank all our Member Associations for their support – particularly at the AFC 27th Ordinary Congress held in Bahrain in May.

It was an important Congress for many reasons, including the election of the additional representatives for the FIFA Council – and again I congratulate the successful candidates – Mahfuza Kiron (Bangladesh), Zhang Jian (China PR), Chung Mong-gyu (Korea Republic) and Mariano V. Araneta Jr. (Philippines).

But it is also important to recognise the spirit in which the election was held. As I said in the weeks before the election, it was important that everyone focussed on the bigger picture – unity and solidarity in Asia. I thank all the candidates who put time and effort into the election and were prepared to represent the interests of the Continent.

The solidarity that exists in the AFC has spread beyond our borders once more with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the DFB (German Football Association) and also with our sister Confederation – CONCACAF in Bahrain. The AFC now has MoUs with UEFA, CAF, OFC and CONCACAF as well as FIFA.



Also in Bahrain, we took another huge step by appointing the Independent Head of Integrity Mohammad Ali Al Kamali, from the UAE, who has already begun his work with great efficiency and enthusiasm.

To support this good governance, because of the political tension which exists in the West Zone at present, I have recused myself from any decisions affecting that area and asked the AFC Administration to consult our Senior Vice President Praful Patel on any issues pertaining to the region. I believe it is the right thing to do.

It is important that all the Member Associations – and their representatives – also uphold this principle of political neutrality – spelt out extremely clearly in our statutes – in all their activities. This principle is a cornerstone not only of the AFC but also all other international sporting bodies.

So as we enter July, this combination of exciting competition and good governance is the reason for our confidence and is also vital in the next phase of the AFC's development which involves the sale of the commercial rights from 2021 onwards. The AFC Executive Committee has already approved the process which will be fair, transparent and independently audited when it begins in the coming months.

With the enhanced competitions, supported by strong and developing Member Associations and underpinned by good governance, the AFC has the chance to secure its financial future for the next generation of players, officials and fans of our great game.

This is a unique opportunity for the AFC and one that I am sure it will seize under the banner of One Asia, One Goal.

Good luck to you all and Eid Mubarak.