



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Cricketers come forward in fight against coronavirus

SPORTS REPORTER

The threat of the coronavirus is looming large over the general populace and people have become more aware of its threat as the pandemic takes shape in Bangladesh with five deaths reported so far.

As always, what opinion leaders say has a big impact on how our society comes to grips with the new reality of the threat. Yesterday, while grocery shopping, one buyer was heard saying to another: "Don't you understand? The war is fought by staying home as Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] had said. Not by going out."

The words Mashrafe had posted on Facebook were clinging to people's minds and it showed that celebrities do have a role to play in helping the country. Mashrafe, who had only just stepped down from the ODI captaincy, is a beloved figure and even though all sporting activity is currently at a standstill, sports still have value because of the attention

that celebrities, especially sports stars, can draw. With cricket currently the most popular sports in the country, it does not come as a surprise that the general populace listens to cricketers a lot more than policymakers or politicians.

To that end, the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mushfiqur Rahim have been coming up with social media posts to call people to exercise self-isolation, quarantine and stay inside their own homes and practise social distancing.

The cricketers have also tried to financially contribute, each from their own position, just as the likes of Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo, who have helped out with efforts to treat patients in their part of the world. 27 of the Bangladesh national team players have decided to put in a concerted effort to raise money towards helping the movement against coronavirus by paying 50 percent of their monthly salary. Tamim Iqbal, the new ODI captain, who had said that he was going to

focus on the team culture of the Tigers, was the instigator and gave the others the direction and impetus to donate.

The 17 players who are under the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) central contract were joined by 10 others who played the recent series at home against Zimbabwe to gather Tk 25 lakh, after taxes, to donate to a government fund.

Tamim hoped their contribution, however small, would act as a catalyst in others stepping up from their own positions. "The sum we have gathered is small compared to the magnitude of our fight against coronavirus. But little droplets can create an ocean. Instead of focusing on criticism from all corners, we must take responsibility and do our bit and then we can win this fight," Tamim wrote on a Facebook post yesterday.

Tamim's idea and the cricketers' willingness to help out in this crisis, can galvanise the side and they in turn will be hoping that it can galvanise society in these tough times.

Junior Asia Cup hockey postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu Al Arafah Islami Bank Junior Asia Cup Hockey, scheduled for June 4 to 12 in Dhaka, has been postponed in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The postponement was announced by the Asian Hockey Federation yesterday.

The continental governing body of the game also postponed the Women's Asian Champions Trophy, which was scheduled to be held in June in South Korea.

"The events suspended due to unavoidable circumstances will be held at a convenient time later. The AHF will work in this regard with the host countries, FIH and other world sporting associations," a statement by the AHF said.

'Have more time to prepare for deferred Olympics'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's top archer Ruman Sana is apparently pleased with the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics because the 24-year-old archer will get more time to prepare for the Games, now set to be held in 2021.

"For me, the postponement of Tokyo Olympics is good news because I could not take part in some international archery tournaments, which were also canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak. Now, I will get more time to prepare by taking part in those tournaments and can take part in the Tokyo Olympics with better preparation," said Ruman, who became only Bangladesh's second athlete to qualify for the Olympics directly after reaching the semifinals in the World Archery Championships in the Netherlands in 2019.

"We may not have faced a big problem yet, but the situation in



RUMAN SANA

Europe is not good, so how would the archers have come to take part in Olympics? I think it is a good decision to postpone Tokyo Olympics," said Ruman.

Ruman, along with other archers, had been in the training camp at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi till Monday as part

of his Olympic preparations, but the camp has been suspended for nearly two weeks to accommodate army personnel, who were deployed by the government to assist the local administration in the battle against coronavirus.

"The suspension of the training camp is a bit of a problem but it is a problem for all. Because, we can't expect everything will go to plan in such a situation and we have to adjust in this situation as well as keep ourselves ready," said Ruman.

"Before leaving the stadium yesterday afternoon [Tuesday], I heard the postponement news from my German coach Peter Fredrick, who also gave me some tips to practise at home," said Ruman, adding that he would now follow the instructions to maintain his physical fitness by doing exercises at home and wait for the next directive from Bangladesh Archery Federation on whether training will resume after April 4.

First-class cricketers in dire financial straits

RAMIN TALUKDER

The coronavirus outbreak has taken a huge toll on human lives and impacted the economy worldwide. Major sporting events were halted around the globe a week ago, with clubs even around Europe facing bankruptcy and struggling to pay staff.

Even practice sessions and camps have been halted to prevent the spread of the virus.

When postponed events will continue is still shrouded in uncertainty and even events scheduled for months in the future are being reconsidered, especially after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Euro 2020 were postponed until next year.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan mentioned that the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League, which was postponed after the first round, may not resume before April 15. He said resuming after that date was more likely.

This uncertainty regarding the domestic league has already started to make a number of cricketers anxious during this perilous time as their livelihoods depend on such remuneration.

contract players like him.

"I hope the BCB makes arrangements for players who are now out of the national side. If they could include us at least in the first-class contract list," sighed Jubair.

Thinking along the same line as Jubair are national discards Dhiman Ghosh and Tushar Imran. Both of them urged the BCB to come forward during this crisis. Dhiman mentioned: "I am in the first-class contract list. But there are a number of cricketers who aren't. In this crisis situation, the BCB should come forward at least considering the current scenario."

Tushar, a domestic colossus and Alauddin's teammate for the season in the DPL, is also concerned about players who are not under contract with the BCB.

"I am in the first-class contract list and there are around 80-90 players in the list. But there are at least 60-70 players outside this list who make their livelihood by playing this premier league every year. Can you think of their plight if the DPL does not resume?," Tushar wondered.

The 36-year-old also demanded the BCB to increase the number of players in the first-class contract list.



Jubair Hossain spending time watching television at home.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

17 players are under the current BCB's central contract list while around 80-90 first-class cricketers are also paid monthly. However, apart from these players, there are numerous others whose prime source of income is the DPL.

That might lead to a tough time for such cricketers, whose only means of income will be halted in the wake of the pandemic.

A number of cricketers who are not under contract with the BCB are terrified, especially following the board president's assumed timeline.

However, all-rounder Alauddin Babu, whose services were acquired by Brothers Union, is hopeful that the havoc wreaked by the coronavirus will soon come to an end and everything will go back to being normal.

"I could not play the national league for the past two years due to injury. And that is why I was not included in the first-class contract list. I was eagerly looking forward to playing the DPL. But if it does not resume then I will obviously be in a fix. Still, I am hopeful that the effects of coronavirus will decrease and we can play the premier league," said Alauddin.

Leg-spinner Jubair Hossain, who made his international debut in 2014 but failed to make a name for himself in Bangladesh colors, was worried of losing another shot at proving himself while also mentioning how it would affect him financially.

"I did not get teams properly in the last few years. Even if I managed to get a team, most of the time I had to play for free. This time I joined Partex SC and I would also get match time. But before anything could happen, the league got halted due to the coronavirus pandemic. I did not even get the chance to prove myself. To top that, there is a financial drawback too," regretted Jubair.

Jubair also hoped that the BCB could extend their help towards out-of-national-

"The BCB should increase the number of players under the first-class contract list. At least the number of contracted players should range between 200-300. However, in this situation, it is not only the players who are suffering. Even the board is also being affected, but the BCB is a profitable organisation. Considering the overall situation, they need to increase the first-class contracted players' list. Only then can those players survive," explained Tushar.

Not only a question of survival of uncontracted players, the problems go deeper.

Although only the first round of country's premier fifty-over domestic league has been played, a number of players have already taken advance payments. This might create a problem if the league does not continue, which is why Tushar urged the BCB to chalk out a solution.

"I am playing for Brothers Union this year. Although I did not take any advance payment, there are players who already took 20-30 per cent or even 50-60 per cent of their payment. But only one round of the league was played and now if the clubs want their money back, then the players are bound to return it. This issue needs to be resolved. I am also requesting the board to give six months' salary in advance to players in the first-class contract list," concluded Tushar.

With conditions around the world showing no signs of improving and more countries reporting new cases, everyone needs to come forward in tackling this pandemic.

One such example was set by 27 national cricketers, who decided to donate 50 per cent of this month's salary to a government fund that aims to fight the pandemic.

But it is also true that not every cricketer is capable of such generous gestures. Some cricketers, especially ones not under contract with the BCB, might need someone looking out for them in such hazardous times.

Shane Warne slams Morrison's 'shocker'

AGENCIES



Cricketing great Shane Warne has lashed Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison over his confusing Covid-19 address.

Morrison, in a live TV address on Tuesday evening, confirmed schools would remain open despite businesses such as beauty salons, tanning and nail studios being forced to shut in a bid by the government to contain the Coronavirus pandemic.

Those businesses were added to the list of non-essential businesses forced to shut after pubs, clubs and gyms were forced to shut their doors on Monday.

Many Australians raised immediate concerns about the contradictions, including the country's

greatest ever spin bowler.

"Listening to the PM like everyone here in Australia and what I understood was, 'It's essential unless it's not. Then it's essentially not essential. I can't be clearer'.

"Plus people can buy a new shirt at a shopping centre? PM just had a shocker. Surely should be in lockdown now," Warne wrote.

Warne then doubled down in as criticism as he called for a countrywide lockdown.

"Ps I know it's impossible to please everyone as PM at the moment, but surely clear rules and lockdown for Australia as of NOW is the only decision - end of (sic)," Warne wrote.

"Let's learn from the mistakes other countries have made.

"Health has to be the most important thing for everyone!"



Even amid the fears of the spread of coronavirus, which has seen most people stay home and practise social distancing, this young cricketer in Dupkhula is practising distancing of another sort -- getting the ball as far away from his bat.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED