

Sports

# No place left to hide

by Shakil Kasem

THE TURN OF the century has brought Bangladesh face to face with the quintessential question of what sports might mean to this nation of under-achievers. In every sphere of activity, be it politics, trade, industry, commerce, education, health, et al, Bangladesh seems to be regress-

ing. Nothing of note has been achieved, and try as hard as we might, the silver lining behind the clouds, or the faint light at the end of the dark tunnel, still seem an illusion. And so it has been with Bangladesh sports.

The reasons for Bangladesh sports not exactly headed towards any destination worthy

of note is not difficult to fathom. Sports is a natural activity performed and controlled by Bangladeshis with the same endemic mindset that dominates the rest of the nation's activities. Socially and culturally, we are not achievers in the real sense of the term, consequently we either lose interest in long

term planning and efforts or are simply disinterested to travel the hard path of progress. Development of sports must always be considered to be a complete package of reforms, and goals to be achieved. These are the essential fundamentals of the development process. Sadly, we have still not been

able to understand or come to terms with the basics of the development game. While the rest of the world is merely passing us by, we continue to sleep blissfully with our blinkers on.

Mismanagement is rife in our sports arena; one may exercise one's prerogative to put it politely or bluntly, as the case may be. But mismanagement in the sports arena is an endemic sub-continental phenomenon, and Bangladesh seems to be learning the relevant lessons from its sub-continental cousins: India with a billion people is still in search of a sporting identity in the world, even after 50 years. Pakistan continues to hang on to its cricket and hockey prowess, much the same way as an undeveloped African state with a one crop economy. Bangladesh, mildly stated, is still confused where it stands on the world's sporting stage.

The future of any sporting achievements for Bangladesh look decidedly bleak. The reasons are many and those have been fairly obvious for long, only that the powers that be chose to ignore them all this time. Gone are the days when schools, colleges and universities used to nurture talents in different sporting disciplines. Armanitola High School was synonymous with hockey. Pogose, West End and Muslim High School churned out footballers, a dime a dozen. St Gregory's was the last word in basketball and cricket. St Joseph's had a long tradition in basketball. The cadet colleges and the Residential Model School demanded sporting excellence. There was a culture of sporting activities in those early days at the school level.

This trend was carried on to the colleges and universities. All across the country there were inter-school competitions, for athletics, cricket, football and hockey; colleges took part and competed against each other in different sports competitions. Universities held their own in their own right with regular competitions. It was natural that sporting talents could flower at the formative stages at the school level and flourish subsequently at the upper echelons in colleges and universities. Every sportsman worth mentioning had therefore a proper educational background to boast of as well.

Such competitions and sports facilities at the school levels are literally non-existent today. In urban areas such as Dhaka and Chittagong, children are packed like sardines in schools which had been someone's residence. Education is imparted in kitchens, dining rooms and bedrooms, while the headmaster or headmistress overlooks all that should not be scholarly, from the garage or store room, now turned into an office. Students play volleyball or soccer in the carpark or driveway. No eyebrows are raised. One is certain though no Tendulkar is likely to emerge from this lot.

The school's conveyor belt is not surprisingly, turning out a generation of couch potatoes and video game freaks who will not know which end of a cricket bat to hold. The future of sports is strangled at birth these days. Not unnaturally, the only avenues left for sports to meander through, are the clubs. It is here that the buck is trodden and trampled upon, for clubs have never thought about the greater interest of any game, other than their own interests.

What exactly makes the club official tick may be a question likely to disturb the sleep of any sociologist worth his salt. But as things stand, every aspect of any game is geared to address the magic adage by the club, of the club and for the club. Big clubs, big money, rule Bangladesh sports. Officialdom and national sports authorities and federations are held hostage by the clubs with nothing short of self serving interest being the primary order of the day.

We are turning gradually and steadily into a nation of paper tigers and tin soldiers determined to talk big and misuse any power vested on them at the drop of a hat. Accountability at the highest level of sports management is a non-existent commodity. As long as non sportsmen, holding office on voluntary basis continue to call the shots, Bangladesh sports will be facing a slow and systematic death.

Our recent and limited success in cricket, played serious incidentally by only nine counties of the world, is more an exception to the rule than anything else. Let us not delude ourselves otherwise.

The writing is stark and clear on the wall. Get the youngsters back into the game, and indoctrinate and put in place a management system that is conversant with the call of the times. Internationally we are the dregs of the sporting world, and although there is no place to go but up, as a nation we do have the singular knack of digging ourselves into even deeper holes. For me, optimism is as dangerous as HIV.

We have a mountain to climb. But are we ready? Or more importantly are we willing? Time cannot tell. We have run out of time. Que, sera sera.



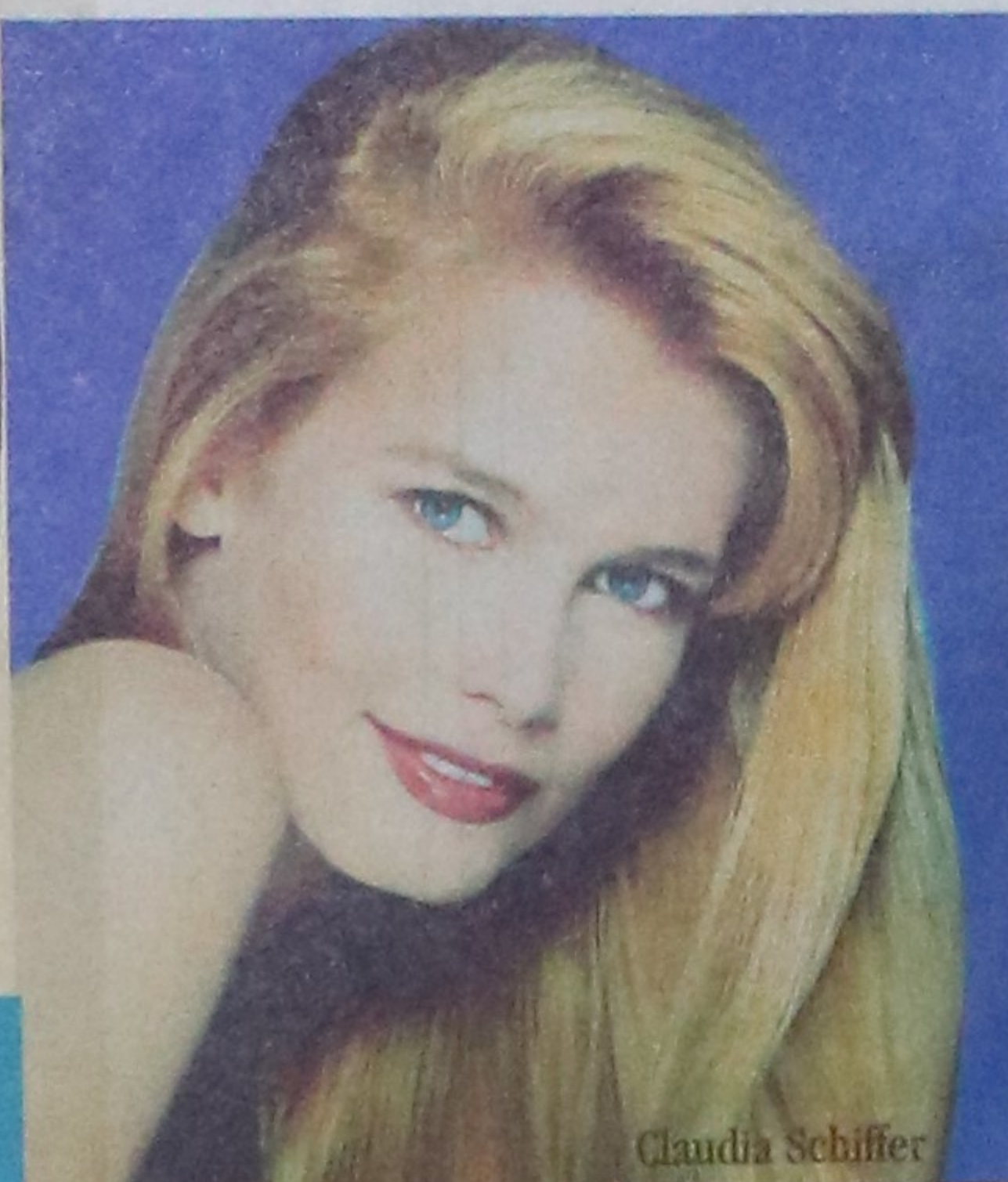
The country created history in the World Cup of cricket in England last year. The success should not end here.

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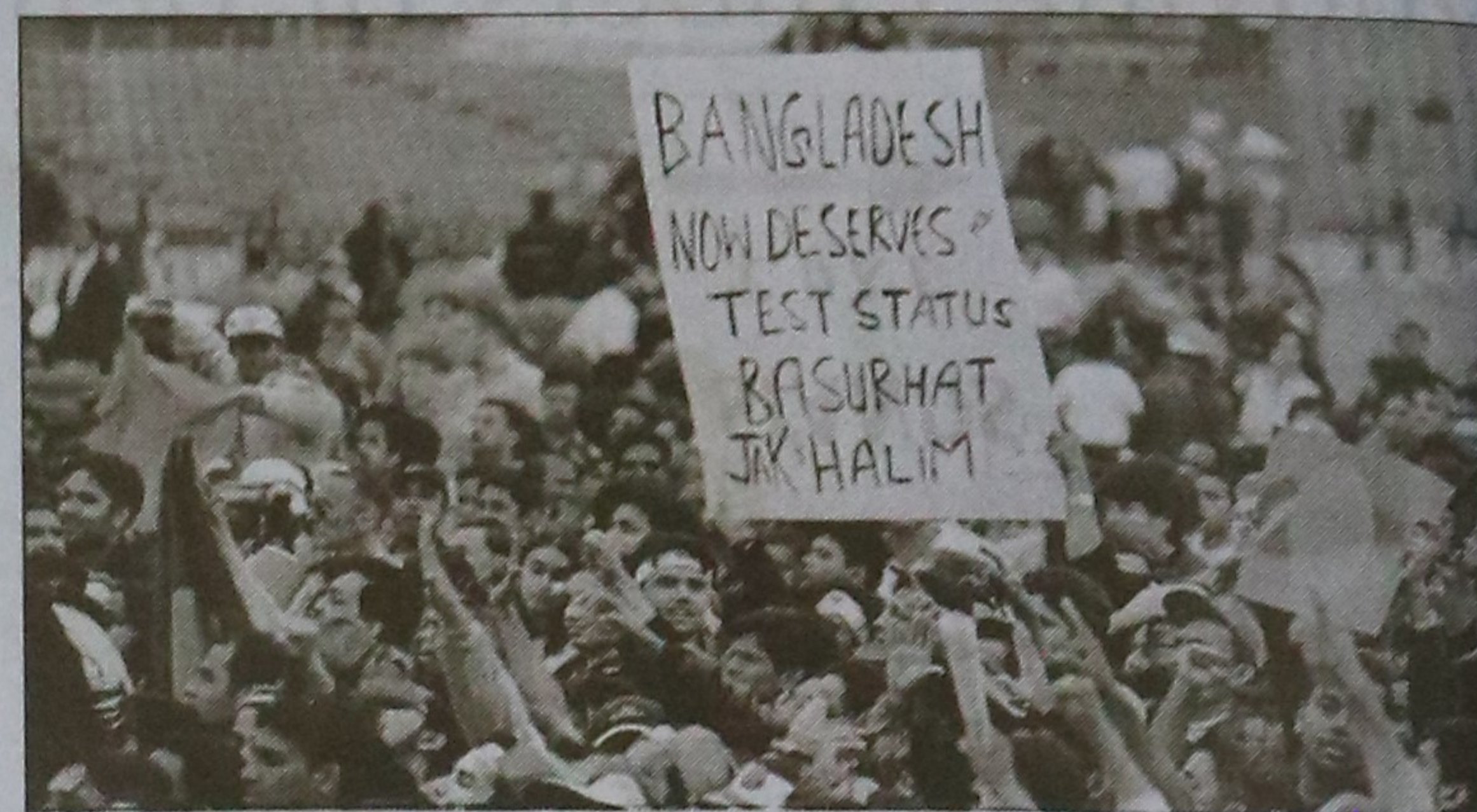


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To convince the cricket lords, there need to be development of the game from the grassroots

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