

# Decision

of the

## FIFA Disciplinary Committee

Mr Anin Yeboah [GHA], Chairman;  
Mr Leonardo Stagg [ECU], Member;  
Ms Theresa Pitcairn [CAY], Member.

on 7 November 2019,

to discuss the case of:

Bahrain Football Association

(Decision 190737)

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*regarding:*

Incidents during the match played between the representative teams of Bahrain and Islamic Republic of Iran on 15 October 2019, in the context of the Preliminary Competition of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, Asian Zone

Arts.12. par. 5 and 16 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code (2019 Ed.)

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## I. Having noted that

1. On 15 October 2019, in the context of the Preliminary Competition of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, Asian Zone, a match was played in Riffa, Bahrain, between the representative teams of Bahrain and Islamic Republic of Iran.
2. In this context, according to the match officials' reports, the following incidents occurred:

### Report of the Referee:

*"Bahrain team delay[ed] [the] restart of the second half by 3 min"*

### Report of the Match Commissioner:

*"Due to the (...) unexpected crowd appearance, there are fans standing at the entrance/exit and aisle which is potential dangerous. The photo will be provided in email"<sup>1</sup>;*

*"The Bahrain team delayed to come out of [the] dressing room in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half which caused the match kick-off time delayed for 3 minutes";*

*"At the National Anthem protocol procedure, the fan[s] from Bahrain booed the national anthem of Islamic Republic of Iran. The video of the incident will be sent to FIFA by the MC"<sup>2</sup>.*

3. On 16 October 2019, disciplinary proceedings were opened against the Bahrain Football Association (hereinafter: *the Bahrain FA*) with respect to the potential breach of arts. 12 par. 5 and 16 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code (FDC). In particular, the Bahrain FA was provided with the aforementioned match reports (along with the relevant video and pictures provided by the Match Commissioner) and was given a six-days deadline to provide the Secretariat to the FIFA Disciplinary Committee (hereinafter: *the Secretariat*) with its position.
4. On 22 October 2019, the Bahrain FA provided its position which can be summarised as follows<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Pictures of said incident were provided to FIFA by the Match Commissioner.

<sup>2</sup> Videos of said incident were provided to FIFA by the Match Commissioner.

<sup>3</sup> The summary does not purport to include every single contention put forth by the Bahrain FA. However, the FIFA Disciplinary Committee has thoroughly considered in its discussion and deliberations any and all evidence and arguments submitted, even if no specific or detailed reference has been made to those arguments in the following outline of its position and in the ensuing discussion on the merits.

- i. With regard to the delayed kick off, the Bahrain FA explained that its *"national team's late exit out of the dressing room was the result of a request made by the assigned Security Officer"*. During the first half of the match, the latter *"had asked [the Bahrain FA's] Team Manager (...) in the presence of [the] Match Commissioner (...) and Local Coordinator (...) to delay the Bahraini national team's entrance onto the field for security related purposes"*. Said request *"was granted due to his capacity as a Security Officer with the trust that his decision was based on ensuring everyone's security and safety"* but *"[u]nfortunately, this has caused [the team] to have less time than the designated 15 minutes (...)"*.
- ii. In what concerns the booing during the national anthem, the Bahrain FA stated that it is committed to promote fairness, discipline and respect *"in all competitions and matches"* it takes part. As such, it *"regret[s] that such behaviour was not displayed during the Iranian National Anthem, an unacceptable incident for which [it] truly apologize[s] for"*. As a result, *"an investigation will be conducted to determine those responsible and appropriate punishments will be given to ensure that no such incidents shall take place again in the future"*.

## **II. and considered**

1. In assessing the case, the FIFA Disciplinary Committee (hereinafter also referred to as *the Committee*) decided to first assess its competence (A), before entering into the substance of the case, while analysing the possible violations committed (B) and the potential sanctions resulting therefrom (C).

### **A) Jurisdiction of the FIFA Disciplinary Committee**

2. First of all, the Committee noted that at no point during the present proceedings did the Bahrain FA challenge its jurisdiction nor the applicability of the FDC.
3. Notwithstanding the above and for the sake of good order, the Committee found it worthwhile to emphasise that, on the basis of arts. 2 and 53 of the FDC, it is competent to evaluate the present case and to impose sanctions in case of corresponding violations.

## **B) Analysis of the possible violations of the FDC**

4. The above having been established, the Committee then acknowledged that the present matter is related to the match played on 15 October 2019 between the representative teams of Bahrain and Islamic Republic of Iran in the context of the Preliminary Competition of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™.
5. The Committee subsequently turned its attention to the evidence at its disposal, namely the reports from the match officials as well as the videos and pictures provided by the Match Commissioner.
6. As a preliminary remark, the Committee wanted to recall that the facts contained in the match officials' reports and in any additional reports or correspondence submitted by the match officials are presumed to be accurate (art. 40 of the FDC). For the sake of good order, the Committee underlined that at no point did the Bahrain FA contest the information and facts reported by the match officials.
7. Against such background, the Committee acknowledged that several incidents were committed in the scope of the aforementioned match, and in particular:
  - a. The kick-off of the second half being delayed;
  - b. Fans standing "at the entrance/exit and aisle";
  - c. The national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran being "booed".
8. Having determined the above, the Committee decided to analyse each of these incidents separately and in the light of the applicable regulations.

### **a. The delayed kick-off**

9. First of all, the Committee acknowledged that, as reported by both the referee and the match commissioner, the kick off of the second half of the match was delayed for 3 minutes due to the fact that the representative team of Bahrain came out late of the dressing room.
10. In these circumstances, the Committee recalled that "*[i]f a national team (...) conducts itself improperly (...) disciplinary measures may also be taken against the association (...) concerned*" (art. 12 par. 5 of the FDC).
11. In the light of this, the Committee deemed that, in the light of the aforementioned article, causing the delay of a kick-off is *per se* an improper conduct for which disciplinary measures could be taken against the Bahrain FA.

12. With those considerations in mind, the Committee however noted that the Bahrain FA explained that its *"national team's late exit out of the dressing room was the result of a request made by the assigned Security Officer"*, as the latter *"had asked [the Bahrain FA's] Team Manager (...) (...) to delay the Bahraini national team's entrance onto the field for security related purposes"*.
13. Having said that, the Committee pointed out that the Bahrain FA *"shall carry the burden of proof"* of this alleged fact (cf. art. 36 par. 2 of the FDC), but that at no point during the present proceedings did the Bahrain FA substantiate its statement by any documentary evidence.
14. As a result, the Committee considered that it had no other choice but to conclude that the Bahrain FA has to be held liable for the misconduct of the members of its representative team in accordance with art. 12 par. 5 of the FDC for having caused the delay of the kick-off of the second half of the match.

***b. The fans standing "at the entrance/exit and aisle"***

15. The Committee subsequently observed that the match commissioner indicated that fans were standing *"at the entrance/exit and aisle"*, *"due to (...) unexpected crowd appearance"*.
16. In view of the foregoing, the Committee drew its attention to the pictures provided by the Match Commissioner and confirmed that, as a result of the fact that several fans were standing in different locations of the stadiums, some exit and stairways were blocked and/or not accessible.
17. Against such background, the Committee referred to art. 16 par. 1 of the FDC which establishes the host association's responsibility *"for order and security both in and around the stadium before, during and after matches"*.
18. With respect to the case at hand, the Committee noted that the match was played in Bahrain and that therefore the Bahrain FA was to be considered the host association. As a result, in line with the aforementioned developments, the latter was responsible to ensure the order and security surrounding the match at stake.
19. In continuation, the Committee underlined that, as such and in line with art. 16 par. 1 of the FDC, the Bahrain FA is to be held *"liable for incidents of any kind and may be subject to disciplinary measures and directives unless they can prove that they have*

*not been negligent in any way in the organisation of the match. In particular, associations (...) who organise matches shall:*

- a. assess the degree of risk posed by the match and notify the FIFA bodies of those that are especially high-risk;*
- b. comply with and implement existing safety rules (FIFA regulations, national laws, international agreements) and take every safety precaution demanded by the circumstances in and around the stadium before, during and after the match and if incidents occur;*
- c. ensure the safety of the match officials and the players and officials of the visiting team during their stay;*
- d. keep local authorities informed and collaborate with them actively and effectively;*
- e. ensure that law and order are maintained in and around the stadiums and that matches are organised properly".*

20. As a result, the Committee considered that, by having fans blocking the exit and stairways of the Stadium, the Bahrain FA failed to duly "*comply with and implement existing safety rules and take every safety precaution demanded by the circumstances (...) during and after the match*" at hand.

21. Consistently with the above, and particularly considering that the Bahrain FA did not demonstrate that it has not been negligent in organising the match, the Committee concluded that the Bahrain FA had to be held liable for the above-described incident.

### ***c. The booing of the national anthem***

22. Finally, the Committee noted that, according to the match commissioner, the national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran had been booed by the Bahraini fans.

23. The Committee also carefully watched the videos provided by the match commissioner, and emphasised that it could clearly and undoubtedly hear fans whistling and booing while the national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran was played.

24. In these circumstances, the Committee underlined that "*[a]ll associations and clubs are liable for inappropriate behaviour on the part of one or more of their supporters (...) and may be subject to disciplinary measures and directives even if they can prove the absence of any negligence in relation to the organisation of the match*" (art. 16 par. 2 of the FDC). In particular, "*causing a disturbance during national anthems*" is defined as an inappropriate behaviour in light of this article (lit. g).

25. Referring to the case at hand, the Committee was satisfied that the booing of the national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran is undoubtedly to be considered as a "*disturbance during national anthems*" and, as such, an inappropriate behaviour.
26. This having been established, the Committee noted that these booing were perpetrated by the fans from Bahrain. As a result, in line with art. 16 par. 2 of the FDC, the Bahrain FA is to be held liable for this inappropriate behaviour, and shall be found guilty of a breach of said article.

#### **d. Summary**

27. In view of the foregoing, the Committee concluded that the Bahrain FA is to be held liable for the incidents described above and, as such, violated the following provisions of the FDC:
- a. Art. 12 par. 5
  - b. Art. 16 pars. 1 and 2
28. Therefore, the Committee considered that the Bahrain FA had to be sanctioned for the aforementioned violations.

#### **C) Determination of the sanction**

29. As far as the sanctions applicable in this case are concerned, the Committee observed in the first place that Bahrain FA is a legal person, and as such can be subject to the sanctions described under art. 6 pars. 1 and 3 of the FDC.
30. For the sake of good order, the Committee underlined that it is responsible to determine the type and extent of the disciplinary measures to be imposed in accordance with the objective and subjective elements of the offence, taking into account both aggravating and mitigating circumstances (art. 24 par. 1 of the FDC).
31. In these circumstances, the Committee wanted to address two incidents in particular.
32. As a matter of fact, the Committee considered that blocking the stairways and/or exits of a stadium represents a serious threat to the safety and security of all persons present in the stadium, and, as such, cannot be tolerated by any means.
33. In continuation, and as far as the booing of the national is concerned, the Committee wanted to emphasise that it strongly condemns such conduct which it deems entirely

intolerable in light of FIFA's objective to promote the game globally in light of its unifying, educational, cultural and humanitarian values as stated in art. 2 of the FIFA Statutes. The non-respect of another nation's national anthem is a direct violation of these principles as well as of the relevant provisions of the FDC, which, once again, cannot be tolerated

34. Notwithstanding the above, the Committee also took note that the Bahrain FA had previously been already sanctioned in relation to kick-offs being delayed on two different occasions (Cases ref. 150397 and 160275).
35. Having said that, the Committee also acknowledged that the Bahrain FA expressed its regrets regarding the booing of the national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran, emphasising that it would investigate the matter so as to "*determine those responsible*" and sanction them accordingly in order "*to ensure that no such incidents shall take place again in the future*" .
36. Taking into account the relevant principles and conclusions set out above, the Committee considered that a fine would be the appropriate sanction in the case at hand.
37. As to the amount of the fine, according to the provisions of art. 6 par. 4 of the FDC, the Committee stressed that it may not be lower than CHF 300 and greater than CHF 1,000,000.
38. Taking into account all the circumstances of the case, while keeping in mind the deterrent effect that the sanction must have on the reprehensible behaviour, the Committee considers a fine of CHF 20,000 to be adequate and proportionate to the offence.
39. In addition, a warning is also issued on the Bahrain FA pursuant to art. 6 par. 1 lit. a) of the FDC. In particular, the latter is ordered to undertake all appropriate measures in order to guarantee that the FIFA regulations (in particular the FDC and all relevant safety and security provisions) are strictly complied with. Should such infringements occur again in the future, the Committee would be left with no other option than to impose harsher sanctions on the Bahrain FA.

**III. therefore decided**

1. The FIFA Disciplinary Committee found the Bahrain Football Association responsible for the infringement of the relevant provisions of the FIFA Disciplinary Code related to Misconduct of players and officials (Art. 12 par 5) and Order and security at matches (Art. 16).
2. The FIFA Disciplinary Committee orders the Bahrain Football Association to pay a fine to the amount of CHF 20,000.
3. In application of art. 6 par. 1 lit. a) of the FIFA Disciplinary Code, the Bahrain Football Association is warned on its future conduct.
4. The above-mentioned fine is to be paid within thirty (30) days of notification of the present decision.

FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE  
DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



Anin Yeboah  
Chairman of the FIFA Disciplinary Committee

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### **Note relating to the payment of the fine**

Payment can be made either in Swiss francs (CHF) to account no. 0230-325519.70J, UBS AG, Bahnhofstrasse 45, 8098 Zurich, SWIFT: UBSWCHZH80A, IBAN: CH85 0023 0230 3255 1970 J or in US dollars (USD) to account no. 0230-325519.71U, UBS AG, Bahnhofstrasse 45, 8098 Zurich, SWIFT: UBSWCHZH80A, IBAN: CH95 0023 0230 3255 1971 U, with reference to case number above mentioned.

### **Note relating to the terms of the decision**

This decision can be contested before the FIFA Appeal Committee (art. 57 of the FDC, 2019 edition). Any party intending to appeal must announce its intention to do so in writing within three (3) days of notification of the grounds of the decision. Reasons for the appeal must then be given in writing within a further time limit of five (5) days, commencing upon expiry of the first time limit of three (3) days (art. 56 par. 2 of the FDC, 2019 edition). The appeal fee of CHF 1,000 shall be transferred to the aforementioned bank account on the date of the expiry of the time limit of five days for submitting the reasons for appeal at the latest (art. 56 par. 6 of the FDC, 2019 edition).