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Veetee: Coming to a boil

From Nizamuddin Ahmed

LONDON, June 1: Bangladesh Cricket Board may have turned down at least one offer of fifty thousand US dollars before agreeing to the Veetee sponsorship of fifteen thousand pounds.

This was disclosed to this correspondent by BCB member, Selim Abedin Chowdhury.

The assertion was, however, denied by the BCB general secretary Syed Ashraful Huq in London today.

Talking at his Essex hotel, Selim Abedin Chowdhury said, "While I was tour manager of the Bangladeshi team that participated in last year's tri-nation tournament in India, several Indian business and advertisement companies contacted me in search of a sponsorship deal for the Bangladeshi World Cup squad."

Kenya was the third team in that tournament, beating whom Bangladesh recorded its first ODI win.

Chowdhury said that team manager Gazi Ashraf Hossain also attended these meetings.

"They (Indian companies) were so persuasive that they rang me even after my return to Bangladesh inquiring about their offers," said Chowdhury.

"The best offer was of fifty thousand dollars and I handed over a letter to this effect to the BCB executives in Dhaka.

"The BCB general secretary at one stage informed me that the Indian offer that I had placed had to be rejected because it was too low," Chowdhury continued, expressing his surprise that a deal was made with Veetee for a much lower amount.

In his response, the BCB general secretary, Syed Ashraful Huq, said Veetee as sponsors of the Bangladeshi team in the World Cup was "fixed" by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), the organisers of the tournament.

There was a cut-off time for sending names of the sponsors to the ECB as the playing clothes had to be ordered. We wrote to several companies and advertisement agencies in Dhaka, but there was no response. So, when the ECB called and said it could arrange Veetee for us, we agreed. We had also asked ECB to look for a sponsor for us. What we got was the only positive response among all the negatives," said Ashraful.

Retorting to the position of Selim Abedin Chowdhury and the Indian offer, Ashraful Huq said, "that letter was from an advertisement agency, not any company. The agency said it would look for a sponsor for our team, provided we gave it the exclusive right to do so, and on payment of a commission. Later, we contacted them but there was no response. I assume they did not get anyone."

The Veetee issue is now being discussed in England among some in the Bangladeshi community.

Said Riazuddin, a London-based Sylhet businessman, at Northampton yesterday, "I am convinced that Bangladesh would have got a better deal. Even with our resources in England, a hundred thousand pound deal was very much possible," reports AFP.

"It's not the Pakistan players we fear, but the fans," Azharuddin said ahead of the second round match between the arch-rivals at Old Trafford in Manchester on June 8.

The tension surrounding the match has increased following military clashes and shelling last week on the disputed Kashmir border between the two nations.

British police have already announced extra security plans to prepare for the game in the north-western city of Manchester, which has large Pakistani and Indian communities.

To date, most player complaints have been about over-enthusiastic supporters wanting to congratulate their heroes.

But some players are now voicing fears that rival supporters could assault a player from another team during an end-of-match pitch invasion.

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Monday, said: "Something has to be done to stop this."

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Hundreds of fans streamed onto the ground even before television replays had confirmed the last dismissal.

The Indian captain, who joined Australia's Steve Waugh earlier in the tournament to warn players could be hurt, said: "It was great to have so many people supporting us against England, but what's the point if we have to run away from them after the match?"

Even before the last wicket falls, players are thinking how to get back quickly to the pavilion. It may look funny, but it is a very serious matter.

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