

**Sport as a tool of politics:  
A study on Myanmar's Southeast Asian Games 2013**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Since a new semi-civilian government came to power in March 2011, Myanmar has embarked on sweeping reforms to end its isolation and integrate its economy with the international economy. As a signal of stimulating the economic stagnation, President Thein Sein's government revamped finance and investment laws to draw more foreign investment into the country and asked for financial and technical assistance from the international community at the same time. However, the image of a military-influenced civilian government has created administrative problems for Myanmar's policy of national re-unification and economic development. So Myanmar badly needed to improve its national image and legitimacy in order to reduce the obstacles to its regional and international political and economic objectives. As a diversely populated country, Myanmar leaders thought that projecting a positive national image will contribute to a higher level of national brand and uplift their political legitimacy. Therefore the government decided to host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games which may be vital for re-branding of Myanmar and so they prepared to formulate this idea since before the transfer of power from military government to a new semi-civilian government in 2011. The Games was a good opportunity for the former Myanmar military leaders to showcase their top-down democratization model. Eventually, with the honour of hosting the Games in December 2013 that returned to the country after 44 years, Myanmar successfully hosted the biggest regional sporting event as a promotion for the new Myanmar. Especially, Myanmar showed its kind hospitality throughout the Games while sport athletes uplifted the nation's image by earning the most medals for the first time since the competition began in 1959. Therefore, it can be said that hosting the SEA Games could revitalize the standard of Myanmar sports. After the Games, Myanmar people proudly say the words, "That's Myanmar". They have swallowed those words under an oppressive era for decades. The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the once-pariah state, Myanmar, used the 2013 SEA Games to present itself as a normal and friendly country and to achieve international recognition.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Sport has the power to change the world. The power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way little else can”<sup>1</sup>

Nelson Mandela

### Background information

A grand opening ceremony with a ten-minute display of fireworks presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games in Myanmar on December 11 2013, it could attract more attention than it normally would in most countries. It was because the Nay Pyi Taw SEA Games symbolized the end of a 23 year-long period of military rule in Myanmar. For Myanmar, the Games were more than just about a sport tournament. It was a moment for the once pariah state to prove to the world they could host such an international big event, expecting many good opportunities from both internal and external entities. While this moment had delivered a word to neighbours and the global community of its ongoing democratic reforms and political realities faced in its path to democracy, it also signalled that Myanmar was opening its doors for more foreign direct investments. The year of 2013 in Myanmar constituted a turning point in its participation and integration in the international community through projecting the image of a strong supporter for international events, such as the World Economic Forum on East Asia and the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games. These events could increase a platform to improve mutual understanding between Myanmar and other ASEAN members and the international community, thereby driving more positive changes in the country. This thesis analyses how the new civilian government led by President Thein Sein worked earnestly to uplift the country's image abroad as a host nation of the SEA Games, and tried to divert the Myanmar people's general dissatisfactions and focus on ongoing domestic conflicts and sensitive political problems by handling games issues.

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<sup>1</sup>David Miliband, *The power of sport: Sport and cohesion toolkit*, Scarman Memorial Lecture, Institute of Community Cohesion, UK, 2006, p. 1, <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=106&file=PDFversion>, accessed 23.1.2015

## **Significance of the thesis**

This thesis is based on the Southeast Asian Games – also known as the SEA Games – which is a biennial multi-sport event involving athletes from the 11 countries of Southeast Asia. Hosting the biggest regional sporting event can be seen as one of several methods used by Southeast Asian governments for image enhancement on a global stage. An examination of the political dynamics of the SEA Games may enrich our knowledge about image building strategies of Southeast Asian countries in contemporary international relations. The main objectives of the research are twofold. First, it is to identify and critically analyze the theoretical debate between sports and politics, tested with some international relations theories. Secondly, the thesis reviews the motives of the Myanmar's government behind hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games and investigates how it can be related to image building and nation branding strategies of the country. This thesis is a way for me to engage my interest in the social, political, and economic transformations and democratization process occurring in Myanmar today. Furthermore, it is expected that this research may make clear the increasingly important role of sport that links with a country's image, soft power, public diplomacy and nation branding in the field of international relations.

## **Purpose of the thesis**

The aim of this study is to show how sport can play a role in international relations and politics. As Gemmell states, sports are "subject to the extensive dynamics that shape our social and political environment".<sup>2</sup> It is now regarded as one of the most useful diplomatic means used by governments to achieve their political objectives.

There are three principal goals of this thesis:

- To demonstrate that the nature of sport is widely connected with that of politics
- To show that the 2013 Nay Pyi Taw SEA Games was an important element within the reform process and a significant tool that can strengthen the democratic transition taking place in Myanmar

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Gemmell, *The Politics of South African Cricket: Sport in Global Society*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 1

- To investigate how the once-pariah state used the Games to construct itself as a normal and friendly country and to achieve international recognition.

### **Research Questions**

To reach the goals of this thesis, which focuses on understanding the concept of sport and international politics, I have three main research questions.

- Why did Myanmar host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games?
- How did Myanmar host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games?
- How much has Myanmar changed because it hosted the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games?

### **Methodology**

The structure of the thesis is based on the qualitative approach. According to this type of approach, this study involves collecting information about the "why" and "how" of social events, processes and meanings happening in the world. The primary sources for the data collection and analysis of this project on the 2013 SEA Games in Myanmar are extremely rare in academic literature. Thus, for more information and documents, I went to Myanmar and conducted fieldwork research. This consisted of collecting necessary documents, periodicals, books, magazines and correspondence from the two main government ministries which organized Myanmar's SEA Games: Ministry of Sports and Ministry of Culture. The secondary sources for my research come from official report of SEA Games, articles about Olympic Games, academic journals and articles, downloaded from scholarly websites on the internet, and from many books on sport ideology and international relations from the library. Hopefully, by researching and analyzing all important data from these sources, this qualitative method can help to link my research questions and findings to understand this topic in depth.



## Theoretical framework

This thesis has to deal with a range of International Relations disciplines within the constructivist framework. The concepts that are going to be applied to fully support the relationship between sport and politics are soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and nation branding. Constructivism emphasizes the role of non-material factors like culture, meanings and norms, political values, ideas, and foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> Politicians recognise the power of sport and public diplomacy as useful tools in sending a message by a government to the world about its country. In a political context, sport cannot be seen as just a game, but as a medium of social interactions among citizens from different countries that can produce cooperation or conflict beyond the limited territories.<sup>4</sup> When the athletes can perform very well in sport tournaments, it becomes a source of pride<sup>5</sup> and dignity for the country they represent. Therefore, Cha stressed the important role of sport in national image building in his book *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*: "one cannot underestimate the extent to which sport becomes interwoven with a nation's view of itself"<sup>6</sup>. To Myanmar, without understanding the importance that reputation, nationalism, and prestige play in world politics, one cannot understand why a poor country like Myanmar spent multi million dollars to host a mega-sporting event like the SEA Games. Thus, it can be understood that sport can also serve as an asset of soft power for some countries. Cha adds this point as follows;

"Sport is not just a tool to express national identity or to convey an image of modernity; in some cases a positive reputation in sport can uplift a country's global status and position on the world stage. In this sense, strong performance in sport becomes a power asset."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Maysam Behraves, *Constructivism: An introduction* from E-International Relations website, 3.2.2011, <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/02/03/constructivism-an-introduction/>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>4</sup> Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, p. 31

<sup>5</sup>Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*, p. 31

<sup>6</sup>Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*, p. 31

<sup>7</sup>Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*, p. 47

According to Nye, "soft power is the ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants".<sup>8</sup> Soft power relies not on the threats and coercion of hard power, but instead provides a power of attraction. Generally, it aims to build power based on shared ideas which are commonly accepted by the international community to make one country's policies seem legitimate. The influence of international sporting events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup in the political sphere can be assumed as one aspect of soft power. It is because the nominated hosts for these events used them to change their policies and domestic affairs to an extent according to globally accepted norms such as democracy or human rights in the pre-games era under international media attention. In this way, the Myanmar government deployed the concept of soft power in its democratic transitional period by hosting the 2013 SEA Games, demonstrating to its people a sense that "we are like others". As Nye says, the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: culture, political values and foreign policies.<sup>9</sup> With the importance of public opinion in this information age, the essence of soft power has also dramatically changed over time. For example, public diplomacy<sup>10</sup> and cultural diplomacy<sup>11</sup> has come to be recognized as different forms of soft power and as powerful image-shaping tools for governments. Generally speaking, public diplomacy is a concept that covers various efforts to promote a country's image to a foreign audience by using resources of soft power.<sup>12</sup> Nye says that it tries to draw attention and understanding of foreign publics for its nation's culture, values and policies through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so on.<sup>13</sup> Cultural diplomacy is the way in which a state uses arts and culture to find common ground and maintain relationships with foreign states.<sup>14</sup> The newest concept derived from soft power is known as nation branding. Nation branding aims to measure, build and manage the reputation of

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Oxford University Press, UK, 2002, p.9

<sup>9</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, 2008, p.96, [http://www.jstor.org/helicon.vuw.ac.nz/stable/25097996?seq=3#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/helicon.vuw.ac.nz/stable/25097996?seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents), accessed 14.1.2015

<sup>10</sup> Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, p. 4 [http://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/soft\\_power/The\\_New\\_Public\\_Diplomacy.pdf](http://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/soft_power/The_New_Public_Diplomacy.pdf), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>11</sup> Hwajung Kim, *Cultural Diplomacy as the Means of Soft Power in an Information Age*, Culturaldiplomacy.org, 2011, p. 1 [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/pdf/case-studies/Hwajung\\_Kim\\_Cultural\\_Diplomacy\\_as\\_the\\_Means\\_of\\_Soft\\_Power\\_in\\_the\\_Information\\_Age.pdf](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/pdf/case-studies/Hwajung_Kim_Cultural_Diplomacy_as_the_Means_of_Soft_Power_in_the_Information_Age.pdf), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>12</sup> Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, p. 11-12

<sup>13</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, p.95

<sup>14</sup> Hwajung Kim, *Cultural Diplomacy as the Means of Soft Power in an Information Age*, p. 1

countries using the means of soft power such as public and cultural diplomacy.<sup>15</sup> Later in the thesis, these definitions highlight and analyse how hosting a sport mega-event becomes involved in the political agenda of Myanmar's new government and how it can be evidence of Myanmar's growing regional role.

## **Literature Review and contribution to the existing literature**

According to the research, sport is not a favourite choice for scholars of international relations and political science. Sport still does not get much attention compared to security studies and international political economy although sport and politics are interwoven in many ways. For example, as international sport and its global media coverage have both increased in volume, so the influence of sport in people's daily lives has also increased and consequently, in world politics as well. Likewise, major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the soccer World Cup, and the participating sports men and women, provide political interests with important resources because each of those athletes and their national teams represent their home countries. In one of the most referred-to academic publications on sport and international relations, *Sport and International Politics* edited by Barrie Houlihan, the editor highlights the major perspectives to accommodate the study of cultural phenomena such as sport in international politics.<sup>16</sup> The concepts and models associated with processes of globalization are linked with the network of international sports organizations such as the Olympic movement, the Commonwealth Games and business. In this book, the interpretation of governmental, business and sports interests is analysed in the light of globalization theory as applied to the experience of particular groups of states. Houlihan's chapter in *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship* illustrates how different political interests emerged out of cooperation between a variety of national and international governmental institutions and non-governmental sports organizations.<sup>17</sup> He also demonstrates the utility of applying insight in international sports from a range of IR perspectives, including neo-liberalism, realism and

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<sup>15</sup>Simon Anholt, *Beyond the Nation Brand: The Role of Image and Identity in International Relations*, The Journal of Public Diplomacy, Vol. 2 – Iss. 1, Art. 1, 2013, p. 1-3 <http://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=exchange>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>16</sup>Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1994

<sup>17</sup>It comes from Barrie Houlihan's chapter, "Building an international regime to combat doping in sport" in *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship* edited by Roger Levermore & Adrian Budd, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 62

constructivism, to the development in international sports of the emergent anti-doping regime.<sup>18</sup>

Grounding their study in transnational relations theory, Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes argue that sport and international relations can no longer be understood only in terms of traditional, realist theories of international politics.<sup>19</sup> Placing recent developments in sport in the context of broader trends in international politics, they offer observations and speculation about the future role of international sport and, in particular, of the International Olympic Committee in the new world of interdependence. In the book *The Politics of South Africa Cricket*, written by Jon Gemmell, the author analyses the relationship between politics and sport, in particular cricket, in South Africa. Sport in South Africa is certainly influenced by forces beyond the playing field, but politics too can be influenced by the social and economic force of sport. Focusing on the sports boycott as a political strategy, Jon Gemmell analyses the relationship between sport and politics through a historical analysis of South African cricket.<sup>20</sup> He employs case studies to demonstrate that the development of sport is inextricably linked with that of politics and to show that sporting policy in South Africa was an important element within the reform process, having constituted a group of measures purposely designed to prolong the existence of apartheid. One of the most famous books in the field of sports and political science is titled as *The Politics of Sport*. The author, Lincoln Allison, draws on academic expertise to examine the relationship between politics and sport and the main areas in which they touch each other. He claimed that it was the first book to draw on concepts developed in the study of politics and areas of special knowledge which academic political scientists process in order to offer a broad, analytic account of the politics of sport.<sup>21</sup> He sought to ensure that the politics of sport would be taken increasingly seriously. The book deals with the major themes which have emerged from discussions of sports and politics. These include the conventional politics of sport and the distribution of sporting resources. The prestige politics of sport, especially in Africa, among the Marxist-Leninist states, and in international relations are well-researched in this book.

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<sup>18</sup>Barrie Houlihan, "Building an international regime to combat doping in sport"2004, p. 62

<sup>19</sup>Donald Macintosh & Michael Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1994, p. 1-234

<sup>20</sup>Jon Gemmell, *The Politics of South Africa Cricket*, p. 1- 204

<sup>21</sup>Lincoln Allison, *The Politics of Sport*, Manchester University Press, UK, 1986, p.1-264

In the book named *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship*, edited by Roger Levermore and Adrian Budd, the authors debate the mutual impacts of sport and international society from within the IR academic discipline. The majority of theoretical perspectives follow closely the realist, and to a lesser extent the pluralist, treatments adopted by most publications and journal articles. However, some of the chapters have a more critical theoretical and post-structuralist stance. The authors say that it is not to argue that sport is central to the dynamics and operation of the international system in the same way as economic, political and military processes.<sup>22</sup> They also do not argue that the analysis of sport offers an especially privileged access point to the understanding of the international system. However they do confirm that sport does provide an access point, for it is an important part of that system, and, as such, it is shaped by it while simultaneously influencing it. In their chapters, Peter J. Beck and Aaron Beacom both explore British Olympic Games and diplomacy, but from different angles. Beck's argument analyses British Olympic Games policy and demonstrates how sport has been used in state diplomacy and as a tool for propaganda to enhance British prestige, despite governmental claims that sport and politics should not be mixed.<sup>23</sup> The British state politicized sport and established a framework used by all subsequent governments, whether Conservative or Labour. Beck recognizes the importance of non-state actors but his analysis is largely based on a traditional realist view.

On the other hand, Aaron Beacom highlights the limitations of state-centric realism and its tendency to see sport as a political tool of states. Beacom argues that even in the inter-war periods, inter-state diplomacy was complemented by the activities of non-state actors.<sup>24</sup> He further demonstrates that, more recently, individual athletes and national sporting associations have influenced British Olympic policy. Riordan and Kruger's 1999 publication *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century* provides an informative and detailed account of the popular arguments in the politics of sport. It examines global issues, starting with chapters on two of the twentieth century's major sports institutions: the Olympic Games and the International Football Federation.<sup>25</sup> It also looks at issues relating to specific populations and traces the struggles faced by

<sup>22</sup>Roger Levermore & Adrian Budd, *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship*

<sup>23</sup>Peter J. Beck, "The most effective means of communication in the modern world? : British sport and national prestige" in *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship*, p.77

<sup>24</sup> Aaron Beacom, "A changing discourse? British diplomacy and the Olympic movement" in *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship*, p.93

<sup>25</sup>Riordan and Kruger, *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge, New York, 1999

these populations in relation to the ruling political ideologies of the day. It also covers the rise of black athletes in the USA, the rise of women's sport against male prejudice, the role of sport played in the racist Apartheid regime in South Africa, and the fight for the rights of handicapped athletes. In addition, two relatively new trends are examined – the politics of homosexuality in sport and the relationship between sport and terrorism.

John M. Hoberman's *Sport and Political Ideology* interprets the major sport ideologies of the twentieth century as distinct expressions of political doctrine. The author relates doctrines of sport to the psychological point of view: values, attitudes, and passions, reflecting historical developments of sport in the world.<sup>26</sup> He demonstrates how interpretations of sport and physical strength vary according to the ideological position from which they are viewed. In the book *National Imagination: Australian Sport in the Federation Decades*, written by Richard Cashman, the author promotes the idea of Benedict Anderson, who argues that nations exist in the mind as 'imagined communities' before they acquire territorial and constitutional status.<sup>27</sup> Cashman extends this idea, with sport as one form of culture that contributes to the imagined nation, particularly in recent centuries. Sport helps both define a nation, and other perceived friendly and even hostile nations, defining what the nation is and what it is not. The book also explores how and why this happens and how the imagined nation developed in Australia.

This thesis is significant because the SEA Games and regional politics have received little attention in the existing literature of sport and IR, especially its impact on national image building in Southeast Asian countries. It can be said this project is the first of its kind and, hopefully, it may contribute effectively to the study of sport and IR in many ways.

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<sup>26</sup>John M. Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology*, University of Texas Press, 1984, p. 1- 328

<sup>27</sup>Richard Cashman, *National Imagination: Australian Sport in the Federation Decades*, University of New South Wales, 2002, p. 1- 282

## **Research Structure**

The research is structured as follows:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter is aimed at explaining how this thesis is constructed and what its goals are.

### **Chapter 2: Utilizing Sports in International Politics**

This chapter highlights the relationship between globalization and the changing nature of sport in the modern era. The politicization of sport in Nazi Germany, in the Cold War, in South Africa, and in other parts of the world are examined.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Overview on the Relationship between Sport and International Relations Theories**

This chapter is an essential part of the thesis to demonstrate that sport is one of the important factors in the international system. The thesis looks to define and discuss a range of international relations theories and concepts such as constructivism, soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and nation branding by linking these concepts to the nature of sport.

### **Chapter 4: The Politics of the SEA Games and Myanmar's Political History**

This section first deals with the key concept of the SEA Games politics in the region and how the Games reinforce national image construction, to promote, unify, and affirm the closer ties between governments and people in the region. The next section, which is necessary to connect with the next chapter, discusses the political history of Myanmar, its democratization and reform processes and the political realities of the country.

### **Chapter 5: The 2013 SEA Games and Myanmar**

This chapter highlights the main arguments of this thesis, which discusses why the Myanmar government bid to host the SEA Games. The chapter analyses the government's shifting focus on the construction and promotion of an image of Myanmar as a democratic country eager to integrate its economic liberalization into the global economy.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter analyses and draws conclusions relating to all the issues mentioned in the introduction and in the subsequent chapters. It assesses whether the research questions have been answered and the main goals reached. Finally, some recommendations are added for future research in this field.



## Chapter 2

### Utilizing Sports in International Politics

#### I. The inherent nature of politics and sport

##### (1) Sport and International Relations

In *The Politics of South Africa Cricket* edited by Jon Gemmell, he gives a definition of sport as "a part of leisure, a measurement of time free from the mundane routine of work and other obligations. It is an activity that usually, though not always, involves competition and the exercise of brain, muscle, or both."<sup>28</sup> A comprehensive definition of sport is provided in *Sport and International Politics* as "an institutionalized competitive activity that involves vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by individuals whose participation is motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors".<sup>29</sup> On the other side, a definition of politics is also given as "an activity that arises out of disagreement, and it is concerned with the use of government to resolve conflict in the direction of change or in the prevention of change".<sup>30</sup> Therefore comparing these definitions, sport and politics share some common characteristics as they involve competitions and struggles so they normally produce winners and losers. Nowadays it is generally known that historians agreed that the birth and development of sport can be a phenomenon of urbanization and industrialization which is affecting modern societies.<sup>31</sup> A political definition of sport given by Pierre Arnaud in his chapter, *Sport and International Relations before 1918*, states that sport, as "an organised and ordered pastime, and consequently part of a consumer culture, evolves in the same way as industrialisation, education and the ever-growing involvement of an increasingly large number of citizens in politics and economics."<sup>32</sup>

The study of international relations aims to explore how states and individuals interact around the globe and to facilitate the understanding and explanation of events and phenomena in world politics. However, there is a neglected dimension in contemporary

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<sup>28</sup>Jon Gemmell, *The Politics of South Africa Cricket*, p.20

<sup>29</sup>Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics*, p.6

<sup>30</sup>Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics*, p.7

<sup>31</sup>Pierre Arnaud & James Riordan, *Sport and International Politics*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 16

<sup>32</sup>Pierre Arnaud & James Riordan, *Sport and International Politics*, P.16

international politics, which is sport, because scholars do not give it much attention in international relations. Cha highlights the mutual neglect of sport and IR: "those who study sport rather than world politics have not observed the former's impact on nation-states, instead largely working in fields like sport psychology and medicine, and in a social science context, in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and gender studies."<sup>33</sup> According to James Riordan, politicians and scholars of politics realized, after the First World War, that sports and politics are connected.<sup>34</sup> This is because sports have become a large part of the cultural practices utilized for the political interests of governments. In authoritarian states, sports have become a tool to promote a political ideology, to prove superiority, and to affirm existence for national or regional groups. During and after the two World Wars, fascist and communist countries used sports to create propaganda for their leadership, while democratic and capitalist states tried to be better than their rivals. It is because politicians began to appreciate the power of sport as a vehicle of national values and policies that the claim that sport was non-political could not be true anymore. Now democratic countries with the help of media exploit sports to unify a country and to help them forget small internal disagreements, as, for example, in South Africa and Myanmar. Meanwhile politicians have to support a team or a sport for voters' support, for state leaders searching to foster national pride, and even for political systems in need of accentuating their superiority. Like the army, economy or culture, sport is part of the nation-building process and can contribute to the good name of states.

## **(2) Globalization and sport**

As mentioned above, it is obvious that sport's purpose is not just for entertainment and its impact is also no longer limited within a defined boundary. Industrialization, urbanization, globalization and the information age are the best drivers to facilitate sport to have a spillover effect in global affairs. It is increasingly accepted that today sport and globalization are closely connected. According to the concept of globalization given by Joseph Maguire, it refers to "the growing network of interdependencies - political, economic, cultural, and social - that bind human beings together, for better and for worse."<sup>35</sup> Globalization is not a new phenomenon; however, it has intensified in recent

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<sup>33</sup>Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*

<sup>34</sup>Pierre Arnaud & James Riordan, *Sport and International Politics*, P.1

<sup>35</sup>Arthur A. Raney & Jennings Bryant, *Handbook of sports and media*, Routledge, New York, 2009, P. 470 p. 1-656

decades. Rapid technological developments, the growth of cross-border activities, and changes in transportation systems have made the world more interdependent than ever and, as a result, the priorities of politicians and governments have also necessarily changed. Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes point out that "recent events have diminished the importance of traditional 'high politics' issues such as security and elevated 'low politics' issues, including those relating to ethnicity, social welfare, culture, and economic well-being."<sup>36</sup> According to them, the study of international relations has focused more on the low politics of social and economic issues in recent years and interaction between states and various non-state actors.<sup>37</sup>

Referring to Trevor Taylor's chapter, *Sport and International Relations: A case of mutual neglect*, it can be noted as follows;

"World politics has become increasingly less formal, taking place at the transnational and trans-governmental levels rather than exclusively through more formal diplomatic channels. Although sport is clearly not at the centre of inter-governmental relations and clearly lacks the importance of security or economic matters, there are four possible reasons why scholars of international relations need to pay somewhat more attention to sport. First, sport is a significant element in world society, a major consideration for those who believe international relations ought to be concerned with more than inter-governmental politics. Second, global sports relations as part of the environment of the anarchic inter-state political system, may influence behaviour in that system. A series of different and contrasting propositions were noted suggesting how that influence might be generated. Third, sport, in different ways and to different degrees, is an element in most government domestic and foreign policies. It was argued that governments generally find sport to be too important to be ignored. Fourth, sport is operated by a substantive network of private international organizations worthy of investigation as part of the overall study of international and transnational organizations."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Donald Macintosh & Michael Hawes, Chapter 9, *The IOC as a Transnational Organization in Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*, p. 163

<sup>37</sup>Donald Macintosh & Michael Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*, p. 8

<sup>38</sup>This information is extracted from Trevor Taylor's chapter of *Sport and International Relations: A case of mutual neglect* "The Politics of Sport", p. 33-35

As the world becomes more interdependent, the scope of international relations becomes wider as well. The study focuses not only on the traditional relationships between states but also on relations between states and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multinational corporations (MNCs). In this way, cross-border cooperation between formal state institutions and informal civil institutions is becoming improved through many different means including sports activities.

### **(3) International sport organizations and their political impacts**

As shown above, sport is a field where international cooperation has strengthened while the role of international sport organizations becomes more significant in world affairs. Thus sport should be assumed as a proper aspect of the study of international organizations. To highlight this point, the nature of international sport organizations needs to be explained in more detail. Just like the organizational structure of state institutions, there are over a hundred international sport organizations which advocate for the sake of sports. Some of those prominent international ruling federations are the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and many National Olympic Committees (NOCs). The IOC is the supreme authority of the modern Olympic movement, and it is a unique platform which governments can use to make a political stand.<sup>39</sup> FIFA is a non-governmental organization that is responsible for overseeing the quadrennial World Cup football (soccer) competition in addition to its jurisdiction over other various international competitions and aspects of international football.<sup>40</sup> Formally, important decisions within these institutions are taken in congresses attended by representatives from national ruling bodies whose geographical jurisdiction normally covers the territory of a state.<sup>41</sup> Strictly, sports delegations speak only for their national body but in reality, they also appear to represent their nation which means the people of a state. It is not unusual for disagreements to take place among the national sports organizations of different countries, just as with governments and states in international relations. They see

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<sup>39</sup>*The Organization*, Official website of the Olympic Movement, Olympic.org, <http://www.olympic.org/about-ioc-institution>, accessed 21.1. 2015

<sup>40</sup>Roger Pielke Jr., *How can FIFA be held accountable?*, Sport Management Review, Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Colorado, 2013, p. 255 , [http:// sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/admin/ publication\\_files/2013.01.pdf](http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/admin/publication_files/2013.01.pdf), accessed 21.1. 2015

<sup>41</sup>*The Organization*, Official website of the Olympic Movement

themselves as in real competition with each other although they have a common interest in the development of their sport, which encourages both cooperation and conflict as well.

## **II. Sport as a government's policy instrument**

In the modern history of sport, states sometimes use sport as part of their internal and external policies. So sport is not only a medium for cross-border interactions, it can also be an instrument of a government's policy. For many governments, the development of international sporting contact has provided them with a low-cost, but high-profile resource for publicizing their policy on international issues or towards specific states.<sup>42</sup> In a foreign policy context, sport is occasionally used in specific situations for a particular purpose. Thus China initiated sports contact as means of signalling a desire for closer relations with the West during the Cold War. Most states have shown disagreement with, and worked for changes in, apartheid policy by discouraging official sporting ties with South Africa. Several states signalled their disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by successfully pressuring their Olympic Committees not to send teams to the Moscow Olympics. Perhaps most remarkably, East Germany used sporting contact on a large scale, in the form of international matches and so on, to secure recognition from the peoples, if not directly the governments, of the world. Some of those examples will be followed as case studies in the next section.

Moreover, according to the changing nature of international relations after the end of the Cold War, intangible power assets such as culture, political ideology, and institutions have been more emphasized than traditional military forms of power in inter-state relations.<sup>43</sup> In this way, sport has been becoming important for the foreign policies of world governments in two basic means. First, as a mixture of public and cultural diplomacy, sport diplomacy encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy which used to focus on relations between government to government and state to state. Politicians acknowledge that sport can also improve

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<sup>42</sup>Chien Yu Lin, Ping Chao Lee & Hui Fang Nai, *Theorizing the Role of Sport in State-Politics*, International Journal of Sport and Exercise Science, 1 (1) p. 25, <http://web.nchu.edu.tw/~biosimulation/journal/pdf/vol-1-no01/vol-1-no-1b-0004.pdf>, accessed 16.1.2015

<sup>43</sup>Jon Grix & Donna Lee, *Soft power, sports Mega-events and emerging states: The Lure of the politics of attraction*, CRP working paper series No. 12, University of Cambridge, 2013, p. 4, [http://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/CRP/research/working\\_papers/](http://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/CRP/research/working_papers/), accessed 16.1.2015

diplomatic relations between countries whose relationship has broken down when ordinary foreign ministries cannot do so. On the one hand, sport can create public goodwill, or provide the opportunities for high level delegations that can facilitate smooth relations in a time of conflict or stagnant diplomatic process. Second, sport has also been used as a tool of coercive diplomacy. Politicians have not been averse to utilizing sport as a tool of statecraft in the form of aggrieved governments boycotting against participation in sport events, or in the form of bans against offending countries from participation in events. In this sense, sport has been used as a form of sanction that sends high profile and symbolic political messages of disapproval. Different kinds of case studies follow in the subsequent section to highlight how politicians and governments utilize sport to get favourable political outcomes.

## **Case Studies**

### **(1) 1936 Hitler's Olympics**

In many respects, the modern Olympic movement has been highly politicized from its beginning because the reasons behind hosting a mega-sport event have usually been related to the political and economic interests of host nations. Much of realist writing on politics and the Olympic movement claims sport as a political tool being used by states to further political objectives.<sup>44</sup> This concept has frequently focused on sports diplomacy as an addition to traditional diplomatic practices, for example reinforcing the government position on the diplomatic recognition of states, or indicating dissatisfaction with the behaviour of the host state. The 1936 Berlin Olympics remains one of the most intensively studied Olympiads in modern history. Hitler employed sport alongside political education to inspire the German people, especially the youth, to believe in both their often proclaimed racial superiority and their place in the construction of a dynamic new Nazi order. In 1931, two years before the Nazis came to power, Germany won the bid to host the XI Olympic Games over Spain at the 29<sup>th</sup> IOC Session in Barcelona.<sup>45</sup> To outdo the American games of 1932, Germany built a new 100,000-seat track and field stadium, six gymnasiums, and many other smaller arenas.<sup>46</sup> Hitler saw the Games as an

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<sup>44</sup>Roger Levermore & Adrian Budd, *Sport and International Relations: An emerging Relationship*, p. 98

<sup>45</sup>This information comes from *1936 Nazi Olympics* posted by Micheal L. Grace, 2012, <http://cruiselinehistory.com/1936-nazi-olympics/>, accessed 16.1.2015

<sup>46</sup>This information comes from Official Report- Volume. 1, The XI Olympic Games, Berlin, 1936, p. 141

opportunity to promote his government and Nazi ideals of racial supremacy, and the official Nazi party paper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, wrote in the strongest terms that Jews and Black people should not be allowed to participate in the Games.<sup>47</sup> However, when threatened with a boycott of the Games by other nations, he relented and allowed Black people and Jews to participate.<sup>48</sup> Filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, a favourite of Hitler's, was commissioned by the IOC to film the Games. Her film, entitled *Olympia*, introduced many of the techniques now common to the filming of sports.<sup>49</sup>

Many other cities around the world also wanted to host the Summer Olympics for that year, but except for Barcelona they did not receive any IOC votes.<sup>50</sup> After Hitler promoted his anti-Semitic programs, the IOC held private discussions among its delegates about changing the decision to hold the Games in Berlin.<sup>51</sup> However, Hitler's regime changed its policy and gave assurances that Jewish athletes would be allowed to compete on a German Olympic team. In September 1934, the US Olympic Committee publicly accepted the invitation to go to the Berlin games, halting any further IOC attempts to quietly revise the decision.<sup>52</sup> Prior to and during the Games, there was considerable debate outside Germany over whether the competition should be allowed or discontinued. Berlin had been selected by the IOC as the host city in 1931, but after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933, observers in many countries began to question the morality of going ahead with an Olympic Games hosted by the Nazi regime.<sup>53</sup> A number of brief campaigns to boycott or relocate the Games emerged in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands.<sup>54</sup> United States Olympic Committee president Avery Brundage became a main supporter of the Games being held in Germany, arguing that "politics has no place in sport", despite having initial doubts.<sup>55</sup> In short, the 1936 Nazi Olympics is a very strong case to prove that sport has been highly

<sup>47</sup>*The Nazi Olympics*, Heritage daily, <http://www.heritagedaily.com/2014/02/the-nazi-olympics/> 102220, accessed 16.1.2015

<sup>48</sup>*The Nazi Olympics*, Heritage daily

<sup>49</sup>*1936 Nazi Olympics*

<sup>50</sup>This information comes from *1936 Berlin Summer Olympic*, <http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163>, accessed 16-1-2015

<sup>51</sup>Stephen R. Wenn, *Proposed American Participation in the 1936 Olympics*, Journal of Sport History, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), p. 27, <http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1989/JSH1601/jsh1601c.pdf>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>52</sup>Official Report of The XI Olympic Games

<sup>53</sup>*1936 Berlin Summer Olympic*, [http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190\\_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163](http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163), accessed 16.1.2015

<sup>54</sup>*1936 Berlin Summer Olympic*, [http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190\\_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163](http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163)

<sup>55</sup>*1936 Berlin Summer Olympic*, [http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190\\_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163](http://www.myhistro.com/story/quiz-getting-a-grip-on-history/78190_#!1936-berlin-summer-olympic-176163)



politicized from its beginning as Germany was using the Olympics in the political arena as a showplace for Nazi youth. When the Axis powers were doing well in sport, the other fascist regimes in Europe copied their efforts and started to invest in sport at all levels, particularly after the Olympic Games of 1936.<sup>56</sup>

## **(2) Olympic boycotts during the Cold War**

Another common use of sport is as a means of showing dissatisfaction with a host's actions, and a boycott is one of the exploitations of sport as apolitical tool that have influenced the Olympics. When the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan in 1979, the international community, mainly the Western countries, condemned this behaviour because Afghanistan was considered to be outside the Soviet Union's traditional sphere of influence.<sup>57</sup> It spurred US President Jimmy Carter's administration to issue an ultimatum on January 20, 1980 that the United States would boycott the Moscow Olympics if Soviet troops did not withdraw from Afghanistan within one month.<sup>58</sup> Subsequently, Jimmy Carter declared that the United States would boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. The Carter administration brought immense pressure on the NATO countries to support the boycott although that support was not universal; 59 other countries joined the boycott.<sup>59</sup> This was the largest Olympic Games boycott since 1956, and it showed that sport is a cheap and harmless substitute for war, as in George Orwell's phrase "war minus the shooting".<sup>60</sup> In an era when nuclear weapons make the traditional form of power struggle, warfare, not the best option for states, so sport is seen as a symbol of power because sports events are not directly linked to other dimensions of conflict. The International Olympics Federation protested the United States for putting pressure on other countries to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.<sup>61</sup> They declared that a boycott of a sporting event was an improper method to use in trying to obtain a political end and that the real victims of any such action were the

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<sup>56</sup>Arnd Kruger, *Strength through joy: The culture of consent under fascism, Nazism and Francoism* in "The international Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century", p.85

<sup>57</sup>*Sport and politics: Are the Olympic Games political?* , Oxford Brookes University, 2010, p. 3 [http://www-new1.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/olympic\\_sig/case\\_studies/CS8-Politics-and-the-Games.pdf](http://www-new1.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/olympic_sig/case_studies/CS8-Politics-and-the-Games.pdf) , accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>58</sup>*The collapse of détente: the American reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan* in the Why did the Cold War end?, p. 121

<sup>59</sup>*Sport and politics: Are the Olympic Games political?* , p. 4

<sup>60</sup>Lincoln Allison, *The Politics of Sport*, p. 37

<sup>61</sup>Lausanne, Switzerland (AP),*Sports Group Blasts Boycott But Strong Support Remains*, Bangor Daily News – April 23, 1980, Google News, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2457&dat=19800423&id=l4Q-AAAAIBAJ&sjid=Bl0MAAAAIBAJ&pg=4699,3421224>, accessed 21.1.2015



athletes.<sup>62</sup> Therefore it can be argued that the US turned attendance at the Moscow Olympics into a foreign policy issue for all governments, and it was an example of East-West sports rivalry at Olympic Games.

The US-led boycott of the Moscow Olympics was followed by the USSR-led boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. Three months before the start of the 1984 summer games in Los Angeles, the Soviet Union declared it would not participate in the 1984 games, citing security concerns and stating that chauvinistic sentiments and an anti-Soviet hysteria were being whipped up in the United States.<sup>63</sup> The boycott involved 14 Eastern Bloc countries and allies, led by the Soviet Union, who initiated the boycott on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1984. Boycotting countries organized another major event, called the Friendship Games, in July–August 1984.<sup>64</sup> Iran also decided to boycott the 1984 Summer Olympics because of the United States interference in the Middle East, its support for the regime (Israel) occupying Jerusalem, and the crimes being committed by the U.S.A. in Latin America, especially in El Salvador.<sup>65</sup> Most of the world's media interpreted the Soviet boycott as retaliation for the US boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games. However, no threat to eastern bloc athletes was ever discovered, and the athletes from the eastern bloc countries that did attend the 1984 games in Los Angeles – Romania – encountered no problems.<sup>66</sup> In fact the Romanian team was widely cheered above all other visiting nations at the Opening Ceremonies when they marched into the Coliseum precisely because they were not taking part in the Soviet-led boycott. In this way, sporting occasions provide a safety valve or outlet of emotional energy for frustrated peoples or the nation; sport is a substitute for and an example of political action.

### **(3) Sport and nation-building in the "Rainbow Nation"<sup>67</sup>**

Another instrumental model of using sport in the politics and nation building arena was the 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa. For the first time in history South Africans

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<sup>62</sup>American Embassy Memorandum to Secretary of State and White House, "Olympics: IOC Message to Mr. Cutler," April 27, 1980, US Department of State, FOIA

<sup>63</sup>John F. Burns, Moscow will keep its team from Los Angeles Olympics, 1984, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/09/world/moscow-will-keep-its-team-los-angeles-olympics-tass-cites-peril-us-denies-it.html>, accessed 16-1-2015

<sup>64</sup>*Sport and politics: Are the Olympic Games political?*, p. 4

<sup>65</sup>John F. Burns, *Moscow will keep its team from Los Angeles Olympics*

<sup>66</sup>John F. Burns, *Moscow will keep its team from Los Angeles Olympics*

<sup>67</sup>Albert Grundlingh & John Nauright, *Worlds apart?: The 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 2010 FIFA World Cup*, academia.edu, p. 192, [https://www.academia.edu/1608414/Worlds\\_Apart\\_The\\_1995\\_Rugby\\_World\\_Cup\\_and\\_the\\_2010\\_FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://www.academia.edu/1608414/Worlds_Apart_The_1995_Rugby_World_Cup_and_the_2010_FIFA_World_Cup), accessed 16-1-2015

took part in a democratic election where people of all races were allowed to vote in April 1994, making Nelson Mandela the first black South African president.<sup>68</sup> After that, the divided nation began its long and difficult process of initiating the economic, social and political reforms, as an alternative to apartheid. Unfortunately, post-apartheid South Africa faced social, racial, gender and economic inequalities and these became challenges for Mandela's reform programs.<sup>69</sup> Thus the new South African government had taken some initiatives to counter inequalities through projects aimed at creating a more coherent society. One of the most celebrated and well-known projects was Mandela's strong support of the mainly white South African national rugby team, the Springboks, in the Rugby World Cup in 1995.<sup>70</sup> Looking back to the sport history of South Africa, the sport practiced in the late 1990s has developed out of various phases of domestic affairs.<sup>71</sup> The period between 1948 and 1992 was marked by the development of apartheid, international isolation from major sporting events and the internal struggle between different sporting factions within South Africa.<sup>72</sup> Just after Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa, he observed that the country was extremely divided along racial lines. Whites feared the new government in the hands of the Black majority, while some Blacks wanted revenge for the suffering and pain they lived during Apartheid years when the white minority ruled and discriminated against Black South Africans.<sup>73</sup>

Mandela started using and promoting sports for two main reasons: to achieve national reconciliation and to increase the international reputation of South Africa.<sup>74</sup> At that time, rugby and cricket were the sports favoured by the White South Africans, whereas Blacks played mostly football.<sup>75</sup> So while the Whites cheered their famous Rugby team, the Springboks, all the Blacks cheered for their opponents, even their foreign opponent

<sup>68</sup>*The First Democratic Election is Held in South Africa*, South Africa History Online (SAHO), 27 April, 1994, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/first-democratic-election-held-south-africa-0>, accessed 16-1-2015

<sup>69</sup>This information comes from *The Challenges of Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Conclusions and papers presented at a Conference of the Africa Leadership Forum edited by Felix G.N. Moshia, 8-10 September 1991, Namibia, <http://www.africaleadership.org/rc/the%20challenges%20of%20post-apartheid%20south%20africa.pdf>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>70</sup>Karen Farquharson & Timothy Marjoribanks, *Transforming the Springboks: Re-imagining the South African Nation through sport*, 2003, p.1 [http://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/vital/access/services/Download/swin:1162/SOURC\\_E1?origin=publication\\_detail](http://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/vital/access/services/Download/swin:1162/SOURC_E1?origin=publication_detail), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>71</sup>Riordan and Kruger, *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*, p. 237

<sup>72</sup>Riordan and Kruger, *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*, p.239

<sup>73</sup>Tamara Juricic, *In Memoriam: Nelson Mandela*, p. 2, [http://assets.sportanddev.org/downloads/in\\_memoriam\\_mandela\\_1.pdf](http://assets.sportanddev.org/downloads/in_memoriam_mandela_1.pdf), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>74</sup>Tamara Juricic, *In Memoriam: Nelson Mandela*, p. 2

<sup>75</sup>Tamara Juricic, *In Memoriam: Nelson Mandela*, p. 2-4

teams. To unite this division, Mandela wanted to use the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a way to bring all South Africans together in support of the country's Rugby team. In a sports award event just before the rugby tournament, Mandela emphasized the vision of the new non-racial South Africa where all could cooperate in its recreation. At first, Black people were resistant to Mandela's idea but slowly the whole Black community began to consolidate around this underdog team. So it is not just a Rugby team that must exceed expectations, it is also the nation, so bitterly divided, that must show the world a new way of people living together. The victory of the Springboks in the 1995 Rugby World Cup was considered by many media commentators, politicians and sporting identities at the time to be symbolic of both the end of apartheid and of the way forward to reconciliation in South Africa.<sup>76</sup> Therefore a Rugby team or a kind of sport can also be a light to a nation that must overcome its internal struggles to find its way to peace, as South Africa went on to become a model for overcoming much of the hatred and fear of its past.

The need for reconciliation and nation-building is really important in countries emerging from a period of conflict. This is particularly the case in those nations, such as South Africa and Myanmar, that have experienced not only authoritarianism but where ethnicity and religion have been divided by colonial rule and different political ideologies. South Africa is a good example which can prove that in newly transformed nations, sport often becomes a vehicle for integration and a tool for nation-building. The victory of South Africa signalled the return of South Africa to international sport and its renewed international presence. Therefore, sport helps to reinforce not only a national reconciliation process but also international political legitimacy.

#### **(4) Ping-Pong Diplomacy<sup>77</sup>**

Sometimes, sport has provided an opportunity to improve relations between states when normal diplomacy has been ineffective. The most obvious case was the Ping-Pong diplomacy that led to a dramatic improvement in Sino-American relations. The American Ping-Pong team's visit to China in April 1971 facilitated diplomacy through

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<sup>76</sup>Karen Farquharson & Timothy Marjoribanks, *Transforming the Springboks: Re-imagining the South African Nation through sport*, p.1

<sup>77</sup>Erik Bao, "Ping-Pong Diplomacy": *The historic opening of Sino-American relations during the Nixon administration* , p.2, <http://www.ohiohistory.org/File%20Library/Education/National%20History%20Day%20in%20Ohio/Nationals/Projects/2011/Bao.pdf> , accessed 17-1-2015

its impact on public opinion. Table tennis was invented in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and just over a century later, this sport became the national sport of The People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>78</sup> Since table tennis had not yet become the national sport of China before 1949, a long chain of events took place under the rule of The Communist Party. Around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a nickname had been coined for China as "the sick man of Asia", which meant that China needed to be cured and become strong, and the physical fitness of its people was of great importance to build a strong nation.<sup>79</sup> As the concept of strengthening the nation through physical fitness grew popular among the political elites and many Chinese intellectuals, sport became a more important element in Chinese society. The Communist Party leaders likewise became aware of the political potential of having a sport represent their ideals and struggle, and so wanted to find an activity to embody the communist ideology and the guerrilla campaign that characterized the communist struggle in the civil war. Finally the leaders of the Communist Party found table tennis as their national sport in a way of making the Chinese people healthier and stronger, but also as a political tool that could be used for national unification and presentation now that the PRC had been founded.

Before the Ping Pong Diplomacy took place, the relationship between the US and the PRC was cold, because the Korean war and "two-Chinas" issue were the main reasons behind the mutually hostile attitude shared between the two countries in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>80</sup> At that time, China-Soviet relations also turned hostile when the two countries engaged in armed conflict on the Chinese-Soviet border in 1969.<sup>81</sup> During the Vietnam war, as the US was backing the Southern Vietnamese forces while the PRC aided the communists in the North Vietnam, the threat of having both the Soviet Union and the US as enemies prompted the PRC to rethink its foreign policies.<sup>82</sup> Up until 1971, there was very little news in the public domain with regard to emerging Sino-American relations.

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<sup>78</sup> Nils Viktor Olsson, *How table tennis became the national sport of the PRC and its role in modern Chinese politics?*, Sinological research project, Department of China and inner Asia, Faculty of languages and culture, University of London, 2010, p. 6, <http://www.ittf.com/museum/ping%20pong%20politics.pdf>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>79</sup> Nils Viktor Olsson, *How table tennis became the national sport of the PRC and its role in modern Chinese politics?*, p.9

<sup>80</sup> Nils Viktor Olsson, *How table tennis became the national sport of the PRC and its role in modern Chinese politics?*, p.17

<sup>81</sup> Thomas W. Robinson, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes*, The American Political Science Review, Vol. 66, No. 4, 1972, p.1175, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_memoranda/RM6171.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM6171.html), accessed 16-1-2015

<sup>82</sup> Chen Jian, *China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69*, The China Quarterly, No. 142, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 359-360, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655420>, accessed 16-1-2015

At that time, a masterpiece of diplomacy unfolded on the most unlikely stage. At the April, 1971 World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan, Chinese and US ping-pong players happened to exchange conversation and souvenirs.<sup>83</sup> Shortly after this incident, the American table tennis team unexpectedly received an invitation to visit China and compete against the Chinese team. The moment was popularly described as ping-pong diplomacy, and President Richard Nixon eagerly capitalized on the new spirit of cooperation by using sport as a springboard for his own subsequent visit to the People's Republic. In this way, through this so-called ping-pong diplomacy, Nixon effectively ended two decades of China-US isolation and cut through one of the great knots of international politics in the twentieth century. Ping-Pong therefore provided a clear indication of popular support, which made it easier for the United States and China to press forward with warmer relations in ways that might not otherwise have been possible.

Therefore, sport needs to take account of politics defined in a wide sense and the study of international relations should give more attention to sport, whose repercussions extend far beyond the sports ground. In this way, sport cannot be seen as just a game, but as a medium of cross-border activities among citizens from different countries that transcends state boundaries.<sup>84</sup> Since victory in sport is a source of pride for a nation and its people, one cannot underestimate the power of sport which becomes an image-shaping tool of a nation. In an era of globalization, the power of a nation is derived in part from its ability to project a favourable image of its military, economy, political impact or cultural importance among other nations. Therefore, countries are now more concerned about how they are perceived by other nations and are becoming more active in measuring and managing their reputation abroad. States can gain benefits and advance their foreign policy goals if the foreign population is attracted by the state and, in turn, influences its own government in favour of a state. It can be argued that the hosting of sports mega-events provides emerging states with the potential to practice public diplomacy to attract the citizens of other states using the global media. For many governments the development of international sporting contact has provided them high-profile resources for publicizing their policy on international issues or towards specific states.

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<sup>83</sup> Erik Bao, *"Ping-Pong Diplomacy": The historic opening of Sino-American relations during the Nixon administration*, p. 4

<sup>84</sup> Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: The politics of sport in Asia*

## Chapter 3

### Theories

This chapter covers the theories that form the framework of the project.

#### Constructivism

This thesis deals with a range of International Relations theories, such as constructivism and soft power and tools of soft power like public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and nation branding to support the relationship between sport and politics. According to different IR theories, states are the major actors in world affairs and key players in world politics. Therefore, political scientists have been studying various aspects of states, and power is a principal focus. Power is defined as how one state uses its material resources to compel another state to do something it does not want to.<sup>85</sup> In assessing a state's power, sometimes realist theory which mainly focuses on tangible assets such as military and economy cannot explain the nature of power completely.<sup>86</sup> In other words, realist thinking of power is based on a state's wealth and the size of its population. This view of power may be appropriate for great powers like the United States or China which have both strong militaries and economic capabilities. However, empirical evidence showed that the concept of a state's power does not involve simply looking at a state's military, wealth or population, but a state's identity, the political legitimacy of a government, and how are they accepted by other countries should be also mentioned. This type of psychological thinking based on intangible assets can be called constructivism. Constructivism focuses on the role of non-material factors like values, ideas, and national identity and how they play in world politics.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Barnett & Raymond Duvall, *Power in International Relations*, International Organization 59, 2005, p. 40 p. 39-75

<sup>86</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, Structural realism, Chapter-4, p. 72, [http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/Structural Realism.pdf](http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/Structural%20Realism.pdf), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>87</sup> John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, University of Connecticut, Twelfth edition, 1986, p. 30-31, [http://jeffreyfields.net/427/Site/Blog/3C90C230-B47B-4894-8E8E-F4C5078\\_BDD88\\_files/Rourke-Realism,%20Liberalism,%20Constructivism.pdf](http://jeffreyfields.net/427/Site/Blog/3C90C230-B47B-4894-8E8E-F4C5078_BDD88_files/Rourke-Realism,%20Liberalism,%20Constructivism.pdf), accessed 19.1.2015

Constructivism maintains an ideology that argues that international relations are socially constructed<sup>88</sup>, and that norms play a crucial role in constructing the social environment of states. It emphasizes how variables such as identities, culture, norms and ideas shape the international system and how state interests and interactions can be understood relying on such non-material factors.<sup>89</sup> While material factors take an important role in global affairs, constructivism assumes that how states respond to and interpret interactions among states and non-state actors is based on how they perceive each other.<sup>90</sup> In this way, scholars and practitioners found that states can influence other states and foreign publics in order to build successful relationships and to get desirable outcomes, not by coercion or economic assistance but by means of persuasion and attraction. At the same time, they noticed that cultural factors, national identities and universally accepted norms, such as democracy and human rights, can convince and attract other states to follow or support their leadership. In this way, the concept of soft power was recently developed as a new concept of power.

### **Soft power**

According to Nye, “soft power” is the ability of one country to get “other countries to want what it wants.”<sup>91</sup> Providing incentives to other states for their collaboration can be called a utilization of soft power. In Nye's analysis, soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument. In terms of behaviour, soft power is an attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction. As proposed by Nye, soft power derives from three sources: culture, political values and foreign policy.<sup>92</sup> In this concept, culture is the one of the key elements of soft power in order to improve relations with other states and attract the foreign public. One of the examples of promoting soft power through culture is the Olympic Games, which can serve as a medium of political influence in international relations. States can show off their political and economic achievements by organizing or

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<sup>88</sup>Nilufer Karacasulu & Elif Uzgoren, *Explaining social constructivism contributions to security studies*, METU Conference on International Relations, June 14=15, 2006, Ankara, p.29 <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/KaracasuluUzgoren.pdf>, accessed 19.1.2015

<sup>89</sup>Nilufer Karacasulu & Elif Uzgoren, *Explaining social constructivism contributions to security studies*, p. 32

<sup>90</sup>John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, p. 31-33

<sup>91</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, Foreign Policy, No.80, Twentieth Anniversary , 1990, p.166, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-7228%28199023%3A80%3C153%3ASP%3E2.0CO%3B2-2> , accessed 19.1.2015

<sup>92</sup>Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The future of power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, p. 84



participating in sports competitions. This study builds on this emergent literature by mobilising Joseph Nye's soft power concept to better understand states' strategic motivations behind bidding for and hosting sports mega events and what they hope to achieve. It is researched that emerging powers want to host sporting mega-events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup because it is likely that hosts can get some respect to further enhance their global image by showing off something impressive.<sup>93</sup> Thus it can be easily understood how Myanmar sought to obtain legitimacy as a nation able to have an impact on the rest of the world. It was seeking approval for its past accomplishments of a democratic transition to a new civilian government, and its current political socio-economic transformations. Therefore it can be argued that the Myanmar government deployed the idea of soft power in actual policy making by hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, which demonstrated a concept of "we are like others".

### **Public diplomacy**

Apart from soft power, governments also use different forms of soft power like public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and nation branding. These trends are increasingly developed in this information age. Globalization and media can make people accessible to information regardless of place and time, so it can arouse their awareness in daily affairs and express their concerns that governments should take into account. Public diplomacy targets not the policy makers and governments, but the public of other countries. According to Nye, "public diplomacy is an instrument that government uses to mobilize resources of soft power to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments".<sup>94</sup> Likewise, public diplomacy is a method of communication by the government, mainly with a foreign population, for a better understanding and acceptance of its ideas, values, culture, national goals and policies. In this connection, considering the tools of public diplomacy includes applying sports as a diplomatic tool, as sports can also help nations to be closer in a way that ordinary diplomatic channels cannot afford.

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<sup>93</sup> Jon Grix & Donna Lee, *Soft power, sports mega-events and emerging states: The lure of the politics of attraction*, CRP Working paper No. 12, 2013, p. 6 [http://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/12780007/2013\\_Global\\_Society\\_Soft\\_Power\\_Emergings\\_States\\_and\\_Sport.pdf](http://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/12780007/2013_Global_Society_Soft_Power_Emergings_States_and_Sport.pdf), accessed 19.1.2015

<sup>94</sup> Philip Seib, *Toward a new public diplomacy: Redirecting U.S. foreign policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2009, p. 14



Hosting big sporting events can attract a foreign audience through global media coverage and it is a great opportunity for the hosts to present the message that they want. Opening and closing ceremonies often involve cultural displays that reflect the host nation's history and national values. Thus, such events can be regarded as commercial opportunities for hosting states because governments can prepare their political and economic policies to be attractive and so they can win the hearts and minds of people. Sport can reinforce as a most efficient tool in public policy because governments have to adapt their domestic and foreign policies to some extent to be acceptable by the international community. It can be understood that the Myanmar government used the SEA Games to send a message about the opening up of the country to the world and welcoming foreign investments to pull up its stagnant economy. According to Nye, it is more probable for a country to expand its soft power when its culture includes "universal values" and its policies "promote interests that others share".<sup>95</sup>

### **Cultural diplomacy and sports**

Cultural diplomacy is difficult to distinguish from public diplomacy. Culture is generally defined as the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual effort but it is generally regarded to be wider than this in cultural diplomacy, encompassing sport, science, architecture and popular culture.<sup>96</sup> The most widely used definition of cultural diplomacy is Milton C. Cummings' 2003 definition of it as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding".<sup>97</sup> Culture must not only foster understanding among peoples; it also needs to provide opportunities for co-operation and trade. More and more, culture is a vital part of a state's diplomacy and its foreign policy. There are many benefits of applying cultural diplomacy, including the role it plays in promoting understanding between states; advancing the national interests of a state overseas; and the way in which it complements more traditional diplomacy and foreign relations.

Culture can be shared by peoples from all over the world regardless of their origins because culture is a powerful and non-threatening way of dealing with people. Culture

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<sup>95</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, Public Affairs, USA, 2004

<sup>96</sup> Oxford Dictionary, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/culture>, accessed 19.1.2015

<sup>97</sup> Jeanette Cajide, *A delicate dance: How the arts can improve US-Cuban relations*, academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/241360/A\\_Delicate\\_Dance\\_How\\_the\\_Arts\\_Can\\_Improve\\_U.S.-Cuban\\_Relations](https://www.academia.edu/241360/A_Delicate_Dance_How_the_Arts_Can_Improve_U.S.-Cuban_Relations), accessed 19.1.2015

can be used as a political tool in many ways such as in building political relationships and warming up cold relations between two states.<sup>98</sup> Since culture is universally accepted as a medium for global communication especially in this globalized era, it can create equality and closeness among different peoples and groups. Cultural diplomacy can help a country with a bad reputation to fade out some misperceptions of this country by familiarising its culture to the foreign public and it can make them understand why this country is facing such difficulties. It can send a message to the world that views of the government do not represent the whole nation and can create a positive image. Cultural diplomacy can be another source for states to express themselves and to promote their national interests apart from official diplomatic channels. For Myanmar, it utilized cultural diplomacy while it hosted the SEA Games in order to build a good image that can help in its nation-building process and to enhance its international recognition. Combining sport and culture, nations expect to increase their attractiveness in dealing with their counterparts and rivals. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Nazi Germany had endeavoured to propagate its political ideology through the grand Olympics in 1936; Beijing also proved its peaceful development ideology and its cultural richness to the world and its rivals, such as the U.S. and Japan, by exploiting the 2008 Olympic Games as a diplomatic tool.

### **Nation branding through image building and perception management**

A sophisticated concept of soft power named nation branding is similar to public and cultural diplomacy.<sup>99</sup> Nation branding is a combination of public diplomacy, focusing on the foreign public, and cultural diplomacy, promoting nation's culture. But unlike cultural diplomacy, it is all about advertising and promoting a nation for economic advantage.<sup>100</sup> By using nation branding, a state can create a good image of its policies or infrastructure and trade on this image to attract customers and foreign investments. The brand can be created from national identities and values which can contribute to the reputation of the nation. While IT and telecommunication developments permit free flow

<sup>98</sup> Margarita Alexandra Coppi Agostinelli, *Cultural diplomacy and the concept of the Other*, The international conference on cultural diplomacy & the UN, New York & Washington D.C., February 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> 2012, [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2012-02-unced/Cultural\\_diplomacy\\_and\\_the\\_concept\\_of\\_the\\_Other- Margarita\\_Alexandra\\_Coppi\\_Agostinelli.pdf](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2012-02-unced/Cultural_diplomacy_and_the_concept_of_the_Other- Margarita_Alexandra_Coppi_Agostinelli.pdf), accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>99</sup> Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding: Concepts, issues, practices*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Elsevier Linacre House, Oxford, 2008, p. 1-259

<sup>100</sup> Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding: Concepts, issues, practices*, p. 1-259

of information in this globalized era, governments of all states are very careful for their national images. It is recognized that power in international relations comes from a nation's ability to project an image that presents its military, economic, political, or cultural might in a favourable way.<sup>101</sup> Hence, brand management is about depicting a good image of a nation and it includes methods of publicizing a state's tangible and intangible assets. A nation must define its values and decide what image it wants to present in creating the positive image. If a nation does not actively define itself, it will be defined by myths, stereotypes and perceptions spread by international media or opposition parties, and these may not always be positive or helpful to the nation.

Perceptions are very important to an image of a nation. People used to have different perceptions relating to a nation based on experiences gained from different sources and places, such as from media, films, literature, performance of a national sporting team or its cultural patterns. These factors have an impact on a country's image building process and how its government and people respond. Therefore nations must find ways of differentiating themselves from others in the minds of others; meanwhile, they must adapt their policies to be acceptable to others. To reduce negative views and retrieve positive views for a country, governments must research what views are in the minds of foreign audiences. Then they should focus on image building that works on a global stage by displaying their countries' significant cultures, national characteristics and landscapes. For instance, for Myanmar, its socioeconomic reforms, better human rights situation, stable domestic politics and presenting a friendly culture can all contribute to a positive image to attract both the local population and an international audience.

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<sup>101</sup> This information comes from a paper for the Workshop on "China, the Olympics and the World" edited by Jianping Ni, *The Beijing Olympics and China's national image building*, Shanghai Institute of American studies, 2008, p. 2 p. 1-7

## Chapter 4

### The Politics of the SEA Games and Myanmar's Political History

#### I. The Politics of the SEA Games

##### (1) A Brief History of SEA Games

This chapter is divided into two parts. In section one, it will highlight the establishment of the SEA Games and make some observations of how the event might enhance the study of Southeast Asian regionalism. In section two, the socioeconomic background of Myanmar and its current political changes will be explained.

The most well-known sporting event in Southeast Asia is the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). The SEA Games owes its origins to the Southeast Asian Peninsular Games or SEAP Games. The Southeast Asia Peninsular (SEAP) Games was first held in 1959 and appeared to have been the first regional sporting event in newly independent Southeast Asian countries.<sup>102</sup> The SEAP Games was initiated by Laung Sukhum Naiyapradit, the then Vice-President of the Thailand Olympic Committee.<sup>103</sup> Like the Asian Games and the Olympics, Laung Sukhum desired to increase sporting exchanges between Thailand and her neighbours to fortify the relationships among regional countries.<sup>104</sup> As the geographical situations and cultural backgrounds of Southeast Asian people are connected and similar to some extent, his idea was acceptable at that time. Based on these similarities, he believed a regional sporting games would help the countries to bridge some political and ideological differences between aligned and non-aligned countries in the region.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 101

<sup>103</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, News Letter, No. 65, Spring 2012, Center for Southeast Asian Studies Kyoto University, p.15 <http://www.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/edit/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/NL6515-17.pdf> , accessed 20. 1. 2015

<sup>104</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

<sup>105</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

In May 1958, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asian Games in Tokyo, Thai officials met with national representatives from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya, and South Vietnam.<sup>106</sup> This meeting approved his proposal for a regional sports tournament called the Southeast Asian Peninsular Games, and, formed the SEAP Games Federation to supervise the event.<sup>107</sup> Then the member states agreed to host the SEAP Games alternatively for every second year between the Asian and Olympic Games.<sup>108</sup> Although accepting holding the games alternatively, Thailand had great support from Cambodia and South Vietnam to host the first edition in 1959 for its leadership role in this initiative.<sup>109</sup> In this way, the SEAP Games became the biggest regional sporting event in the Southeast Asia, and the founding members were Thailand, Myanmar (then Burma), Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia (with Singapore included thereafter). Thailand proposed 12 sports for its first games, including athletics, which was made compulsory, and other international sports such as football, basketball, and boxing.<sup>110</sup> The first SEAP Games in Bangkok from 12 to 17 December, 1959 saw 527 athletes and officials from Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Laos participating in 12 sports.<sup>111</sup>

The schedule for hosting the games was not in alphabetical order as agreed before due to different political and socio-economic impediments in some member countries. After Myanmar (then Burma) organized the second games in Yangon (then Rangoon) in 1961, Cambodia cancelled its turn to host the event due to its poor relations with Thailand over the Preah Vihear temple dispute, and its socio-economic difficulties.<sup>112</sup> As a result, the 1965 Games were passed to Malaysia after Laos also turned down the chance for financial reasons.<sup>113</sup> It is noted that the French Indochina countries could never host the SEAP Games in the alphabetical format owing to different sporting abilities and levels of economic development. The event returned to Bangkok, Yangon (then Rangoon) and

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<sup>106</sup>Regional and sub-regional games, Historical archives, Olympic studies center, November 2012, p. 27, [studies-centre@olympic.org](mailto:studies-centre@olympic.org), accessed 20. 1. 2015 p. 1-47

<sup>107</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

<sup>108</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

<sup>109</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

<sup>110</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

<sup>111</sup>21<sup>st</sup> SEA Games, History of Southeast Asia Games, sadec website, <http://www.sadec.com/Sea2001/history.html>, accessed 20. 1. 2015

<sup>112</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, p. 101

<sup>113</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p.15

Kuala Lumpur in 1967, 1969 and 1971 respectively and in 1973, Singapore organized its first SEA Games after gaining independence in 1965.<sup>114</sup> Although a detailed study of the SEAP Games has not been carried out, Luang Sukhum and his counterparts seemed to have two main objectives in founding the SEAP Games. The first reason for establishing the SEAP Games might be for national sporting progress to foster improvement in international Games; the second reason was to promote regional solidarity. Regional leaders assumed that existing friendships among member states could be strengthened through the Games and this idea is reflected by an official emblem of six interlocking rings on the SEAP Games flag.

## **(2) Political Background of SEA Games and Regionalism**

After the Second World War, the international political system was in a so-called bipolar new world order as a result of power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. This power struggle produced the formation of political and military pacts – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance (WARSAW) – at an international level.<sup>115</sup> This development of the international system had affected countries, including countries in Southeast Asia, and made them worry about their security. In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of Southeast Asian countries achieved independence from colonial powers. As the statehood of Southeast Asian countries was very young, these countries faced various internal political instabilities, ethnic conflicts, unity problems and weak security and defence systems. These challenges alerted and motivated the Southeast Asian countries to consider forming regional organizations that could promote regional peace and solidarity. The formation process of Southeast Asian regionalism was a process of understanding and cooperation between countries in the region and was begun in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>116</sup> Understanding involves awareness between countries to unite, cooperate and mutually respect each country in the region.

At that time, the SEAP Games was a very significant step for regional community and institutional building. It would be said that this organization lasted longer than the US-

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<sup>114</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, p. 102

<sup>115</sup>Mohamad Faisol Keling, *The development of ASEAN from historical approach*, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 2011, Asian Social Science, Kuala Lumpur, p. 170, [www.ccsenet.org/ass](http://www.ccsenet.org/ass), accessed 20.1.2015

<sup>116</sup>Mohamad Faisol Keling, *The development of ASEAN from historical approach*, p. 170

led institutions such as the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). However, the criteria for the membership of the SEAP Games was not officially defined. However, there were clearly two considerations of membership.<sup>117</sup> The first was based on geographical reality according to the name; all of the member countries were in Southeast Asia. Therefore, Singapore was included in the 1959 games when Cambodia withdrew due to border disputes with Thailand.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Thailand's hegemonic behaviour can be seen also in its attempts to decline the entry of Indonesia and the Philippines in the early 1970s.<sup>119</sup> It may be that Thailand was worried about threats to its dominant position within the grouping.<sup>120</sup> In reality, some concerns like Thai hegemony and disputes between members could weaken the goal of boosting regional amity. At the 8<sup>th</sup> SEAP Games in 1975, the SEAP Federation voted to consider the inclusion of Indonesia and the Philippines in the games and this inclusion was formalized in 1977.<sup>121</sup> With this, the 9<sup>th</sup> edition was called the Southeast Asian Games or SEA Games. From that time the SEAP Games Federation assumed its present name as the SEA Games Federation. The second important objective, which was not revealed but was more political, was to deter the spread of communism in the region.<sup>122</sup> At that time, Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, South Vietnam, and Laos were all strong anti-communist allies of the US, while Myanmar and Cambodia were non-aligned countries. Due to the ideological differences, North Vietnam, which was the only communist country in the region, had never participated in the games.<sup>123</sup> In short, the SEAP Games sought to influence the Southeast Asian region to be a more united and anti-communist region and to upgrade the sporting quality of the member states as well.

### **(3) Strengthening relationship among ASEAN countries through sport**

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<sup>117</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16

<sup>118</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16

<sup>119</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, p. 104

<sup>120</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, p. 104

<sup>121</sup>Culture: Sport; How can ASEAN use sports to strengthen relationships in the region?, Youth Model ASEAN Conference, p.7, <http://www.ymac.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Cultural-Sports.pdf>, accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>122</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16

<sup>123</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16

In fact, this SEA Games is not only politically important but is also culturally significant in the region. It is because sport can penetrate into all walks of life, including ordinary people, athletes, politicians, spectators and fans. These biennial games have promoted interactions among the Southeast Asian peoples for over half a century. In addition, it can uplift the rich cultural features of the Southeast Asian countries. To get this sense, a series of adaptations was made since its inception. The SEA Games flag featured a light blue background, representing "the water that surrounds or the sky that covers the Southeast Asian countries", with six (originally) and now eleven interlocking "bright yellow gold rings - intertwined to denote friendship, brotherly love and unity of purpose".<sup>124</sup> The flame itself symbolized the unity among them as it was lit from torches brought from the six member countries at that time.<sup>125</sup> Like the Olympic procession, after national teams enter the stadium, athletes form ranks on the stadium field and the athlete's oath was read in the opening ceremony.<sup>126</sup> In this way, the SEAP Games became an official platform to indirectly show regional cooperation, as well as the national unity and economic development of the host country.

#### **(4) Nationalism vs. Regionalism**

It is known that the Olympic movement is a universal ideology, which means that sport is not just for recreation and physical fitness but for wider purposes such as improving mutual understanding through cross-border activities. But in the SEA Games, Cambodia's withdrawal in 1959 and complaints about Myanmar's inclusion of some unpopular sports to win more medals in its 2013 SEA Games often show that nationalism conquers regionalism. Myanmar also put nationalism at the forefront in joining the SEAP Games, as other countries did, and focusing on nationalism appeared to carry intense competition into the games. Nevertheless, the SEA Games promote regionalism while preserving nationalism, as intra-regional connections and flows of people are developed because of the games, and tensions derived from nationalism can also be reduced. Currently, there are 11 member states in the SEA Games, after Brunei joined at the 10<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 1977 and Timor Leste in 2007. The SEA Games can encourage the soft power diplomacy of all of the Southeast Asian countries.

<sup>124</sup>Simon Creak, *Sport across Asia: Politics, cultures, and identities*, p. 102

<sup>125</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16

<sup>126</sup>Simon Creak, *From Bangkok to Palembang: The Southeast Asian Games and a cultural approach to studying regionalism*, p. 16



## **(5) ASEAN Ministerial Meetings on Sports (AMMS)**

The establishment of an ASEAN Sectoral Body on Sports was first proposed at the 16<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Ha Noi, Viet Nam in April 2010, to promote more active cooperation in sports among the ASEAN countries.<sup>127</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit held on 7-8 May 2011 in Jakarta, Indonesia endorsed the recommendation to establish an ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports (AMMS).<sup>128</sup> It is recognised that sports is one of the most effective instruments in bringing about greater interaction among the ASEAN peoples.<sup>129</sup> At the 19<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit held on 17 November 2011 in Bali, Indonesia, the ASEAN Leaders reiterated their commitment to support the AMMS and the initiatives to enhance cooperation in sports and sports-related activities in order to promote a healthier lifestyle for citizens of ASEAN Member States.<sup>130</sup>

## **II. Myanmar's Political History**

### **(1) Political and Socioeconomic Background of Myanmar**

Myanmar is a geographically strategic country in Southeast Asia as it is bordering with India and Bangladesh in the Northwest, China in the Northeast, Laos and Thailand in the East and the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea in the West. There are about 135 different ethnic minorities in Myanmar comprising approximately a third of the estimated total population of about 52 million,<sup>131</sup> and occupying more than half of the total land area of approximately 6,77,000 sq km. The majority Burman population constitutes nearly 60 per cent of the total population. Since a new semi-civilian government headed by President Thein Sein came to power in March 2011, Myanmar has been involved in political liberalization programs to keep up with other countries in the region. However, the post-SPDC<sup>132</sup> government has been facing challenges in many issues such as the national peace process and a legitimacy crisis as the ruling military-

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<sup>127</sup> Sport; How can ASEAN use sports to strengthen relationships in the region? , p. 3

<sup>128</sup> Sport; How can ASEAN use sports to strengthen relationships in the region? , p. 3

<sup>129</sup> Sport; How can ASEAN use sports to strengthen relationships in the region? , p. 3

<sup>130</sup> Sport; How can ASEAN use sports to strengthen relationships in the region? , p. 3

<sup>131</sup> UNFPA Press Release: *Myanmar releases population count from census*, 2014, Yangon, [http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/2014/08/30/10473/unfpa\\_press\\_release\\_myanmar\\_releases\\_population\\_count\\_from\\_census/](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/2014/08/30/10473/unfpa_press_release_myanmar_releases_population_count_from_census/) accessed 22.1.2015

<sup>132</sup> The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was the military regime in Myanmar led by Senior General Than Shwe from April 1992 to March 2011.

backed USDP party<sup>133</sup> is extremely unpopular domestically and internationally. Therefore, President Thein Sein's government has been eager to change its reputation by all possible means and it can be assumed that organizing the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 2013 was a gesture towards beginning a new chapter in Myanmar's foreign policy. Myanmar's recent domestic reforms and improved relations with the United States, European Union, Japan, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have opened the door for Myanmar to be an important regional player. After introducing the democratization process, Myanmar's foreign policy developments and its growing regional role will not only have an impact on the country's economic development but also on ASEAN. Therefore, it is necessary to study the country's political history in order to understand why Myanmar needs to build a good image and how it has managed to do so.

## **(2) Post-independence Era**

Myanmar was a British colony for over 100 years and it was also invaded by Japan in World War II, being occupied from 1942 until 1945. Although Myanmar's first constitution established a democratic system after its independence in 1948, the eruption of countrywide insurgency upon the departure of the British finally produced a military coup in 1958. After the assassination in July 1947 of General Aung San, who is called the 'Father of the Union of Burma', the ethnic minorities were in severe armed struggles with subsequent governments for autonomy of their respective regions. Due to the aftermath of the Second World War, and plagued by subsequent communist and ethnic insurrections, post-independence Myanmar faced many serious problems. The two backbones of the economy, natural resource extraction and rice production, declined sharply since the 1950s and 1960s. For a long time governed as part of British India, Myanmar failed to develop strong institutions of governance under colonialism, and the young politicians who took over in the 1950s had little relevant experience. After the military handed power back to a civilian government led by U Nu, Myanmar's domestic affairs were highly unstable again as the country faced separatist movements of ethnic armed groups and communist insurgencies.

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<sup>133</sup>The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is the ruling party of Myanmar which was established in June 2010 for the following first democratic election, and it is mostly comprised of former military personnel.

Such kinds of political crisis finally led to a second military coup, in 1962, that put in place a “Revolutionary Council” to run the country under the leadership of General Ne Win. The country's first democratic constitution was abrogated and all legislative, executive and judicial power placed in General Ne Win's hands. Radical economic and social policies were instituted, including the nationalisation of all industries other than agriculture, with the aim of creating a socialist state isolated from outside influences. The effects on the economy were disastrous, and by 1987 Myanmar was admitted to Least Developed Country (LDC) status by the United Nations.<sup>134</sup> Economic malaise led to widespread political unrest. The trigger was a 1987 demonetisation of the largest currency notes, without any warning or compensation, making three quarters of the currency worthless, wiping out the savings of millions of people.<sup>135</sup> The military regime that took over in 1988 ended the failed socialist experiment and indicated that it would shift to a market economy. The regime began to reverse many socialist economic policies, but it lacked the vision and technocratic skills to successfully keep up with other economically liberal authoritarian states in the region that were achieving high rates of growth.<sup>136</sup>

### **(3) The 8.8.88 Pro-Democracy Uprising**

By mid-1988, food shortages and economic discontent led to mass protests, often spearheaded by monks and students. During the 1988 August uprising, there were calls to the international community for help in ending military rule.<sup>137</sup> Throughout the 1990s the regime –renamed the SPDC in 1997 – continued to feel insecure and vulnerable. As it consolidated its domestic position it became more confident of its ability to resist international pressures, but it was still sensitive to calls for regime change and to other perceived threats to Myanmar's independence and national sovereignty. The thinking behind the move of Myanmar's capital from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw in 2005 is unclear, but one possible explanation is that the new city was considered more secure from civic uprisings as in 1988. Before 1988, perceptions of security in Myanmar were predicated

<sup>134</sup>International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The politics of economic reform*, Asia report No 231, 2012, p. 1 [http:// www. crisisgroup.org/~media/files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/231-myanmar-the-politics-of-economic-reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/231-myanmar-the-politics-of-economic-reform.pdf), accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>135</sup>International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The politics of economic reform*, p. 1

<sup>136</sup>International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The politics of economic reform*, p. 1

<sup>137</sup>Andrew Selth, *Burma and the threat of invasion: Regime fantasy or strategic reality?*, Regional Outlook Paper No. 17, Griffith Asia Institute, 2008, p. 10 <http://www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/Andrew-Selth-Regional-Outlook-17v2.pdf> , accessed 21. 1. 2015

upon the belief that the greatest threat to the continuity and independence of the state came from internal sources. After 1988, external threats became more important, but opinions on their significance were mixed. However, Myanmar does not perceive external threats in the form of hostile states bent on conflict and conquest. The SPDC's primary concern was with external actors who might seek to intervene in the internal affairs of the state to influence the way in which the regime deals with its domestic problems.<sup>138</sup>

Under the SPDC government, Myanmar had been the least willing among the ASEAN states to integrate economically or share information. Additionally, as Myanmar had made little effort to placate the international critics of its domestic situation, its policies had caused ASEAN's relationship with Myanmar to sour. Though Myanmar's actions may seem logical given the country's domestic situation, its failed foreign policy endeavours could effectively harm its international image. Traditionally, Myanmar had been isolationist in its foreign affairs; institutionally, Myanmar was the least capable of the ASEAN countries to deal with change. In part, the political instabilities of Myanmar to establish any kind of effective civilian institutions or develop economically since joining ASEAN has caused the group consternation. The four new members of ASEAN, the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) group, have been trying to catch up in terms of economic development with the rest of the group. Vietnam has been particularly successful in this endeavour, and Myanmar has notably been the sick man of the group. The macroeconomic situation in the country has not improved much recently, because its economic development was hampered by sanctions from the West.

#### **(4) Seven-Point Roadmap to Democracy**

Out of concern for the political and human rights situation after 1988, many (mostly Western) countries suspended bilateral development programs, imposed economic sanctions and put in place restrictions on bilateral and multilateral engagement with the country. Sanctions were intensified after the 1990 elections, which the opposition National League for Democracy won in a landslide; however, the results were never

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<sup>138</sup>Andrew Selth, *Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion*, Contemporary Southeast Asia Vol. 30, No. 3, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2008, p. 379-402, <http://www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/Andrew-Selth-Regional-Outlook-17v2.pdf>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

implemented.<sup>139</sup> Myanmar became increasingly isolated from the West and from the global economy. Its external economic and political relations became skewed towards China and other countries in the region. In May 2002, the international community pressured the United Nations to interfere in Myanmar's affairs.<sup>140</sup> The international community criticized Myanmar's military administration and prompted the military government to take positive approaches to decrease international pressure. This situation influenced SPDC leaders to employ a more positive approach, especially in implementing a democratic system which can be literally accepted and recognized by the international community. In this way, the SPDC's "Seven-Point Roadmap to Democracy" has been the focal point for the struggle for change since it was first announced in August 2003.<sup>141</sup> Like the Revolutionary Council in the 1960s, the military junta had been searching for a way to return to formal civilian rule without relinquishing de facto military control of the government.

The first step of the roadmap was the reconvening of the National Convention, which had been suspended in 1996. The work of the Convention, to finalize the principles for the new constitution, was completed in September 2007, and the third step, the drafting of the new constitution, was completed in February 2008.<sup>142</sup> In May 2008, the SPDC organized a national referendum on the constitution (step 4).<sup>143</sup> Parliamentary elections, scheduled for 7 November 2010, were the fifth step of the SPDC's roadmap to democracy.<sup>144</sup> Convening of parliament was the sixth step and the final step was building a democratic nation by the newly elected parliamentarians. After the formation of the new government with Thein Sein as President at the end of March 2011, few observers were optimistic that genuine reforms would occur. Indeed, in its first 100 days most political activists expressed disappointment with the government's performance. However, the developments that have taken place since July 2011 have taken many by surprise. A series of reforms such as liberalization of the press, releasing of thousands of

<sup>139</sup>International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The politics of economic reform*, p.2

<sup>140</sup>Mohamad Faisol Keling, *A historical approach to Myanmar's democratic process*, Journal of Asia Pacific Studies, Vol 1, No. 2, 2010, p. 143 <http://www.japss.org/upload/2.%20keling.pdf>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>141</sup>Mohamad Faisol Keling, *A historical approach to Myanmar's democratic process*, p. 144

<sup>142</sup>David Arnott, *Burma/Myanmar: How to read the generals' "roadmap" – a brief guide with links to the literature*, 2008, p. 1- 13 <https://www.scribd.com/doc/2250232/7-Step-Road-Map-of-Burmese-Regime>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>143</sup>David Arnott, *Burma/Myanmar: How to read the generals' "roadmap" – a brief guide with links to the literature*, 2008, p. 1- 13

<sup>144</sup>David Arnott, *Burma/Myanmar: How to read the generals' "roadmap" – a brief guide with links to the literature*, 2008, p. 1- 13

political prisoners and initiation of a political dialogue with opposition political forces impressed not only the people of Myanmar but also the international community. Although opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi had been released from nearly eight years of detention just after the elections, her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), rejected the entire electoral process as illegitimate, boycotting the elections. However, thirty-seven other political parties contested the elections, including a group of former NLD members.<sup>145</sup> The government abolished laws that led to the NLD's boycott, and in April 2012 by-elections, Aung San Suu Kyi's party won forty-three of forty-five seats up for election.<sup>146</sup> Although the small parliamentary victory was expected to have only a slight effect, it served as a symbolic victory for democracy.

### **(5) Political liberalization before the 2013 SEA Games**

Beginning from when the new civilian government came into office in March 2011, the government focused on building trust and confidence between the ruler and the ruled. To achieve this objective, the top leadership has embarked on a course of limited political liberalization. The new president, Thein Sein, a former military general and a member of the military junta (SPDC), initiated some major reforms before the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games. Some of these reforms have changed the country dramatically. The government relaxed internal censorship laws and unblocked the websites of exile radio and TV stations (for example, Democratic Voice of Burma, Voice of America).<sup>147</sup> The consequence is a much freer press, which now also covers the activities of the NLD. The government has also established the independent National Human Rights Commission and passed new legislation that allows for labour unions and the right to strike.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, the president has signed many peace agreements with ethnic armed groups that have been fighting the central government for decades.

<sup>145</sup>Morten B. Pedersen, *The Politics of Burma's "Democratic" Transition: Prospects for change and options for democrats*, Vol. 43:1, Critical Asian studies, Routledge, 2011, p. 50 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14672715.2011.537851>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>146</sup>Jayshree Bajoria, *Understanding Myanmar*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/human-rights/understanding-myanmar/p14385>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>147</sup>Michal Lubina, *The Burmese thaw: Regime's new lifting or a transformation of political system?*, p. 450

<sup>148</sup>Michal Lubina, *The Burmese thaw: Regime's new lifting or a transformation of political system?*, p. 450

## Chapter 5

### The 2013 SEA Games and Myanmar

#### Sports History of Myanmar

Myanmar's sports history shows that Myanmar was never in the list of famous sporting countries in the world or in Asia. However, it is undeniable that Myanmar was once qualified enough at the Asia level. Myanmar stepped into the international sport arena for the first time as an independent state and participated in the 14<sup>th</sup> Olympics held in London in 1948.<sup>149</sup> Myanmar sent athletes to participate in the Sprints and Boxing competitions.<sup>150</sup> In the flyweight competition, a Myanmar boxer defeated a Canadian Boxer, which was the first ever victory of an athlete representing Myanmar after gaining independence.<sup>151</sup> The flag of Myanmar was hoisted on equal grounds with the independent nations' flags in the capital of England, London. Even though Myanmar athletes did not win awards, it was Myanmar's first ever try at Olympics. That victory achieved in England, the land of the former colonizers, stimulated national pride and patriotism in Myanmar nationals.<sup>152</sup> U Phoe Kyar, a national educational minister and famous Myanmar (then Burma) writer, wrote a poem about Myanmar's achievement in sports and the awakening of Myanmar, inspired by the boxing victory at the Olympics.<sup>153</sup>

Under direct military rule, Myanmar was the most neglected nation in Southeast Asian sports history. Before that, Myanmar was a potential developing country with the region's best education system and high living standards that could compete with its neighbours. Myanmar was also a major political player in the region. After the 1962 coup, since General Ne Win practiced socialism, Myanmar's economy declined, which also affected the country's sporting activities.<sup>154</sup> In the 1960s Myanmar was at the top of the SEAP Games medal table twice, but in 1979, it only managed a third place on the

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<sup>149</sup>This information comes from a Burmese article titled *Thu toe myin san say chin hla par thi* (Let the new generation see the victories in the past) written by a famous sport journalist Khin Maung Htwe in the Irrawaddy Blog (Burmese Section), 2013, <http://burma.irrawaddy.org/sport-keyword/2013/02/28/34666.html>, accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>150</sup>*Thu toe myin san say chin hla par thi* (Let the new generation see the victories in the past)

<sup>151</sup>*Thu toe myin san say chin hla par thi* (Let the new generation see the victories in the past)

<sup>152</sup>*Thu toe myin san say chin hla par thi* (Let the new generation see the victories in the past)

<sup>153</sup>*Thu toe myin san say chin hla par thi* (Let the new generation see the victories in the past)

<sup>154</sup> Simon Roughneen, *Could the SEA Games revitalize Myanmar sport?*, The Irrawaddy Blog (English Section), 2013, <http://m.irrawaddy.org/magazine/sea-games-revitalize-myanmar-sport.html>, accessed 21. 1. 2015



medal-winners ranking. Since the SEAP Games were last held in Myanmar in 1969, the country had fallen behind neighbours such as Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and, more recently, Vietnam, who all have done well at the SEA Games. Therefore, Nay Pyi Taw's hosting of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games was very meaningful for Myanmar: to improve Myanmar's international reputation, national economy, domestic reconciliation efforts, and potentially, its sports standard. For being a failed state for a long time, Myanmar assumed the SEA Games as an opportunity to demonstrate its reformist efforts and as a stepping stone to re-engage with the international community. The new leaders thought that sponsoring the Games could contribute not only to raising their international profile but also to welcoming greater economic opportunities for Myanmar.

### **Why the Myanmar government wanted to host the 2013 SEA Games**

The Myanmar leaders decided to host the SEA Games for both tangible and intangible objectives. For intangible benefits, the government assumed the SEA Games was a good opportunity to change misperceptions of Myanmar that are common in the international community and widely mentioned in the foreign media. The common misperceptions about contemporary Myanmar may be conceptualized as follows:

- Perception of better knowing the country as Burma<sup>155</sup> rather than its official name, Myanmar, which can give the country a low-profile and less recognition among the global community. Therefore the new government decided to try to restore the country's status that it deserves.
- A commonly held view of an oppressive country where the human rights situation remains poor
- As a failed state which has no peaceful domestic environment and has no capacity to increase its international participation because of ongoing ethnic conflicts and religious violence
- As a fragile nation in transition without prevalence of law and order
- Criticism for excessive Chinese dominance in the country
- Assumption as an underdeveloped country with extreme poverty, insufficient social welfare system and infrastructures

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<sup>155</sup>The State Law and Order Restoration Council changed the country's name officially from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, and the change was recognized by the United Nations, and by countries such as France and Japan, but not by most Western countries, such as UK and US.



- An extremely risky country for economic investments
- Perception that ongoing political and socio-economic reforms are reversible at any time.

Some of the stereotypes and negative images of Myanmar listed above can be reduced by hosting the SEA Games while the country is transforming into a democratic and open society.

By hosting the SEA Games, the Myanmar government can get a number of tangible political and economic benefits, such as:

- asserting Myanmar's achievement of, or returning to, international respectability and normal membership in the regional as well as global community
- increasing legitimacy of its ruling military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) party, gaining a greater political credibility in the ASEAN and Western community, especially from the U.S.
- obtaining financial assistance and loans from international financial institutions like the World Bank or IMF
- receiving more foreign direct investments and aid
- removing the embargos and sanctions imposed by Western countries against Myanmar and lifting the resolutions about the human rights situation in Myanmar adopted by the UN Human Rights Council.

#### **(i) Economic factor**

One of the ambitions of Myanmar's democratic transition is to foster its economic development through foreign investments. The pace of ongoing democratic transition and a market-based economy in President Thein Sein's term has been facing many challenges. Although Myanmar has made some important initial moves to promote its economy, it is still one of the poorest of the ASEAN member states. On the other hand, the ASEAN Economic Community in the region is deeply concerned about the looming initiation of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015.<sup>156</sup> However, the four least

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<sup>156</sup>Lex Rieffel, *The Myanmar economy: Tough choices*, Global economy & Development working paper 51, The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2012, p. 14, <http://www.brookings.edu/~/>

developed member states –Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam –are worried that the domestic companies cannot compete with duty-free imports from other member countries, resulting in economic failures and social consequences.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, Myanmar's parliament enacted a new Foreign Investment Law in 2012 after repealing the outdated 1988 one.<sup>158</sup> The new government also sponsored and supported economic related workshops and conferences, such as the World Economic Forum on East Asia in 2013, to show economic opportunities in Myanmar.<sup>159</sup> However, continuing insurgencies in the country, communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists, and weakness in infrastructures are unfavourable conditions for FDI and surely hinder foreign firms from making investments in Myanmar. Some foreign firms believe that investing in Myanmar is too soon and some international economists have concluded that business in Myanmar is risky. Therefore, Myanmar's new government has given much attention to changing Myanmar's international image after democratization.

Thein Sein's administration perceived that in order to attract international aid, trade and investment, promotion of Myanmar's international standing and reputation was required. Therefore, hosting the SEA Games may be one of the methods which might enhance its soft power efforts in the international community. The 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in Myanmar can be regarded as a sign of how much has changed. The Games were part of efforts by the government to convince the world that it is open for business, following a half-century of military rule and isolation. Hosting the biggest regional sporting event reflects the new face of Myanmar as an active member in the regional and international community. Besides, it was a test for the country's domestic stability and rule of law, as politicians and economists in the region closely watched Myanmar's capability for organizing the games smoothly. Furthermore, as the 2013 SEA Games was held during the peak travel season, it helped boost international tourist arrivals and brought foreign investment opportunities for hotels and the tourism sector. In this way, the new government invited foreign companies, international institutions and businessmen to invest in Myanmar's economy. Now Myanmar people can enjoy more job opportunities and better living

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[media/research/files/papers/2012/9/myanmar%20economy%20rieffel/09%20myanmar%20economy%20rieffel.pdf](http://media/research/files/papers/2012/9/myanmar%20economy%20rieffel/09%20myanmar%20economy%20rieffel.pdf), accessed 22.1.2015

<sup>157</sup> Lex Rieffel, *The Myanmar economy: Tough choices*, p. 14

<sup>158</sup> Lex Rieffel, *The Myanmar economy: Tough choices*, p. 14-15

<sup>159</sup> World Economic Forum on East Asia 2013, <http://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-east-asia>, accessed 22.1.2015

standards as fruits of reform programs and it can help strengthen the country's democratization process.

## **(ii) Sanctions and Foreign Aid**

Myanmar's international trade has been restricted for decades by some administrative measures and Western sanctions. Because of financial sanctions imposed by Western countries, it did not allow businessmen and investors to establish businesses in Myanmar. Investing in Myanmar was one of the first economic sanctions included in the economic measures introduced bilaterally by the US Congress in 1997.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, Thein Sein's government has been exploring and adopting a number of measures to lift or reduce trade restrictions, and creating favourable domestic political conditions for Western countries. In response to the reform process initiated by Thein Sein's government, the US responded with a re-engaging policy by relaxing most of its sanctions and restoring a more normal policy of encouraging trade and investment in Myanmar. The European Union also lifted economic sanctions against Myanmar in 2012.<sup>161</sup> Relaxing the sanctions would enable the country's businessmen to operate their businesses more widely, increasing trade and investments and creating more job opportunities. Being a resource-rich country and a potential economic frontier in Southeast Asia, Myanmar is quite an attractive destination for foreign investors. So Myanmar just needs to prove to the international community that it is a politically stable country with rule of law. This was the main theme of the 2013 Nay Pyi Taw SEA Games and it could contribute to strengthening the political and economic reforms of the new government.

Although Myanmar has currently one of the lowest per capita incomes and highest poverty rates in Southeast Asia, the country has great potential for economic development if supported by the right policies and institutions.<sup>162</sup> However, Myanmar has a wide range of development challenges. In view of Myanmar's development needs,

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<sup>160</sup>Trevor Wilson, *The politics of investing in Myanmar*, Australia-Myanmar Chamber of commerce, p. 1 <http://www.a-mcc.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/130623-Investing-in-Myanmar-Trevor-Wilson.pdf> , accessed 22. 1. 2015

<sup>161</sup>Thomas Fuller & Paul Geitner, *European Union suspends most Myanmar sanctions*, The New York Times, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/24/world/asia/eu-suspends-sanctions-on-myanmar.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/24/world/asia/eu-suspends-sanctions-on-myanmar.html?_r=0) , accessed 22. 1. 2015

<sup>162</sup>Yoon Ah Oh & Nari Park, *Myanmar: Development Challenges and Opportunities*, ODA Policy Reports 13-07, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, [http://www.kiep.go.kr/eng/publications/pub08\\_view.jsp?no=185829&sCate=010000](http://www.kiep.go.kr/eng/publications/pub08_view.jsp?no=185829&sCate=010000) , accessed 23.1.2015

industrialization and rural development have been chosen as the principal tools to reduce poverty and increase standards of living. To support these efforts, massive investments are needed in infrastructure and human capital. Thus Myanmar desperately needs foreign aid to make a greater impact in reducing poverty and creating conditions to encourage economic growth and prosperity. The new government is fully committed to finally making the long-standing goal of building a modern and developed nation, while reality has made clear that it cannot succeed without foreign aid, trade and investment. However, foreign aid to Myanmar is still small relative to its development needs. Foreign support to Myanmar is necessary to meet the major development goals as identified by the Myanmar government and help strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, improve economic governance and advance the rule of law. Foreign assistance may also promote the internal peace process and can help to build an environment conducive to successful peace negotiations between Myanmar's government, military, ethnic armed groups and affected communities. In this way Myanmar's democratization process can be strengthened.

### (iii) National Pride and Promoting Image

Most countries in the world recognize the value of developing a good image of themselves with respect to audiences in other countries and make an effort to manage that image in a favourable way.<sup>163</sup> National image is a comprehensive reflection of one nation's influence of soft power and it is a crucial factor in international relations.<sup>164</sup> Sport can assist in this claim, especially on the world stage.<sup>165</sup> Governments will take advantage of prestigious sporting occasions to promote their country on the international stage. Despite its dramatic political changes from authoritarianism to a democratic society since 2011, Myanmar still feels misjudged by the international community because of its previous xenophobic and self-reliant policies.<sup>166</sup> In the spirit of opening-up, Nay Pyi Taw keenly uses avenues that promote global interaction, friendship and

<sup>163</sup>Jiajun Yao, *The effect of hosting the Olympics on national image: An analysis of US newspaper coverage of host countries with reputation problems*, Graduate Theses and Dissertations. Paper 11658, Iowa State University, 2010, p. 14 <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>, accessed 23.1.2015

<sup>164</sup>Xue Liang, *China's Dilemma in its Soft Power: How to Build Its National Image?*, Master Thesis, Aalborg University, 2012, p. 9 [http://www.google.com.mm/?gws\\_rd=cr&ei=lpO3UrXDKImIrOfQ8YDQDw#q=China+%E2%80%99s+Dilemma+in+its+Soft+Power:How+to+Build+Its+National+Image%3F](http://www.google.com.mm/?gws_rd=cr&ei=lpO3UrXDKImIrOfQ8YDQDw#q=China+%E2%80%99s+Dilemma+in+its+Soft+Power:How+to+Build+Its+National+Image%3F), accessed 21.1.2015

<sup>165</sup>Jon Gemmell, *The Politics of South Africa Cricket*, p. 28

<sup>166</sup>*Myanmar: The military regime's view of the world*, ICG Asia Report N 28, International Crisis Group, 2001, p. 5 [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/\\_Myanmar%20The%20Military%20Regimes%20View%20of%20the%20World.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/_Myanmar%20The%20Military%20Regimes%20View%20of%20the%20World.ashx), accessed 23.1.2015

solidarity, including hosting the 2013 SEA Games. Besides, sport can assist internal national cohesion by providing a focus for people from different social, racial and religious backgrounds. Sport can change peoples' lives in so many ways, but it can also change the perspective of whole communities and develop their sense of belonging.<sup>167</sup> By sponsoring the region's biggest sport tournament successfully, it is possible to yield intangible benefits such as an enhanced sense of national pride and prestige of the Myanmar people. The SEA Games, successfully run, would give the nation something to celebrate. After the Games, Myanmar ordinary citizens could proudly say the words, "That's Myanmar". They had been swallowing those words for decades through an oppressive era. Reputation has always mattered in world politics, but the role of credibility becomes an even more important power resource.<sup>168</sup> While Myanmar needs to improve its external image in order to attract international support for its reform programs, national pride is an important element behind the shift in foreign policy and the broader reform process. Therefore, successful completion of the 2013 SEA Games provided a much-needed boost to the country's self-image, and set the stage for the even greater challenges Myanmar is expected to face in the future, as it raises its international profile.

#### (iv) Political Legitimacy

Political legitimacy can be defined as the degree to which a state is viewed and treated by citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power.<sup>169</sup> Simply put, the greater the acceptance by the people of this right to rule, the higher is the level of political legitimacy enjoyed by the ruler.<sup>170</sup> For new democracies, a high level of political trust will facilitate the consolidation process while a low level of it will contribute to protracted political instability or the return to authoritarianism.<sup>171</sup> If the new civilian government of Myanmar is perceived as legitimate at home and abroad, then the government can improve the consolidation process in the country and promote its political and socioeconomic goals without many difficulties. Conversely, if the

<sup>167</sup>David Miliband, *The power of sport: Sport and cohesion toolkit*, p.3

<sup>168</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, p. 100

<sup>169</sup> Lynn White, *Legitimacy: Ambiguities of political success or failure in East and Southeast Asia*, Vol.1 of Series on contemporary China, World Scientific, Singapore, 2005, p.31 p. 1-316

<sup>170</sup>Yongnian Zheng & Liang Fook Lye, *Political Legitimacy in Reform China: Between Economic Performance and Democratization*. 2005, p. 183-214 [http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/9789812569349\\_0006](http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/9789812569349_0006), accessed 23.1.2015

<sup>171</sup>Zhengxu Wang, *Political Trust in China: Forms and Causes*, 2005, p. 113-139, [http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/9789812569349\\_0004](http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/9789812569349_0004), accessed 23.1.2015

government was not recognized sufficiently by its domestic population and international community, its right to rule will be constantly challenged and more political freedom will be sought through resistance, rebellion and even revolution. Therefore the once-pariah state portrayed Nay Pyi Taw's 2013 SEA Games as a regional coming-out party, just as the 2008 Beijing Olympics did. Externally, by improving international relations especially with the West and United States, the Myanmar government achieved the goal of legitimacy it had long sought. Until the April 2012 by-elections, the U.S. and other western nations still condemned the results of the 2010 general elections, saying they did not reflect the opinion of the people.<sup>172</sup> But in the 2012 visit to the country the U.S President, Obama, said, "I stand here with confidence that something is happening in this country that cannot be reversed"<sup>173</sup> as a token of acknowledging the new government's legitimacy. Therefore, in a time of uncertainties and changes, the successful 2013 SEA Games acted as an agent for further national reconciliation and political legitimacy for the new government and it aimed to show its legitimate power as a democratic regime.

### **Preparations for the SEA Games**

On 31 May 2010, the Southeast Asian Games Federation Council met in Jakarta and unanimously agreed to award the Myanmar Olympic Committee the right to host the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the most popular and important sports competition in the region.<sup>174</sup> That decision indicates that the newly formed government had won acceptance and trust, at least to some extent, among its counterparts. As a matter of fact, hosting an international sporting competition such as the SEA Games is not an easy task for a least developed country like Myanmar, which was facing many challenges and difficulties in its infancy as a democracy. The Vice-President, Nyan Htun, himself had undertaken a position as a patron of the leading committee for the Games preparations. He formed sub-committees dividing respective duties to prepare for a bid to host the Games. When Myanmar was known to be awarded the opportunity to host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, it did not have good enough quality stadiums, gymnasiums, sport grounds and facilities to hold such an international sporting competition. From the beginning of January 2010 to October 2013,

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<sup>172</sup> Kyi Thar Tun, *Burma's changing foreign relations*, Educational Initiatives, p.1-6, <http://www.eduinitiatives.org/reports/burmas-changing-foreign-relations>, accessed 23.1.2015

<sup>173</sup> Aung Tun, *What Obama can do on his second Myanmar visit*, The Diplomat, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/what-obama-can-do-on-his-second-myanmar-visit/>, accessed 23.1.2015

<sup>174</sup> *2013 Southeast Asia Games*, Sports Festivals in Burma, 2013, <http://www.snipview.com/q/2013%20Southeast%20Asian%20Games>, accessed 21. 1. 2014

gymnasiums, stadiums, sport grounds, swimming pools and other facilities were built or renovated in the capital of Nay Pyi Taw, and in Ngwe Saung, Mandalay and Yangon.<sup>175</sup> The SEA Games Federation supervised and guided completion of the sport grounds and facilities between the end of 2012 and January 2013, but they were not entirely finished till June 2013.<sup>176</sup> Many of the SEA Games facilities, including the 30,000-seat Wunna Theikdi Stadium in Nay Pyi Taw, which is said to be the biggest sporting venue in Myanmar, were built by the Myanmar tycoon Zaw Zaw, Chairman of Myanmar's Football Federation.<sup>177</sup> In accord with the motto of the Games: “Clean, Green and Friendship”, each and every sports event was held with the help of sporting facilities of international standards, and with sports equipment meeting accepted standards.<sup>178</sup>

On 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012, the Vice-President addressed the leading committee and 13 subcommittees which had been founded to ensure success in hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games.<sup>179</sup> He called on efforts for timely construction of sports grounds, gymnasiums and an athletes village to receive the inspection of international sport federations and enable Myanmar athletes to train in advance. He called for the systematic recruitment of prospective athletes of younger generation and for them to be trained under foreign and local coaches. He stressed the need for organizing an adequate number of internationally recognized certificate holder referees and juries, and for supervision of them to become qualified referees and juries so as to ensure fair play in the sports competitions. He underscored the importance of training volunteers to be fluent in English and to be sociable, with vivid hospitality of Myanmar people, calling for a reflection of the culture and national prestige of Myanmar in the opening and closing ceremonies. He said that Myanmar had achieved eighth place at the previous 26<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, as it had played in a foreign country, but that this time, as the host, Myanmar should achieve a considerable victory. He also encouraged those involved, saying that the government is supporting victory and that the sports federation and athletes should work heart and soul. He urged everyone to host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games impressively and to try to reach Asian and international level, and said that courtesy, hospitability and the cleanliness of the country

<sup>175</sup> It comes from the Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014, p. 14 p. 1-90

<sup>176</sup> Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 14

<sup>177</sup> Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 15

<sup>178</sup> Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 25

<sup>179</sup> This information comes from a speech addressed by Vice President of Myanmar, Dr. Sai Mauk Kham at third meeting of Leading Committee for Preparation of XXVII SEA Games on 28. 2. 2012. [http://en.myasoc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=3&Itemid=216&limitstart=40](http://en.myasoc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=3&Itemid=216&limitstart=40), accessed 21.1.2015



must be displayed. Finally, he called for working cooperatively among the steering committee, sports federation and officials.

### **Sports choices raised concerns**

The history of the SEA Game shows that the host country usually does well, often topping the medals tables or finishing in the top three. The host's haul is often abetted by some sharp pre-games arrangements, such as pushing for the inclusion of local sports that other countries are not familiar with.<sup>180</sup> It seems Myanmar did not want to break with history, as it was itself accused by other countries of trying to arrange the event roster to suit itself. In the 2013 Nay Pyi Taw SEA Games, the main complaint was that Myanmar dropped some popular sports, such as bowling, tennis, beach volleyball, gymnastics and field hockey, and instead included some local sports in the games.<sup>181</sup> Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand had sent separate letters to Myanmar protesting the way the event was being organized.<sup>182</sup> Allegations made by other members were that the SEA Games regulations allowed for eight traditional sports, but that Myanmar had put 17 local sports and non-Olympic games on the roster, stacking the competition with obscure sports that Myanmar's athletes had a good chance of winning.<sup>183</sup> The Singaporeans were lamenting the loss of water polo, in which they did well, and the Philippines Olympic Committee threatened to send a threadbare delegation if the roster was not changed.<sup>184</sup> Malaysia and Indonesia, which had strong badminton traditions, were urging that the sport be reinstated.<sup>185</sup> *The Nation*, a Thai daily newspaper, reported that Myanmar had also dropped beach volleyball because "the sport's outfits were not suitable for Myanmar culture."<sup>186</sup> However, the Myanmar side defended itself, saying that every host country had the authority to decide which competitions should be included and excluded, and that at previous games Myanmar's requests "were

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<sup>180</sup> Simon Roughneen, *Could the SEA Games revitalize Myanmar sport?*

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*, The New York Times, 27. 1. 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/28/sports/28iht-games28.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/28/sports/28iht-games28.html?_r=0), accessed 21. 1. 2015

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*

<sup>183</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*

<sup>184</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*

<sup>185</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*

<sup>186</sup> *Myanmar needs to remember Games is an ASEAN event*, 28.1.2015, The Cambodia Herald, <http://www.thecambodiapherald.com/opinion/myanmar-needs-to-remember-games-is-an-asean-event-640>, accessed 21. 1. 2015



ignored.”<sup>187</sup>In the end, despite some complaints, the choice of sports at the 2013 SEA Games remained unchanged.

Of course, this is not the first time that host nations faced questions over their decision to select sports for the competition. Usually, the host nation chooses local sports to raise their chance of collecting more gold medals to buoy national feeling.<sup>188</sup> But the omission of popular sports from the event can affect the region's opportunity to elevate the games to a world-class level.<sup>189</sup> If top athletes lose the chance to practice their skills at a regional level they can lose an essential element for their preparations for competitive international championships. The inclusion of sports is relevant to the question over what constitutes a regional sports event. Like any international event with Olympic sports, the SEA Games is the biggest regional event and is expected to cover a wide range of popular sports to make the games appealing and popular for international fans. This is not to mention the fact that the games must be fair and adhere to desirable sportsmanship. The selection of sports can be justified by many reasons. For instance, some sports may be considered elitist and not widely popular, such as golf, equestrian events or sailing. Or, professional tennis players may prefer to play in commercial tournaments to fetch more lucrative deals from sponsors. But the SEA Games event is supposed to reach out to people in the region to inspire ASEAN people and the future generation, unlike other tournaments in which accessibility may be limited due to commercial deals. Therefore, the existence and inclusion of games is essential to raise the standard of the games, to inspire people, and to make the Games appealing for 600 million spectators. After all, the ultimate goal of the event is to celebrate humanity, discipline, determination, tolerance and excellence in line with the SEA Games' goal to celebrate the unity and diversity of people in this region in which we have a shared vision and future.

### **Opening Ceremony**

The 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games opened spectacularly in Myanmar's newly formed capital, Nay Pyi Taw, on the date of December 11, 2013.<sup>190</sup>The Opening Ceremony was

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<sup>187</sup> Thomas Fuller, *In Myanmar, sports choices raise concerns*

<sup>188</sup> *Myanmar needs to remember Games is an ASEAN event*

<sup>189</sup> *Myanmar needs to remember Games is an ASEAN event*

<sup>190</sup> Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 1 This date – 12.12.13 – was deliberately chosen as it was considered auspicious.

filled with meaning and grandeur for the host nation and the stadium, which was packed, was adorned with flags from the 11 SEA Games member countries. It was begun with pre-launch entertainment where vocalists entertained audiences with songs and a series of cultural programmes on the giant digital TV screen was shown.<sup>191</sup> After more spectacular fireworks at 6:00 pm, a three-hour show began with a Myanmar traditional orchestra chanting the welcoming songs. With a digital carpet (i.e, a giant TV screen) covering the stadium field, almost half of the stadium was converted into a monument stage piled with LED screens and speaker-stacks. The sound and lights of the opening ceremony blasted away the country's recent religious violence and ethnic conflicts happening across the country – at least momentarily. Then, the mood turned from festive to solemn, to dignified, as of the moment when President Thein Sein and his wife arrived at the event. The presence and involvement of the President and Ministers in the lead-up to the games and at the events reinforced that the SEA Games were a state event. Together with guests, officials and athletes, totalling around 30,000 people, President Thein Sein and his wife, Laotian President Mr. Choummaly Sayasone and his wife, the Chinese Vice-Premier and the Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Brunei, ministers of the People's Republic of China and ASEAN member countries, and the president of the Asia Olympic Council attended the ceremony.<sup>192</sup>

On behalf of the President, Patron of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games Leading Committee Vice-President U Nyan Tun made an opening address. He said "Myanmar takes pride for hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games again after a 44-year pause since the host for 2<sup>nd</sup> SEAP Games in 1961 and 5<sup>th</sup> SEAP Games in 1969. All global countries know that sport is a more effective diplomatic channel and the best way to showcase country's high integrity. The South East Asian Games Federation (SEAGF) holds the SEA Games with the aims of having regional amity, healthy and fitness, love of sports and sport spirits among the regional countries. The motto of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games is “Green, Clean and Friendship”. Myanmar is making progress on her democratic path. But this has not been an easy task. In the ongoing reform process, Myanmar is facing challenges as well as opportunities. Within a short time, the people of Myanmar have been able to bring about amazing changes. After a civilian government led by President U Thein Sein taking office about 3

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<sup>191</sup>Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 23

<sup>192</sup>Colourful opening ceremony of 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games in Nay Pyi Taw, *The New Light of Myanmar*, 12. 12. 2013, p. 1 p. 1-16

years ago, the Parliament, the Judiciary, the Armed forces, the national races, political parties, civil societies and the people at large have been taking tangible irreversible steps in the democratic transition and reform process. Leaving behind a system of authoritarian government wherein the administrative, legislative and judicial powers were centralized, it has now been able to put in place a democratic government and a strong, viable parliament following a practice of check and balance. Myanmar is now ushering in a new era by enhancing its political legitimacy. As a member in the family of Southeast Asian nations, Myanmar will be participating more actively in the regional affairs".<sup>193</sup>

After that, he proclaimed the announcement of the opening of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, and then more fireworks displays were made. Bearers brought the Myanmar national flag and the SEA Games flag into the arena and then the Myanmar national anthem was sung throughout the stadium, and the flags were raised high above the stadium. An athlete and a SEA Games official took the oath and a torch relay was passed through the hands of six former Myanmar athletes. Then, a Myanmar archer lit up the Games cauldron by shooting an arrow into it, followed by another explosion of colourful fireworks that lit up the night. Vice President U Nyan Htun grasped the opportunity at this crucial time in the history of Myanmar by giving a political message to the world.

Then the showcase event restarted. It included three sectors – fine arts by the Ministry of Culture, Myanmar Director's Zin Yaw Maung Maung's script and photo display, and technical assistance by the China Art and Entertainment Group (CAEG).<sup>194</sup> Using a mix of traditional culture and high technology, the show was both beautiful and awesome and the performance used form as well as content to display Myanmar's greatness. The principal theme song was "Colourful Garden", referring to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar as a multi-ethnic nation which is composed of more than one hundred national races, living together in Myanmar sharing both joy and sorrow.<sup>195</sup> In this song, many performers represented nationalities of Myanmar in their respective colourful costumes, portraying the country's beauty, unity and peaceful coexistence, and its sustainability on this motherland. This program was to show that the Myanmar people warmly welcome with open arms and congratulate all the athletes from the various Southeast Asian

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<sup>193</sup> "Colourful Opening Ceremony of 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games in Nay Pyi Taw", *The New Light of Myanmar*, 12.12.2013, p. 1,9,16

<sup>194</sup> *SEA Games' opening/closing ceremonies to feature Myanmar, ASEAN cultures*, Shanghai Daily.com, 9.12.2013, [http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article\\_xinhua.aspx?id=185947](http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article_xinhua.aspx?id=185947), accessed 22. 1.2015

<sup>195</sup> Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 24

countries who have come to Myanmar to participate in this occasion of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games. Yet Southeast Asian traditions of political performances surely helped create a captive audience for this kind of display. The opening and closing ceremonies of the 2013 SEA Games used 8,000 people for its performances.<sup>196</sup> One of the great performances that reflects Myanmar's traditional culture is the Kyaukse Elephant Dance. The Kyaukse Elephant Dance features two men taking their places inside a huge elephant figure made from bamboo and paper, dancing to the rhythmic beat of drums. This was performed at the opening ceremony of the SEA Games, chosen in accordance with the instructions of the President's Office.<sup>197</sup> A total of 80 elephant dancers from Kyaukse<sup>198</sup> – a small town in the Mandalay region – took part in the opening ceremony. It was a chance to reveal Myanmar's traditional elephant dancing at an international level occasion.

### **Closing Ceremony**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2013, the closing ceremony of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games was held at Wunna Theikdi Stadium.<sup>199</sup> Before the closing ceremony, celebrities entertained the audience with their performances and songs, and the State Band and athletes took their positions in alphabetical order of the sports games. Four performances were presented, with the first directly connected to the SEA Games and to Myanmar tradition, celebrating the sport of Chinlone<sup>200</sup>, which is believed to have first appeared in Myanmar in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The Closing Ceremony then paid homage to the country's 135 officially recognized ethnic races and the diversity of the country, with the performance of "Everlasting Myanmar", depicting the rich diversity of the population, and simultaneously the many obstacles on the path to realizing a new, peaceful and prosperous modern state. After that, the presenters announced the numbers of participant athletes and the medals for the 33 kinds of sports. Medal winners of every participating country were then paraded onto the stadium floor to the beat of martial music – chants of "Myanmar" ringing through the stadium. With the procession complete, Vice President U Nyan Htun officially announced the 27th SEA Games concluded, as strobe lights searched the sky and a further display of fireworks exploded over the stadium. The first

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<sup>196</sup>Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 25

<sup>197</sup>Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 25

<sup>198</sup>Kyaukse is a small town in Mandalay Region, Myanmar. It is the birthplace of former Military leader, Senior General Than Shwe and it is famous for the *Kyaukse Elephant Dance*.

<sup>199</sup>Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 25

<sup>200</sup>Chinlone is a cane ball composed of wicker-work. Chinlone is a Myanmar's traditional sport, and it is a combination of sport and dance, a team sport with no opposing team.

SEA Games in Myanmar in 44 years was then finally concluded with one last volley of fireworks and the main torch was slowly put out. Then a round of musical performances was followed by the official handing over of SEA Games responsibilities to Singapore, host of the 2015 Southeast Asian Games.

At the opening and closing ceremonies of the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, athletes, volunteers, the audience and even local residents all sent one clear message: that the Myanmar people are friendly and peaceful like others in the world. It can be assumed that the opening and closing ceremonies of Myanmar's SEA Games can reflect the political direction of the ongoing reforms taking place in the country. The 27<sup>th</sup>SEA Games opening and closing ceremonies could effectively feature Myanmar's traditional culture and ASEAN countries' culture on a grand scale. These ceremonies can tell much about how Myanmar sees itself, and how it sees the world. The Games proved not only the existence of the Myanmar model, but also the success of its top-down democratic revolutionary process. The fantastic performance in the opening and closing ceremonies shows how we need to shift the focus of our analysis from the material measures of hard power to the symbolic politics of soft power.

### **China's assistance in hosting the SEA Games**

While Myanmar has actively sought to diversify its external relations in an attempt to become less dependent on Chinese government, China has used both hard and soft tools of power in Myanmar to retain its favoured position. Though China has largely maintained a policy of “non-interference” in the internal affairs of another country, China intervened enthusiastically in peace negotiations between Myanmar's central government and the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) in 2013 to protect its national and economic interests in Kachin State. Chinese arms dealers provided the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the largest and best equipped insurgency in Myanmar-China border, with modern weaponries. On the other side of the coin, Beijing reportedly offered Myanmar nearly US\$33 million in technical assistance for its SEA Games, including for the opening and closing ceremonies, while accepting Myanmar athletes for training on Chinese soil.<sup>201</sup> It is known that assisting Myanmar in organizing the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games was a very important project for the Chinese government as an attempt to strengthen the

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<sup>201</sup> Aung Zaw, *At SEA Games stage, China casts long shadow*, The Irrawaddy, 12.12.2013, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/commentary/sea-games-stage-china-casts-long-shadow.html>, accessed 22.1. 2015

two countries' relationship and to secure the business concessions in this resource rich country. While China's Vice Premier Liu Yandong paid a trip to the game's opening ceremony, she called on Myanmar to maintain a neighbourly policy between the two countries and ensure continued good relations in the long term.<sup>202</sup> In return, President Thein Sein expressed Myanmar's thanks to China for its assistance to Myanmar's holding of the SEA Games, underlining that Liu's presence at the opening ceremony reflected the importance China attaches to the China-Myanmar relationship and its consistent support to Myanmar.<sup>203</sup> Through a “soft power” strategy involving assistance to Myanmar's SEA Games, China has sought to win back the hearts of the Myanmar people, and to put an end to hostile anti-Chinese sentiments.

### **Revitalizing Myanmar's sports through hosting the SEA Games**

Khin Maung Htwe, a famous Myanmar sports journalist, pointed out that the sports standard of Myanmar is low although it had a good name in the past for sports, because the government did not effectively support the people who play sports or assist talented young people to develop their sports abilities.<sup>204</sup> What Myanmar's sports officials hope for is more long-term: that hosting the SEA Games can revitalize the country's sporting spirit and help Myanmar move back towards the top of the Southeast Asian pile. They simply think of the example of Vietnam, as after it hosted the SEA Games, the country went up to the top level in Southeast Asia. Vietnam hosted the SEA Games for the first time in 2003, topping the medals table that year with 183 golds. Since then Vietnam has been a consistent top-three SEA Games finisher along with Indonesia and Thailand.<sup>205</sup> It is observed that in 2001, Myanmar and Vietnam were at almost the same level, but now Vietnam has progressed way ahead of Myanmar.<sup>206</sup> The 2013 SEA Games consisted of 33 sporting events, providing 460 gold, 460 silver and 637 bronze medals in four different locations, namely Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay and Ngwe Saung beach.<sup>207</sup> Although Myanmar was unable to top the medal tally, it met success to a certain extent. Myanmar finished second in the medal tally with 86 gold medals, while Thailand

<sup>202</sup>Chinese VP attends SEA Games opening ceremony, meets Myanmar President, Xinhua, Myanmar.com, 2013, <http://www.myanmar.com/sports/categories/listings/sports.html?lang =none& start =115> , accessed 22.1.2015

<sup>203</sup>Chinese VP attends SEA Games opening ceremony, meets Myanmar President

<sup>204</sup>Simon Roughneen, *Could the SEA Games revitalize Myanmar sport?*

<sup>205</sup>Simon Roughneen, *Could the SEA Games revitalize Myanmar sport?*

<sup>206</sup>Simon Roughneen, *Could the SEA Games revitalize Myanmar sport?*

<sup>207</sup>Official Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Southeast Asian Games, p. 16

topped the group with 107 golds. Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia followed, making up the top five.<sup>208</sup> The men's football team of Myanmar lost 1-0 to Indonesia in the last group match and got knocked out of the tournament. Nonetheless, as host Myanmar gathered gold like other top countries did, it can be said that hosting the SEA Games can revitalize the standard of Myanmar sports.

### **Development of Infrastructures through the SEA Games**

Sport can also act as an engine of change in world politics. This change can be both physical and political. Countries that host major sporting events undergo a massive facelift in which entire cities may be virtually rebuilt and refitted with new infrastructure to meet the standards of modernity and user-friendliness for the international tourists. Despite its natural riches, Myanmar is still a poorly developed country with few modern facilities particularly outside the major cities. At the time that the new government took over in 2011, physical infrastructure in Myanmar was underdeveloped and un conducive to support economic growth efforts as aspired to by the government. Despite major improvements since 1988, the transport and communications infrastructure is very weak. A huge infrastructure deficit combined with electricity shortages are serious concerns for foreign companies willing to operate in this promising new market. Therefore, the spending in Myanmar related to hosting the 2013 SEA Games could yield an additional long-term economic benefit because the budget spent on improving the transportation infrastructure could generate significant long-term economic benefits. Even before the Games, Myanmar made considerable progress in terms of construction of transport routes and facilities to support the event.

### **Political legacy of the 2013 SEA Games**

The main political legacy of the Myanmar's 2013 SEA Games was the consensus achieved between the different levels of public administration, rival political parties and different ethnic groups. The grand event offered Myanmar an opportunity to burnish its new image as a quickly-changing country and the ceremony has been well-planned. During the Games, it was a unique opportunity for the whole nation to see elite sport, to value it, to be proud of it, to feel it, to experience it and be inspired by it. And Myanmar

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<sup>208</sup>SEA Games Medal Tally, *The New Light of Myanmar*, p. 16

politicians were there, and they saw it and they felt it. They saw the nation was proud, and that a proud nation is a happy nation. Myanmar's 2013 SEA Games tells two important things. First, athletes from different ethnic groups had participated in the games and they had been contesting for medals for fulfilling their national duty. The support from citizens living both inside and outside the country also provided a driving force for medals and so the Games were more than about winning medals but a valuable display of national unity. Second, it should be clear that Myanmar's young people contributed in making these Games a success. Of great benefit for the country were the experiences these Games provided these youths in self-sacrifice, duty, hard work, organizational skills, and interactions with people from different countries. Therefore all people in Myanmar were proud of the success of the Games. Because of the SEA Games, the reform process was getting stronger as the government and people have been able to learn how to cooperate and work collaboratively on various issues.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, this thesis has highlighted the subject of sport and the way politicians use it. Sport has been used for many different reasons because it is really influential on people. Sport can transform people's lives in so many ways by improving personal health, building teamwork and even turning the most disaffected of young people into disciplined athletes. In international relations, sport can change and unite communities – the country as a whole – in common cause. Moreover sport can also reflect society's divisions. All of our inequalities are reflected on the sports field and, often, sports activities are completely divided, failing to build bridges between communities. In this study, we have seen many examples where sports serve as a tool of politics in one form or another – as a means of diplomatic recognition or isolation, as a vehicle of protest and propaganda, as a catalyst of conflict, as a way to gain prestige or further international cooperation, as a vehicle of internal social control, as a stimulus to modernization and unification. Today, modern sport represents a major political, economic, social and cultural force in the world. Hosting a sports mega-event clearly brings a variety of important economic, social and psychic benefits to a host country and region. Hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games brought both challenges and opportunities for the rapidly opening society of Myanmar. The proposed rationale in this thesis was that regional sport competitions can increasingly help promote cooperation, understanding and relations among countries in a region or in a group.

Myanmar is currently in a triple transition – from an authoritarian military system to democratic governance, from a centrally directed economy to a market-oriented economy, and from 60 years of conflict to peace in its border areas. These transitions have the potential to create opportunity and shared prosperity for the Myanmar people and for the country to resume its place as one of the most dynamic economies in Asia. However, the democratic transition of Myanmar is still in its infancy and faces a range of challenges that will test their capacity and threaten the durability of the transition. Hard-liners within the regime still threaten the reform process and in addition, the majority of Myanmar people do not completely trust the government's efforts yet. At the same time, as Myanmar re-emerges onto the world stage, the potential for it to play a larger role in

global economic and political affairs is significant. However, Myanmar still needs to build its soft power and national image in emergency because of the legacy of the previous military junta. Therefore Nay Pyi Taw must use the tools it has to influence internal and external entities to favour the policy-making process of its government. Thus the new Myanmar government decided to host the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games to resolve the "poor image" problem for their government. In this way, sport became a political tool for the Myanmar government because it can foster national unity and can distract from other problems such as religious violence, the unfinished constitutional review, the unresolved ethnic conflicts, and so on. Specifically, Nay Pyi Taw viewed hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games as an opportunity to demonstrate to domestic audiences the international support for its political and economic reforms and in return it expected to get political trust back from its people as well as from the international community.

This research indicates that the new leadership consciously managed to project the friendly and civilized culture of Myanmar by designing images and performances in the opening and closing ceremonies which could reflect positive brands about Myanmar. It can be said the aims of hosting this Games were achieved. Regarding the sport sector, Myanmar could earn a reputation for good sportsmanship by achieving second place, which was the country's highest rank since the 1993 SEA Games. To sum up: the SEA Games brought four opportunities to Myanmar. The first opportunity was that it could respond to the critics who had questioned whether Myanmar would be able to host such an international sporting event: now Myanmar and its people were capable of hosting the Games. The second opportunity was to be able to present the morale, ability, sense of fair play and courage of Myanmar athletes to the world. The third one was to be able to show the kindness, hospitality and honesty of Myanmar people to athletes and visitors from foreign countries. The final one was to promote the image of the nation and its people while foreign visitors were enjoying sports events and visiting many interesting places in Myanmar. The Games have helped Myanmar to project a successful national brand image as an emerging regional power in spite of some problem areas. The Games also left behind a legacy of a transformed Myanmar, a fascinating Myanmar culture, improved infrastructure and a better reputation for business and tourism.

In short, by examining the 2013 SEA Games and the politics behind it, one can better understand how Myanmar leaders were attempting to present a changed nation to the

international community, showing that it has shifted from being a black sheep in the ASEAN community to being a normal country after it had transformed into a civilian government. The new government also wanted to demonstrate to the world through the Games that the country's top-down model of democratization is superior to the chaotic bottom-up models attempted elsewhere. Meanwhile, while Myanmar faced new realities in its democratization era that threatened its future national development, these issues were brought into the spotlight by the international media attention preceding the Games. This allowed the critics and the international community to better understand the difficulties of its transition. It can be argued that Myanmar also searched for a chance to rid itself of negative perceptions about the country's image. Eventually, it attempted to advertise itself – a new Myanmar –through this sporting event. In this respect, this project may shed light on how politicians can use sport as a political tool in the field of international relations. This study also showed that the hosting of sports-mega events as part of the practice of public diplomacy can demonstrate an existing soft power capability as well as pursue its further enhancement. Because of hosting the SEA Games successfully in 2013, today, Myanmar has been included back into the international community so that it can define itself again as a nation within the world of nations.

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