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T3

Has the Olympics been a success for Brazil?

W8

Photo of five-year old Syrian war victim shocks the world

Nice court upholds burkinis ban, but appeal planned - BBC News

A French court in Nice has upheld the ban on burkinis imposed by the mayor of Cannes.

The court said the ruling was legal but many religious groups were outraged.

The Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) said it would appeal against the decision in France's highest administrative court.

Authorities in Cannes and nearby villages voted to ban full-body swimsuits or burkinis from the end of July.

The court said the ban was legal under a law which prohibits people neglecting common rules on "relations between public authorities and private individuals" on the basis of religion.

The judge noted the ban came "in the context of the state of emergency and recent Islamist attacks, notably in Nice a month ago".

But CCIF lawyer Sefen Guez Guez, said he would lodge an appeal with the Council of State, the highest administrative body in France.

"This decision opens the door to a ban on all religious symbols in the public space," he added.

France is on high alert following a series of incidents including July's truck attack in nearby Nice.

Anyone caught breaking the new rule could face a fine of €38 (£33). They will first be asked to change into another swimming costume or leave the beach.

Nobody has been apprehended for wearing a burkini in Cannes since the edict came into force at the end of July.

This is not the first time that women's clothing has been restricted in France. In 2011 it became the first country in Europe to ban the full-face Islamic veil, known as the burka, as well as the partial face covering, the niqab.

Earlier this week a private waterpark near Marseille cancelled a burkini-only day after being subjected to criticism.

Colorado will be the next state to vote on doctor-assisted dying

THIS newspaper has tracked the twists and turns of assisted-dying legislation as it has passed onto the statute books in California and Canada—as well as failed attempts, such as a private member's bill in Britain that was voted down last year. The issue is a tough one for legislators, since it arouses strong passions and well-organised opposition. Sometimes, therefore, campaigners have sought to "let the people decide".

The latest place to take this route is Colorado. A bill supporting doctor-assisted dying was quashed last year by the state legislature. But in April a draft statute was filed with the secretary of state, an elected constitutional officer, to place Initiative 145, the "Colorado End-of-Life Options Act", on the ballot in November. Under state law campaigners needed to collect supporting signatures totalling 5% of the number of votes cast for secretary of state in the preceding election, by a deadline of three months before election day. That meant hitting 98,492 signatures by August 8th.

On August 15th the secretary of state announced that the total had been reached. Campaigners had submitted more than 155,000 signatures four days ahead of the deadline; statistical sampling suggested that 108,775 were likely to be valid.

The model for Colorado's mooted law is Oregon's legislation, which has been in force for

almost two decades. Patients with a terminal illness who are expected to live no longer than six months, and who are judged by doctors to be of sound mind, would be able to ask for lethal drugs to end their lives. A second opinion about the likely prognosis is required. Polls suggest that most Americans are in favour of such laws. Support is stronger from richer and better-educated people across the country; the groundswell of support for Initiative 145, and Colorado's demography, suggest that it stands a good chance of being passed.

The intention is to give the terminally ill the right to choose from all their options, says Julie

Selsberg, one of the campaigners behind the petition. Her father, Charles, died of motor neurone disease in 2014; shortly before dying he wrote an open letter to Colorado's politicians saying that he had made a "terrible mistake" in choosing to live "when I should have chosen to die, at my own hands, many months ago."

Team GB's Olympic success: five factors behind their Rio medal rush | Owen Gibson

1) The National Lottery

It's unlikely Max Whitlock was thinking of Sir John Major, the former Conservative prime minister, as he stood on the podium on Sunday as Britain's first gymnastics gold medalist. But it was Major who decided, after the humiliation in Atlanta when Britain came home 36th in the medal table, beneath Kazakhstan for example, with one gold, to divert National Lottery funding into elite sport. The move was far from universally popular at the time, but has had a lasting effect. The percentage has increased over time and a fifth of all the money spent by National Lottery players now goes to sport.

Under the coalition government, the amount of UK Sport's funding that comes from the Lottery rather than the exchequer also increased (it now stands at around 75/25), with the effect that the funding formula is less likely to be unpicked when the Treasury comes looking for savings. There has also been an attempt of late to persuade athletes to talk up the link with the National Lottery and reinforce the link between buying a ticket and winning medals.

2) No compromise culture

Of all the buzz phrases that have echoed around the offices of UK Sport since it began investing heavily into those sports most likely to win medals, these words are the most commonly heard. It means that cash has been targeted at those sports most likely to bring podium places. The £350m invested in Olympic and Paralympic sport over the current four-year cycle is aimed at one thing: winning medals.

UK Sport targets the funding based on podium potential at the next two Olympics. It can be boiled down to a simple formula and allows UK Sport to predict with a fair degree of accuracy how many they will win – money in equals medals out. It has not always been popular – sports

such as table tennis and basketball where it is very hard to win a medal miss out at the expense of those where heavy investment in technology and talent can yield success. Fewer tend to complain when the medals start raining in.

3) The high-performance system

A system honed by a generation of performance directors in the sports Britain has excelled in recent Games – Sir Dave Brailsford in cycling, Dave Tanner in rowing, Stephen Park in sailing – has now spread to the rest of the British Olympic sports system. Well-meaning application has long since been supplanted by scientific rigour.

It is part of what the UK Sport performance director, Simon Timson, calls success by design, with all the sports looking to replicate what has worked for others. A lot of the credit deserves to go to Timson's predecessor, Peter Keen, a technocratic genius who minted the culture of marginal gains at British Cycling and then sought to replicate it across the whole of British sport for Beijing and London.

Since he left after London 2012, the aim has been to keep the machine whirring after the inevitable pause that followed a home Games and spread its gospel across new sports. From talent identification to elite coaching, the effect has been transformative.

This constant striving for excellence – present in great individuals such as Sir Ben Ainslie, Sir Steve Redgrave, Andy Murray, Kath Grainger and Jessica Ennis-Hill – has become contagious since Athens in 2004. Greg Rutherford was gutted with bronze on Saturday, while Sir Bradley Wiggins said he did not consider himself Britain's most decorated Olympian because he was only counting golds.

Success in sports where Britain has little pedigree, such as trampolining and diving, suggest that attempts to increase the breadth of potential medal-winning sports is working. Timson also says the fact that Team GB has more fourth places than any other nation is a cause for optimism and demonstrates growing strength in depth because most of those individuals are not missing out on expected medals but are emerging talents exceeding their targets.

4) New stars emerging

While raw talent is a prerequisite, the influx of Lottery and government funding, which took another a big leap in 2005 when the bid to host the London Games was won, has allowed those in charge to create a pathway to make the most out of it.

What Keen sought to achieve was a situation where the maverick geniuses who might land you a gold medal on talent and application alone were replaced by a system that constantly regenerated talent.

The most obvious example is in the velodrome, where Sir Chris Hoy begat Jason Kenny, who now has Callum Skinner snapping at his heels. It can now be seen in sports such as gymnastics, where a gold medal was once a distant dream given the dominance of the traditional giants of the sport but where Whitlock was pushed to new heights by the internal rivalry with Louis Smith. In the pool, too, there is a depth of talent that did not exist before.

Creating a culture of excellence in those sports, and intolerance of failure, has given rise to its own difficult questions (even as it again succeeds in the velodrome, British Cycling is currently facing an independent review over bullying allegations) but it has been brutally effective. The marginal gains rhetoric can sound deadening at times but it is the foundation for those heart-stopping moments of sporting drama.

5) Team spirit

The contrast between the claustrophobic, paranoid atmosphere around the England football team at major championships and the inclusive, positive ethos of the 366-strong Team GB is obvious.

While UK Sport is responsible for distributing the money and setting the tone and the individual sports must spend it wisely, the British Olympic Association takes charge of the team at the Games and the crucial final preparations. Much of the credit for the quietly effective team culture must go to Mark England, the experienced chef de mission since Salt Lake City in 2002. Largely hidden internal disputes between the BOA and UK Sport that were a feature in Beijing

and London are now a thing of the past.

Despite only a third of the British team staying in the athlete's village, the aim has been to make them feel like a cohesive whole. The swimmers, for example, were part of the team holding camp in Belo Horizonte for the first time and when a new hierarchy was put in place after disappointment in the pool in London one of the priorities was to change the mindset.

When each team arrives in the camp, as they have done on a rolling basis throughout the Games, they are presented with their Team GB tracksuit at a special ceremony. The willingness of big names such as Andy Murray and Justin Rose, together with experienced Olympians such as Wiggins and Grainger, to impart advice and be key members of the team has also been praised. England said this week it was the best team dynamic he had ever experienced.

Has the Olympics been a success for Brazil? - BBC News

From a purely sporting perspective, Rio 2016 has been an extraordinarily successful Olympic Games.

The sporting competition has been of the highest standard in the pool, on the track and in the gym.

There have been almost 100 World and Olympic records broken in what has, thus far, been a relatively drugs-free Games.

Indeed, for the second time in two years, Brazil has shown it can successfully stage a major international sporting jamboree.

But how many Brazilians were engaged by, or felt part of, the Rio Olympics is much harder to judge.

Some Brazilians were determined not to miss any of the action

At open-air events or fan zones in the old port areas of Rio, there have been huge gatherings of several thousand locals, especially at weekends or when the big screens are showing Brazil playing football or volleyball, two of the most popular sports here.

This is an uplifting sight for two reasons.

These areas are often regenerated parts of the city that were previously too dangerous or dirty to visit and it also suggests that Brazilians have, to an extent, been bitten by the Olympic bug.

The reality at the many Olympic sports venues dotted around Rio has been starkly different.

Many stadiums have sometimes felt half full, even when officials had announced they were sold out.

There have been empty seats, especially in qualifying rounds

There have been thousands of empty seats at the later stages of the tennis tournament, athletics finals and even the beach volleyball.

The volleyball games were held on Copacabana beach, which is about as convenient a location to the amenities and tourist hotspots of Rio's south zone as you can get.

Olympic officials, when pressed, admit that embarrassing corporate no-shows - sponsors who do not use or have not distributed their full allocation of tickets - are thought to be responsible for many of the empty-looking stands.

Brazilians not attending sports about which they are not traditionally enthusiastic, like hockey, rugby or badminton, also account for many of the gaps.

More often than not, locals blame high ticket prices, with some tickets for the most popular events going for 900 reais ($280; £215) which is more than the monthly minimum wage in Brazil.

Those who could not afford tickets watched in bars

Attending the Olympic Games in person has simply been beyond the means of many Cariocas, as Rio residents are known.

Sailing concerns

Coming into Rio 2016, some observers had predicted a litany of problems that could each contribute to derailing the Games; from the appalling water quality in the sailing venues of Guanabara Bay, to the Zika virus, to the critical transport infrastructure that was finished just in time.

Few athletes were as keen as Stefaniya Elfutina to be in contact with the water in Guanabara Bay

While such an apocalyptic scenario was never really likely, not everyone is happy.

Despite the close attention of spotter helicopters to detect floating rubbish and eco-boats to remove the flotsam, several competitors complained bitterly about plastic bags and other waste impeding their progress in the races in the later stages of the sailing events.

More seriously, at least one team coach, Belgium's Will van Bladen, said that one of his competitors, Evi van Acken, was denied her chances of winning a medal when she caught dysentery.

The coach alleges it was from the huge amounts of untreated sewage in the bay.

Logistical problems

Eighty-five-thousand troops on the streets of Rio have helped to keep this notoriously violent city peaceful, at least in those areas where sport is going on or where the tourists venture.

Tens of thousands of police and soldiers were deployed in Rio

Privately, Olympic bosses admit that they have sometimes "dropped the ball" and it has been a challenge running the Games in a city where too much was ready too late and where having four distinct sporting venues situated around the city has presented its own logistical problems.

But Mark Adams, Director of Communications at the International Olympic Committee, says that there are no regrets in choosing Rio.

"What people really need to remember is that we are in a country in the middle of a serious political economic and political crisis but it's been worth it," Mr Adams says.

"If the Olympic Games are about one thing it's about spreading these values around the world. It's worked in South America, so why not Africa next?"

For the past two weeks, Brazilians have appeared to forgot about the many wider problems in the country, including a deep funding crisis facing the forthcoming Paralympics.

They have enjoyed the fantastic medal successes of their sailors, athletes and judokas but you get the distinct feeling that Brazil won't be bidding to host another global mega event for some time.

Images that stop the world in its tracks

The stunned face of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, caked in blood and dirt, shocked the world this week. Images of war can make us feel, writes Kelly Grovier, but they will never make us understand.

Every so often, a photo stops the world in its tracks. The image of nine-year old Phan Kim Phúc, running naked down a street in Vietnam in June 1972 as her skin burned from a napalm attack was one such photo. South African journalist Kevin Carter's photograph of a starving Sudanese child being stalked by a hooded vulture in March 1993 was another. On Wednesday evening, the world's conscience was once again jolted by the sight of a child in appalling distress when an image from the Syrian city of Aleppo went viral on social media. Sitting motionless in an incongruously vibrant orange chair, a young boy – his face caked in dirt and blood – stares glassy-eyed into dead space like a battered and abandoned rag-doll.

The alarming photo, captured by Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Raslan, was taken after five-

year-old Omran Daqneesh was rescued from a building ravaged by Russian airstrikes and has quickly become a symbol for a traumatised people trapped by the Syrian civil war (a conflict that has displaced nearly 12 million people in the past four years and killed at least 250,000 more). Still haunted by images of the lifeless body of three-year old Alan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015 while trying to flee Syria for Europe, many people around the world are horrified by the toll the war is taking on the region's children.

So unforgettable are the viral images of Kurdi and Daqneesh that they begin to file themselves in our consciousness beside other iconic depictions of violence – a reflex that compounds the dehumanisation of the victims. One is hesitant to suggest that the frightful sight of child after child being fed like fodder into a maw of unrelenting violence in Syria echoes in any way, for example, Francisco Goya's terrifying painting Saturn Devouring His Son, in which a ghoulish Titan, afraid that one of his children might overthrow him, resolves to eat them one by one.

Though life is not a painting and oughtn't be confused with one, the greatest works of art intensify our response to life's tragedies rather than distract us from them. Take Portuguese artist Paula Rego's contemporary painting War. Created in the wake of the allied invasion of Iraq in 2003 and inspired by a journalistic photograph of children fleeing an explosion (not unlike the circumstances surrounding this week's photo from Aleppo), Rego's War dares us to distinguish between what is fantasy and what is real.

In the surreal language of Rego's painting, the central figures have been transformed from people into toy-like rabbits. Amid such grotesquerie, it's impossible to know for sure the nature of a lifeless child-shaped figure in the painting's middle ground. Is this merely a doll that has been accidentally dropped in the melee or is this an actual infant's broken and abandoned body – a tragic victim of the bomb blast? Staring into the far-away gaze of five-year old Omran Daqneesh in this week's soul-wrenching photo reminded me of gazing helplessly at Rego's War, knowing that, however powerful I may find the image, I'll never understand the half of it.

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UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

Under the Macroscope is a weekly summary of what's happening around the world and what's worth pondering. Stay on top of international and local news with this bulletin produced by the Raffles Economics and Current Affairs Society.