

BUILDING A MORE COMPETITIVE TEAM



DHAKA TUESDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2004

The Daily Star Sport organised a roundtable on cricket on December 20, 2003. The purpose of the roundtable titled 'Building a More Competitive Team', first of its kind by any newspaper in the country, was to identify various problems that are proving detrimental to the advancement of the popular game in the country. It was an animated four-hour discussion at the Conference Room of The Daily Star, where sixteen speakers, who have served or is serving cricket in different capacities, shared their wealth of experience. We strongly feel that by putting their words into writing it is possible to outline a roadmap that can take our cricket to a desired standard. Although Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Ali Asghar was a notable absentee in the roundtable, he made up for his non-appearance with an interview afterwards. We are also carrying that interview in the supplement. It's better late than never and we hope that our effort will set a trend in the days to come.

Following is a transcript version of the roundtable:

Mahfuz Anam: Good morning gentlemen. I welcome you all to this The Daily Star roundtable on Cricket: Building a more competitive team.

The daily Star as you know has a tradition of organising roundtables on various important national issues and this is the first time we are actually holding something on sport.

We did organise events around the World Cup football and a quiz contest on World Cup cricket but nothing like this as an intellectual input to promote cricket in Bangladesh.

You have a list of invitees in front of you and you will see that we tried to include everybody who is playing some role now and also people who have played important roles in the past in promoting cricket in Bangladesh.

As our heading says, "Building

problem you think now is faced by our cricket. In other words, to have a competitive Bangladesh cricket team today, what in your view is the number one problem?"

Utpal Shuvro: The present structure of domestic cricket.

Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury: Lack of a compact, competitive, stable and smooth going cricketing society.

Sarwar Imran: The standard of teamwork and coaching has to be improved.

Ziaul Islam Masud: Need of efficient people in the leadership.

Maqbul Hussein Duthia: Lack of a highly qualified pool of modern coaches.

Mahfuz Anam: Lack of efficient management structure.

Shafiqur Rahman Munna: Have to have more infrastructure, grounds for cricket all over Bangladesh.

international cricket.

Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu: After gained Test status, the best possible people around were not in the driving seat to develop cricket in the country.

Mahmud Ul Haq Manu: An efficient management structure is what we are lacking.

Faruque Ahmed: Lack of proper training facilities and real good wickets.

Mahfuz Anam: We are finished. I think this gives us a good idea of the type of agenda we can have for the meeting. We have had 15 comments and if we group them together we find that they come under mainly three sets of issues.

The first set of problem is domestic cricket infrastructure. Then a second set of problems comes in management, management set-up, management of the Board and other

management. I think we should start with domestic cricket and the facilities. I think your point is very well taken. Not only our cricket is suffering, but the country is suffering as a whole. So who would like to be the first guest?"

Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen: I think the domestic cricket and infrastructure are not only two very important issues but also the main issues to be addressed. Where does our problem lie?

We lack proper grounds or, what I would like to say, lack infrastructural development and that's why we are not being able to play the kind of cricket we want or develop a continuous cricket culture. If you look at the grounds outside Dhaka you will find all of them are standing as concrete structures. Perhaps Bangladesh is the only country



THE COUNTRY'S FINEST MOMENT TO DATE
Bangladesh cricketers celebrate the fall of yet another Pakistan wicket at Northampton in their 1999 World Cup match which they eventually won.



Speakers at The Daily Star roundtable.

a more competitive team."

Now the purpose of our roundtable is really not to try and blame people, not to try and say whose fault has caused this disaster or that. Our attempt is forward looking. We want to address the issues and move ahead. So, basically, I would like all of you to have a forward looking approach and say what we can do, not the mistakes we have paid. Because, you know in

Mainul Haq: We must have proper infrastructure.

Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen: We have to promote domestic cricket.

KZ Islam: I will go along with the recommendations of the inquiry committee after the World Cup debacle. And they identified the first problem confronting the Bangladesh cricket, as a matter of fact for any thing or any organisation, is politicisation.

"I appeal to the present Board don't make your president a lame duck president. Give him the authority and power to decide. There are whisperings, which are now turning into a loud chorus that he cannot decide because there are other influences within the Board."

--Saber Hossain Chowdhury

Bangladesh the culture is the play the 'blame game'. You know, always it is other fellow's fault, not mine and it doesn't lead anywhere.

Now, we have invited the president of our Cricket Board Ali Asghar MP and also we have invited Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the former president. And I think it was in the fitness of things that we have kept two chairs for the two presidents. The moment they come they would be sitting there and it is the tradition of The Daily Star that when we have photographs, the editor really doesn't adorn the centrepiece.

What I would like to do is first of all I would ask you one question and go around the table with your answer. The question is: **What is the number one**



Aliul Islam: There should be unification in the Board with good, honest and efficient cricket people and organisers.

Khandoker Jamil Uddin: Lack of smooth future planning for a longer period of time in both domestic as well as

things.

The third set of issues that has come up is policies, planning and things like that.

And off course Mr. KZ Islam has mentioned the issue of politicisation.

So may we start off with domestic cricket and infrastructure?"

KZ Islam: Various points have been mentioned and all of them are very fundamental. But at the top of everything should be the implementing body. What we see here in our country is one person sets up a beautiful management structure. But when the next party comes in it removes the whole lot and starts all over again.

In Bangladesh what are the success stories? I would say something like Grameen Bank or BRAC. What is the hallmark of this continuity of management? You will find one person has been managing BRAC for the last 35 years. Same thing happens to Grameen Bank. And these organisations are held up as international success stories.

But when we look at our cricket, I think something has gone wrong somewhere in between and I feel it has been because of the very frequent changes of management.

And that's what I mean as politicisation. This culture of messing around with sports has to stop.

If somebody is doing a good job, regardless of his political culture, he should be allowed to continue.

Mahfuz Anam: Kamal Bhai, we will have a more detailed discussion on this as I think the second set of issues will be the

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in the world which has so many stadiums. You will find at least one stadium in every district. But what we cannot do is use them properly. One stadium is being used for all kinds of sports like football, cricket, hockey, kabadi and what not? It is also being used for holding national programmes.

So, until we get grounds exclusively for cricket we cannot build our domestic structure and prepare the kind of wickets we need.

Mahfuz Anam: But as far as we know resource allocation has not been made for the development of the grounds.

Shah Nurul Kabir: No, allocation has also been made this year. We are facing problem only this year, since the Under-19 World Cup is going to take place in our country. We are setting up five to six venues permanently for cricket in places like Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong and Bogra. Once the competition is over, cricket is going to get some venues permanently.

Mahfuz Anam: Domestic cricket and infrastructure both

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Ali Asghar was one of the most anticipated guests at The Daily Star Roundtable on Cricket. However, the lawmaker from Khulna failed to reach Dhaka in time from his constituency after missing the morning flight. The Daily Star Sport later in the first week of January caught up with Asghar for an exclusive interview that touched on many of the burning questions and recommendations to come out of the roundtable.

The Daily Star Sport (DSS): We desperately missed you in the round table.

Ali Asghar (AA): First of all I want to thank The Daily Star for taking this interview after I missed the roundtable. I'm really sorry to miss the event.

In fact, I was in Khulna (my constituency) on that day and was scheduled to avail the first flight in the morning to come to Dhaka. But the flight was delayed because of thick fog and I couldn't reach here in time.

DSS: Our first question is what is the number one problem you think now is faced by our cricket?"

AA: Look, we have numerous problems and it's very difficult to single one out. Even Australia have problems too.

But again if you ask me about one problem, I think it's the lack of proper cricketing infrastructure, which is the main problem in Bangladesh cricket. We don't have the infrastructure.

DSS: In the roundtable, most of the speakers identified flaws in domestic cricket structure as the number one problem. There were

allegations that your Board failed to make the National League as the premier competition of the country. Besides, there is no proper ground for cricket and the game needs to be taken out of the capital. Do you agree? How do you want to go about it?"

AA: Yes, I partially agree with them and that's why we are thinking of taking the game out of Dhaka. We are building five stadia at different places in the country which will be ready for the Under-19 World Cup.

We are also thinking to develop the Sylhet and Barisal stadiums to raise the number of cricket venues. Hopefully work will start there after the under-19 meet.

I can assure you that the game will be decentralised from this season once the World Cup is over.

DSS: It is said that the schools cricket is the breeding ground of the game. But the tournament these days is not creating that much enthusiasm compared to what we have seen in the past. The month of December is the ideal time for the meet to take place, but it did not happen this year.



AA: The schools cricket will start next week (2nd week of January). We could not hold it in December because of our involvement in the World Cup and also for unavailability of grounds. But again this will be over from next season.

DSS: We frequently see that domestic competitions are being hampered by international events. The National League this year almost suffered a suspension due to the preparations for the World Cup. Don't you have a proper plan?"

AA: You know the ICC has given us a ten-year programme for International

cricket. We cannot ignore that because that is related with the teams visiting Bangladesh. Again, we give a lot of importance to our domestic cricket and try not to hamper that for international events. However, it happens due to shortage of grounds.

DSS: We are fascinated to building new stadia but always end up in erecting a concrete structure rather than having all the facilities there needed for the game. Will the stadiums that are being made be exclusively for cricket?"

AA: Yes, these five are cricket stadiums with all the required facilities. The government has given us written assurance that those stadiums will only be used for cricket. The government will hand over the venues to BCB after the World Cup.

DSS: Now let's have your views on an ideal management set up. Are you on way to making it a reality?"

AA: Yes, I'm looking forward to setting up an ideal management system and the

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THE PARTICIPANTS

- Saber Hossain Chowdhury** (Former BCB president)
- KZ Islam** (Former BCB president)
- Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen** (Chairman, Tournament Committee, BCB)
- Mahfuz Anam** (Chairman, Cricket Committee, BCB)
- Shafiqur Rahman Munna** (Chairman, Grounds Committee, BCB)
- Maqbul Hussein Duthia** (CEO, BCB)
- Mahmud Ul Haq Manu** (Director, BCB)
- Aliul Islam** (Former Chief Selector, BCB)
- Mainul Haq** (Former Chief Selector, BCB)
- Faruque Ahmed** (Chief Selector, BCB)
- Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury** (Cricket coach)
- Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu** (Former national captain)
- Ziaul Islam Masud** (Former national player and umpire)
- Utpal Shuvro** (Sports Editor, Prothom Alo)
- Khandoker Jamil Uddin** (Secretary, Development Committee, BCB)
- Sarwar Imran** (National coach)

six months. It is one of the issues we have been advocating and the good news is that at the moment the government is building six new indoor facilities across the country. It is a great move and will allow players of all regions to practise round the year. It will also help us decentralise the game.

But since it is an integrated and continuous process we must keep it in mind that it requires a lot of fund.

Mahfuz Anam: Do we have it?"

Mahfuz Anam: At the moment, we do what we plan. But this may not be sufficient.

Being a Test-playing nation this country does not have an exclusive cricket ground, which is so unfortunate. I am afraid that if it were spelled out our Test status would be in question. You cannot be a Test-playing country

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