

## Column One

### SPORTS TALK



**Gordon Greenidge**

(Bangladesh cricket coach)  
"July would have been a better time... for some of the other teams, because the pitches would not be so difficult from ones they play on for the rest of the year."

On the timing of the World Cup.

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- Who will replace Bob Woolmer as South African cricket coach?  
Ford Stewart Marsh
- When England last hosted cricket World Cup?  
1975 1987 1993
- Umpire Steve Bucknor is a  
Guyanese Jamaican Trinidadian
- The final match of the 1999 cricket World Cup will be held at  
Edgbaston Lord's Oval
- The World Cup match between Bangladesh and Scotland will be played in  
Edinburgh Belfast Cardiff

Name .....  
Class ..... Roll No. ....  
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### Steve, Glenn sing for sledging!

LONDON, May 10: Australian captain Steve Waugh and fast bowler Glenn McGrath today slammed proposals designed to erase sledging from the game, reports AFP.

Waugh said the recommendations by an MCC committee, which would see offending sides docked five runs for intimidating or insulting batsmen, were "pretty stupid" and hoped they would not be enforced.

"They don't even dock runs for missing overs. Why do it for so-called sledging, which is open to interpretation," he said. "It's always been up to the captain and players to do the right thing on a field. Sometimes you're going to overstep the boundaries, but that's happened for 200 years."

"I don't see (the law) happening. I mean, it could affect a Test match."

Media reports here say the proposals could come into force next year. It would be the first time umpires had the authority to mete out on-the-spot penalties. Under existing rules, players can be fined or suspended but without affecting the score.

The committee included leading umpires Steve Bucknor of the West Indies and Nigel Flaws of England, besides former Test cricketers Bob Simpson of Australia and Clyde Walcott of the West Indies.

A five-run penalty would also be imposed if a bowler deliberately scuffed the pitch to help spinners or if a fielder tried to obstruct the batsman running between the wickets.

McGrath, who ran foul of the umpires for spitting near an opponent on the recent tour of the West Indies, said: "If they want to turn the game into a sport full of robots and really kill it, maybe that is what they want to do."

"It makes you wonder why they want to keep tampering with the rules. There are certain other aspects of the game I think they could concentrate on, rather than tweek at little bits here and there."

McGrath even argued fans and television viewers enjoyed sledging.

## Optimistic outsiders

LONDON, May 10: Bangladesh are ready to be pitted against cricket's elite this summer but first they will have to cope with the English weather, says a report on internet.

The rank outsiders for the World Cup arrived a month before the start of the tournament to acclimatise - only to be blighted by an incessant deluge.

Bangladesh, who were granted one-day international status in 1997, have been left unhappy as their plans have backfired.

Former West Indies opening batsman Gordon Greenidge organised a schedule geared to getting Bangladesh used to English conditions.

To an extent they did, but sitting in Watford hotel rooms watching a pond develop outside, was not quite what Greenidge had in mind.

Having arrived on April 15, ten days without being able to bat or bowl outdoors had rendered the exercise worthless.

But captain Aminul Islam, the side's premier all-rounder, is upbeat about their prospects despite many pundits placing them below Scotland in the list of also-rans because of their inexperience on wickets in this country.

The Bangladeshis view the game against Scotland as the one they have most potential to win but Aminul is not ruling out further shocks.

"The pitch condition in Scotland is almost similar to that in England, which is very difficult to assimilate. We came here early to adjust ourselves," he said.



"We're not only thinking about Scotland, we're also looking to play well against the other Test-playing nations right from our first match against the Kiwis."

"You see, one-day games are like a lottery. The team playing better on a particular day will be the winners. So you cannot write off an upset."

But the current crop of players is relatively young and the Bangladesh Cricket Board's decision to alter their 15-man squad at the final hour was made to provide extra bonus.

Veteran all-rounder Minhazul Abedin ousted wicket-keeper-batsman Jahangir Alam from the formal party despite not even being in the provisional group of 19.

Fallings by the younger players in recent months encouraged Aminul and the BCB to rethink their plans despite having stated on the announcement of the original party that the best job possible had been done by the selection committee.

"Yes, I thought we had the best possible side," said Aminul. "But after the Meril Cup in Dhaka, I was proved wrong and I deeply felt we were lacking in the middle order. That's why we are happy to get back Minhazul."

Right now Aminul and his side would settle just for some cricket being played.

They may not have had the best of preparation but Bangladesh are surrounded by experience.

As well as Greenidge, former Pakistan captain Mushtaq Mohammed and Alan Ward, who won five Test caps for England, had been recruited on a temporary basis to coach the bowlers.

Mushtaq has since last week replaced Javed Miandad as Pakistan coach.

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## A sell-out World Cup

LONDON, May 10 (AFP) - Tickets for all but two preliminary league matches in the World Cup have been sold out, organisers announced here on Monday, with the rest likely to go within days.

Of 30 first-round matches, only Kenya's matches against Zimbabwe at Taunton on Saturday and against Sri Lanka at Southampton on May 30 still have seats available.

Tickets for the super-six games, semi-finals and final were also not available, the organisers said.

The six-week tournament starts on Friday with hosts England taking on defending champions Sri Lanka at Lord's. The final will be played at the same venue on June 20.

## Richards rejects WICB offer

ST JOHN'S, Antigua, May 10: Vivian Richards has turned down an offer to be West Indies batting coach at the World Cup which starts in England on Friday, reports Reuters.

West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) chief Stephen Camacho said on Sunday that the board regretted not being able to secure Richards' services at the tournament.

But he hoped it would still be possible to have Richards involved in some aspect of West Indies cricket.

Richards, the former West Indies captain who retired from Test cricket in 1991, confirmed last month that he had been asked by the team to help out at the World Cup. He said at the time that he wanted to see a contract first.

## Alec badly out of touch

LONDON, May 10: Storm clouds are already brewing for England's cricket captain Alex Stewart even before a ball has been bowled in the upcoming World Cup, reports AFP.

Stewart's form as the tournament's opening batsman was already under the microscope before his team almost tumbled to an embarrassing defeat against county side Essex in a practice match on Sunday.

His plight was further underlined when he failed again, while Nasser Hussain - one of Stewart's rivals for the opening slot - scored 82 in the game.

"One more dark day for Stewart" was how the Daily Telegraph responded today. "There can be no getting round the fact that things are getting serious for him."

The 36-year-old right-hander, who also doubles up as the side's wicket-keeper, has not scored a one-day 50 in the past 18 internationals.

"That's not a record I can be happy with," he conceded.

Calls for him to drop down the order have not yet begun in earnest.

But another failure in England's last warm-up match on Tuesday against Hampshire, in the run-up to their first World Cup match on May 14, would further chip away at confidence.

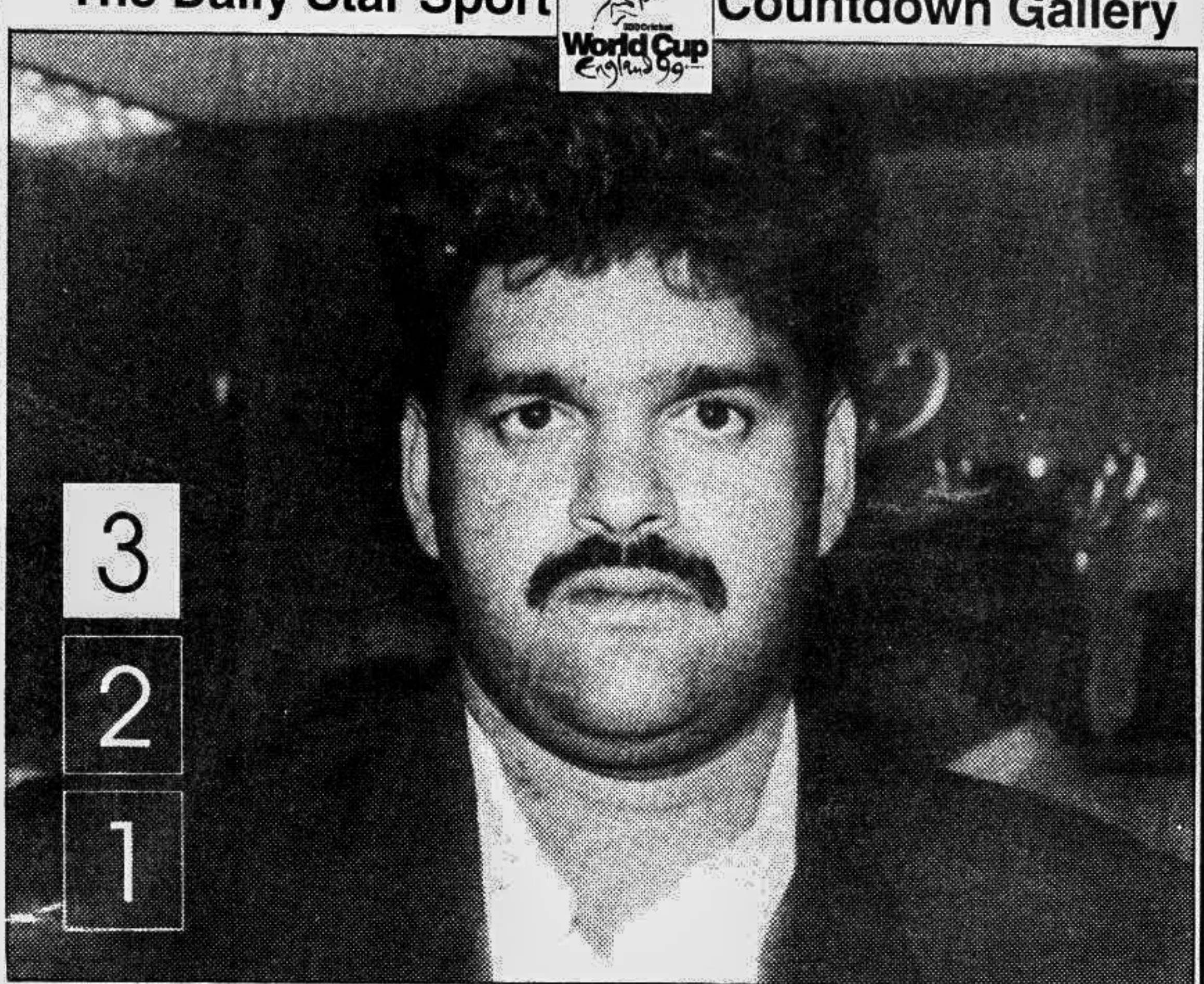
There have long been doubts about Stewart's ability to cope with the triple responsibility of captaincy, opening the batting and keeping wicket in Test matches.

Stewart argued: "In Tests I'm happiest opening the batting and leaving the wicket-keeping gloves in the dressing room. In one-day cricket, there should not be a problem with all three."

But a mix-up with his bowlers in the one-run win over Essex - Vince Wells had to bowl the last over after not bowling earlier in the game - raised eyebrows.

England, currently seen as fourth favourites to win the tournament, play Sri Lanka in group A at Lord's on Friday. Their group is completed by South Africa, India, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

## The Daily Star Sport Countdown Gallery



days to go AKRAM KHAN shoulders the hopes of nation. — Star file photo

## Bangladesh's best bet

Hasan Masood

Acrum Khan is arguably the best middle-order batsman in the country. He has also the reputation of being the most gentleman cricketer in Bangladesh.

The former national captain took the entire destiny of the nation on his broad shoulders when he played the innings of his life to take Bangladesh to the 1997 ICC Trophy semifinal with a match-winning knock of an undefeated 67 against the 1996 World Cuppers Holland in the quarterfinal on April 5, 1997 at Kuala Lumpur.

Bangladesh were tottering on 15 for four in reply to Holland's not-so-impressive 171 when Akram came to bat. The portly Chittagongian, who was captaining Bangladesh, engaged his life in a brave rescue operation in that rain-interrupted match. Along with his predecessor Minhazul Abedin and all-rounder Saiful Islam, he helped Bangladesh reach the revised target of 144 in 33 overs with three wickets and eight balls in hand.

Akrum's magical act against Holland worked as a real tonic for Bangladesh cricketers before they encountered Scotland in the semifinal. The rest of the tournament is now history. The 32-year-old right-hand batsman, who has scored 618 runs in his 26 ODI appearances at an average of 25.75 with four fifties, began his prolific career with Chittagong Friends Club in 1985.

With his mind going back-and-forth between 'football' and 'cricket', his maiden appearance in cricket was in the pink. That was thirteen years back in Chittagong. Ever since, he never had to give a second thought... Akram knew he was destined for cricket.

After a season, Akram was picked by Bangladesh Railway, a team with the reputation of fielding Chittagong based players.

During his three-year stint with the Railways, Akram earned the distinction of becoming the best all-rounder and the best batsman in the Dhaka league. That paved his way to join Abahani in the 1988-89 season.

Akrum has continued his cricketing career with Abahani till today except for one season, 1990-91, when Abahani did not play in the league and Akram moved to Brothers Union.

Akrum became the captain of Bangladesh in 1994 without having any experience of leading even his own club. However, that did not stop him from becoming the most successful Bangladesh captain so far. Under his leadership Bangladesh won the 1997 ICC Trophy and earned their maiden berth in the World Cup proper.

Ironically, Akram was sacked in a humiliating manner by the Siraj-led three-member national selection committee last October after Bangladesh's dismal performance in the 16th Commonwealth Games. Unfortunately they failed to prevent Akram from subsequently returning to the national team on the merit of his good form.

With the experience of having the highest individual tally by a Bangladeshi in ODIs, Akram Khan is keen to score in the World Cup this time.

"I don't want to look at the past. A lot of injustice was done against me. But I have no complaints because I know I'm a cricketer. As long as I can prove my worth with the willow, I will have a place in the national team -- today and tomorrow. I feel sorry for those who dropped me from the national team last year," said Akram to this correspondent before the Bangladesh team left for England last month.

"I want to score runs and only runs. That's what I'm concentrating on," he said.

Akrum alike, the whole nation is expecting him to score runs.

## Dreaming beyond Scotland

Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed

For to be able to defeat former two-time World champions West Indies, the 1987 conquerors Australia or the 1992 victors Pakistan, or the 1992 semi-finalists New Zealand in any of our five group matches seems beyond even the most biased of Bangladeshi dreams. Yet, in only cricket is it possible

even an ODI side, in George Hamilton they have a probable future England cap. They also have several players with English county league experience. Let us, however, take potency from the realisation that had the Scots thought them to be that good, they would have chosen to play us anywhere but at home.

We can never rule out our chances against any of the others. Upsets happen all the time. It is the hallmark of cricket. Cynics consider India's 1983 championship a result that defied all predictions. Kenya had the better of West Indies in a World Cup tie. Where was Sri Lanka before they stormed into the 1996 World Cup, despite water bottles and other dangerous missiles at the Eden?

So, there you are! If you analyse, you will see we have everything to hope for and play for.

We are the only team in the competition to have four captains playing, four former and one leading the side in England. Minhazul Abedin, Faruque Ahmed, Akram Khan and Aminul Islam are all prolific batsmen. Apart from Faruque, the other three can also do wonderful things with the ball.

In the Hossains, Mehra and Shahriar, we have a couple of sabre-rattlers. A lot will depend on how well a start this give us. Khaled Mahmud and Enamul Hogue can convincingly wield the willow as well as spin web or two. Naimur Rahman is an offie but he also likes to give the opposition a good whack with the bat.

Since the KL ICC Mohammad Rafique had been elevated to almost a living legend, but he has not been able to live up to his billing. But, news from the See page 14

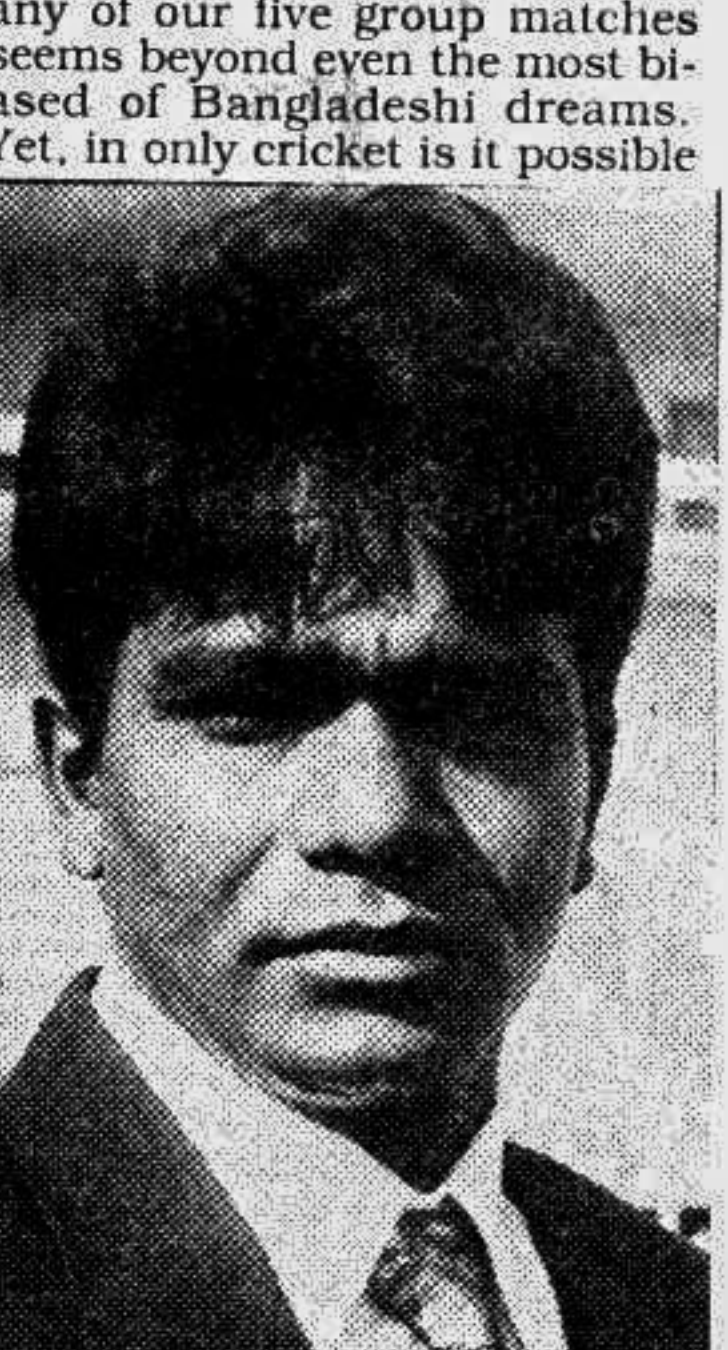
Although Scotland is not for such ludicrous dreams to come alive.

As a note of warning, in Scotland also there is a slight problem because we play the Scots of all the places in the world in Edinburgh. And, that is in Scotland. Well, if not anything, we have a gifted excuse in case we get thrashed. And, when we win against the only side that is rated below us in the World Cup, we are 11th and they... we can always claim to have beaten someone on their own soil.

Unfortunately, our performance since then plummeted and has been less than impressive, to say the least. We have blamed everybody from goosy Gordon Greenidge to sacked selector Siraj, and everything from flu to football. We have not had the gentleman's courage as yet to admit the fault in our players' commitment to the game. Lack of talent? Well, one should never admit to that because firstly, it is demoralising and secondly, it make little sense then of shooting for the stars.

Since the 1997 ICC, our notable successes have been an ODI win against Kenya in a tri-nation tournament in India last summer (we were third) and a home series win against a West Indies 'A' which many consider as our biggest laurel to date. That same WI 'A' went on to beat India 'A' in India and some of those Caribbean who visited Bangladesh have since made it to the WI side proper. So, it was a big deal.

Our recent campaigns, Commonwealth Games at KL, tour of UK and Ireland, Meril tri-nation trophy at Dhaka have been disastrous, said even with a pinch of patriotism. And so, our imagination today has been reduced to such minuscule dimensions that we cannot think beyond beating Scotland.



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## Cutting the root, caring the branch

Mir A Zaman

Last year, just when the whole country was reeling under the devastating impact of the century and the government planned to raise some fifteen hundred crore taka for post-flood rehabilitation through austerity and fresh taxes, hosting the nine-nation Wills International Cup cricket championship, to many, seemed luxury.

Their cynicism was grounded in reality beyond an iota of doubt. Installation of a new floodlight system and electronic scoreboard, laying out of international standard wicket and different face-lifting activities at the Bangabandhu National Stadium required crores of taka. Moreover, there are other areas of investment like upgradation of extant sport infrastructure. Whether a country ravaged by the prolonged and pervasive deluge can, and should, spent so much on a tournament that would hardly generate any financial return was an much-belaboured issue.

Organisers of the knock-out tournament had their reasons for going ahead with the ambitious venture. Unlike the detractors, they took into account the long-term impact of the Mini World Cup as the tournament was popularly known as for the very fact that it had involved all the Test-playing nations, would have on the country's cricket. Hosting the tournament, they had argued, would enhance the country's image world-wide. Besides, the infrastructure development, they had said, would have a long-term benefit.

On the first count, they were right, indeed. Whenever one switches on to a sports channel to watch a one-day international match anytime, anywhere in the world, it is highly likely that one would hear the commentators making a passing remark on the Wills International Cup. The tournament has certainly done what the organisers predicted - it has helped the Bangabandhu National Stadium make a niche in the world's cricket map.

On the second, unfortunately, they were wrong. Just when the national cricketers are acclimatising themselves with the difficult playing conditions in the British Isles for the World Cup, the game's premier event, back home, works have been on in full swing to get the Bangabandhu National Stadium in shape for the football season. After more than two years, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has taken over the ground, built exclusively for cricket in the fifties, from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Four of the seven pitches, specially tailored for the Wills Cup, have already been dug up, and the rest will meet similar fate in near future. By the time the football season ends, and the BCB gets the stadium back, it will have to start from the scratches - wiping out the marks left behind the footballists' spikes, rolling the outfield ready and, of course, laying the turfs all over again. So much for long-term benefit of the infrastructure development!

Successful staging of the Wills International Cup, the final of first-ever Asian Test Championship and the recent triangular series involving Zimbabwe, Kenya and the hosts have certainly raised hopes among the country's sport-lovers of an awakening for the people at the National Sports Council (NSC), the highest governing body of sports affairs. General expectations were that since the stadium had been upgraded, spending a huge amount of tax-payers' money, it will be dedicated fully to cricketing activities. The BCB may have harboured similar hopes. However, their expectations were cruelly belied, for they had been based on an extremely erroneous rationale that the NSC is run by wise men.

Far-sight does not seem to be the NSC's forte. One has to struggle real hard to find one NSC decision that smacks of long-term planning. One wonders why the Mirpur Stadium was upgraded with floodlights and synthetic tracks in the first place. It seems the Council could not look further beyond the sixth South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. And, similar

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THE ONLY BENEFICIARIES: They were paid to build it and they were paid to destroy it — workmen at the Bangabandhu. — Star file photo