

BUILDING A MORE COMPETITIVE TEAM

FROM PAGE 1 where your national team cannot go to practice at their will.

Look at any other country, each of them has a cricket home. Like Lord's, which identifies the game in England. We don't have that. You cannot grow without an identity.

So, I think the move to allocate the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla Stadium exclusively to cricket is a positive one. And you will be glad to know that the BCB, with the help of Cricket Australia, has had a deal with an Australian consultancy firm. They are coming up with a master plan in this regard.

But again implementing a master plan involves a huge amount of money. So I encourage the leading business bodies to come forward and make contribution in such a large project which will make the job a lot easier.

Mahfuz Anam: Just to clarify one point, you mentioned that you prepare pitches and grounds for cricket and then it goes to waste. So, has a decision been taken now to protect those pitches all year round?

Mahbub Anam: I'm afraid, no. We have laid seven wickets at the Dhaka Stadium and each cost us Tk 1,50,000. But every year we need to repair three wickets after the football season was over, which cost us Tk 15,000 to make them into shape. It's a waste of time and money for no good reason in a poverty-



day National Cricket League but it is in an infancy stage. Besides, it has so far failed to create the necessary rivalry, excitement and sense of belonging among the participating six divisions. So, what I mean by saying true decentralisation of cricket is that the game should be played as much in all the divisions as in Dhaka. For example, a lot of current national players are coming from Sylhet. But if we look into the cricketing activities in Sylhet, it is not as much active as in Dhaka.

I want to add another thing, which is to follow the example of Mr. KZ Islam's successful Nirman school concept. It will help us to start in a small scale like we can pick ten schools from Dhaka, six from Chittagong four each from Khulna and Rajshahi and two each from Sylhet and Barisal based on their performance in the domestic school

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of an effective drainage system in those newly build stadiums so that we do not get embarrassed in front of the international community like the time the whole day's play was washed out for just one short bout of rain at the Bangabandhu National Stadium during England's tour of Bangladesh.

Mahbub Anam: I want to add something to Lipu's query about the authority of the ground. At the moment the NSC is given an official letter to the Board stating that these grounds are in the custody of BCB. But unfortunately I don't know what will happen in the future whether the notice will be reverted with the change of the government.

Mainul Haq: I feel that a domestic calendar is very important. You can have a good calendar but it is equally important to implement it. But if I'm not mistaken the only venue

one way of taking it out of Dhaka was the school cricket tournament. Although there were hundred entries from Dhaka and only ten to twelve from different zones, I was startled to see sixty per cent of the time the national schools tournament was won by teams from outside Dhaka.

Let me take the opportunity to tell a story of how six members of the Nirman school team became members of the victorious Bangladesh ACC Trophy team.

When we started the school tournament it created enormous enthusiasm and about twenty to thirty thousand boys were involved in the competition. Our scouts used to go round the country and pick up the talented boys and I used to house them in Dhaka for six months and provide them with proper diet, exercise and practice. Then they started playing in the domestic

same players are playing for several years. But if you look at our team, in three years we have had an experiment with sixty players. Why this? I mean if a player fails once or twice, persist with him, give him more chance.

So, coming to another micro level problem, which was raised by the inquiry committee, was the use of bowling machine. In international cricket bowling is done at a speed of 140-plus per hour. And our bowlers do not bowl more than 130kph. So, there is a need for tremendous practice with bowling machines. And I believe we have a bowling machine, which is out of order. We should have a dozen bowling machines.

The other problem with our players is their fragile physique. If you compare the average age and the average weight with the other Test playing nations Bangladesh will perhaps become the lowest. Why our players are light because they are under-nourished. I would say when the national players are not playing cricket they should not stay in Bangladesh. They should be sent either to Australia or to England. For nothing else but for food because when they go home after the national duties they eat all our adulterated food, rubbish food.

So, my suggestion is send them off to play in the Lancashire League in the summer when there is rainy here. I'm sure they will find a place in Lancashire League even it is free and they do not get paid. Let the Board pay for it. It will not only allow them to have proper food but also allow them to play in good pitches.

I don't know why they are talking about money. The BCB is not short of money. If anything they have got too much is money. As Saber Hossain Chowdhury said when he left the Board he left a balance of over 200 crore taka and he wants know what happened to it.

Life is all about opportunity. So, it's the job of the Board or in a broader perspective a job of the government to provide the opportunities for the talents from Tetulia to Teknaf to flower.

Mahbub Anam: I just want to clarify one thing which I think is misunderstood. Domestic cricket has not suffered. All the tournaments are going on as schedule including the school tournament. The junior level tournament which has been introduced by the board four years ago is still continuing.

I think the backbone of cricket is the under-13, under-15, under-17 and under-19 tournaments.

This is something the public should know. It is being progressively decentralised. Initially it was played on a divisional level. In the second year we played at the district-level. Now all the districts are participating within themselves and then a team is selected for the division and the second phase is played.

And as our ex-president KZ Islam has mentioned that he used to scout players to make his Nirman team, now it is the Board which takes the responsibility and builds under-13, under-15, under-17 and under-19 teams. They are housed in a residential camp in BKSP, they are nourished and coached with expert staff.

Utpal Shuvro: I want to mention one thing about regional cricket association. We heard about it many times before. It is a fantastic idea. I think it is not possible for the BCB alone to control cricket. It's not possible for BCB to go to 64 districts and tell them what to do. If divisional cricket associations are there they will be in charge and they will be accountable to the BCB. So it will be the first step towards decentralisation. I don't know why it has not happened. After Bangladesh won the ICC trophy,

the then president Saber Hossain Chowdhury told us that this divisional association would be on top of his agenda.

The other problem I want to put emphasis on is the wickets. The main reason for the bad performance of our national team is that we are playing on substandard wickets at home. Our batsmen acquire wrong habits, bowlers get false sense of confidence and when they step into the international level they are exposed there. A lot is spent on the National League but it's still not up to the standard. The National Cricket League should be our main domestic competition but it's just being played in a picnic mood. There's no competitiveness, which can prepare the players for international level. And the main reason for this is the lack of regional cricket association because now the players who are playing in Dhaka, they are just divided into six teams and play for the divisional teams just like another club tournament because there is no real regional pride.

For example, someone like Sanwar Hossain, who was born in Mymensingh, has played his whole career in Dhaka.

Ziaul Islam: I just want to make a reference, in 1980, I went to Hyderabad to play some matches for Azad Boys Club in the Mainudolla Gold Cup. In Hyderabad they organised about 110 matches throughout their season. In Dhaka, in a season there are ten to maximum 15 maximum matches. You just see the difference.

Mahmud UI Haq Manu: Actually all of us are saying let's take cricket outside of Dhaka. But we are not doing that. In the last Board, we made the first cricket calendar in 2001. We had a big plan to arrange the Club Cup tournament. The BCB should take the initiative at all the six divisional headquarters. The BCB should organise the Premier League in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet and all the champion teams will play centrally in Dhaka and from Dhaka we can include two teams the Premier League champions and runners-up. That would have been a wonderful tournament because the way we are playing the National League in at the moment, it has no charm.

The system has to be changed. If you want to ensure infrastructural development, good wickets, good coaches, good umpires, at the same time you have to have a good domestic cricketing structure. Without good domestic cricket we can't improve our national cricket.

I believe the Dhaka League is very important for us although there is need of decentralisation.

The future of a lot of players is dependent on Dhaka League.

Saber Hossain: I think the first point that should be addressed is the structure of the domestic cricket. When we applied for the ICC Test status the first thing they looked at was our structure of domestic cricket. And that time in a National Championship we had sixty four teams, sixty-four district each had a team, ICC's view was this was too diluted a system. It didn't provide quality because if you have sixty-four teams who are competing at the national-level and you have a pool of twenty players, who are really national material, then you can imagine that in every three teams they are going to be one national player. So the first thing we did was instead of having 64 districts we brought it down to six divisional teams and this is where our cricket started. If we talk about development of the game you have to talk about the integrity of the your first-class structure.

If your first-class cricket is not strong your Test level perfor-

mance is not going to be satisfactory. If you look at the current Test teams, the reason why Australia is at the top is because the gap between their first-class cricket and the standard of their Test cricket is minimal. Any player from the first-class structure can walk into the national team. So when we talk about our domestic cricket we should look at ways and means of strengthening the first-class structure because that is the structure that is going to provide you cricketers for your national team. I don't wish to be personal in any of the attack and I think you have all seen that I have not been president of the cricket board now for two and half an years and this is the first public forum or dialogue that actually I am taking part in. I made some observations after the World Cup and then also some observation I made from my party platform but other than that I didn't say much because I felt the Board has to run in its own way and we want to make the task easier. But I think a question that has to be asked is why did we abandon the home and away system of our National League? We introduced a system where in a National League the six divisions would play each other on home and away basis. You see it's one thing to say that you want to decentralise the game and it's another to actually try and institutionalise the decentralisation concept. And the way of doing that was for a team to play at home and then for a team to go away and play in the other territory.

The infrastructure in all those divisional stadiums would also have improved. Our players would have had the experience of travelling from one place to the other. What happens in the English County season? They go around various counties and they play.

What happens in the Pura Cup in Australia? They go around various states and play.

But we stopped that and I'm glad that the BCB has reintroduced this because I think that was suicidal and that was counter productive and that was regressive. I don't know what motivated the Board to do that

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because that is where we went wrong at the time when we should have been concentrating on that and strengthening the base. We in fact brought all of the cricket back to Dhaka.

So, how can you expect our national team players to perform at the Test level when they are only playing six games and all in Dhaka instead of the ten or twelve games that they played before? You see, we demand and we expect performance from players. But if we don't organise our domestic structure in such a way that they are equipped to play Test cricket, how can we expect them to perform? Mahbub Anam spoke of the development programme that we have. You see, when you talk about the domestic structure, you will have two motivations, you will have two targets. One is your first-class cricket and the other is development programme. And we now have the under-13. When we introduced it even the Australians didn't have that. We didn't get the Test status on the basis of our playing ability. We got Test status on the basis of potential and opportunity. Because people felt there was a good potential. So, I think what is very important is our domestic structure should

have two dimension. One is the first-class cricket and the other is the development dimension because we have to create a pipeline that is going to feed our national team.

Now where is this pipeline going to come from? Other major issue which has to be addressed is the perennial conflict between club cricket and district cricket.

You see, the way Bangladesh cricket has evolved, it has been club cricket that has played the pioneering role. It has been the cricket in Dhaka and in the past, the cricket in Chittagong. So, the clubs have a huge contribution. But as each system evolves, you have to rely on your regional system rather than on the clubs. I'm not saying you have to do away with the clubs but you have to find the right balance. In the past we have seen that the club interest and the club lobby is also very strong. You know, lot of us have club affiliations. Now when we come from a club affiliation and we are sitting in the Board, it is very difficult to take a decision that is going to go against the interest of the clubs.

So, you have to come out of this. I don't call it a vicious circle but I think it's a circle that doesn't have to promote the game in Bangladesh. And we have to find that balance. May be then the clubs can be encouraged to play the three-day version of the game. May be the clubs can be encouraged to play the four-day version of the game because the players are essentially the same. So, this is an issue that also has to be addressed.

KZ Islam: In the future, I would like to see the national cricketers coming not from Mohammedan Sporting or Abahani and Brothers Union but they are coming from Chittagong, they are coming from Sylhet and they are coming from Rajshahi. Is cricket in England restricted to London? Is cricket in Australia restricted to Melbourne? Is cricket in India is restricted to the city of Bombay? They come from the various parts of the country. And the national cricketers do not identify themselves as coming from a particular club, they come from



the zones.

Mahfuz Anam: I think that the point of decentralisation and having it spread out or sent out to Dhaka has been well made. I think we all agreed on this both past and present leadership. So, can we move to the next item, which I think many people identified at the beginning. That is management set up. And I think also the point that KZ Islam made at the very outset that the politicisation of the whole cricketing management. There is a one management there, they have their own ideas and then there is a change of the government and you have sweeping change in the cricket leadership. I wish Ali Asghar had arrived because I was deliberately waiting for him to come when we started this subject because as the president of the BCB he is the top manager in a sense. Anyway, when we went around in the table in the morning asking what is the number one problem, I think many of you identified the whole issue of efficient leadership. People who know cricket, who are good managers should be at the top. So, can we start off with this question of management?

Mahbub Anam: What I have identified as the first priority is management. And as I mentioned that the strategic plan that we have in place now is with the assistance of Cricket Australia, it introduces a management structure that is provided for

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--Mainul Haq

ridden country. So, people have to come forward and take note of it.

Mahfuz Anam: Okay thank you.

Shafiqur Rahman Munna: I think Mahbub has talked a lot about facilities but I believe that without good pitches we can't improve our cricket. Pitch is the heart of cricket. So, our effort at the moment is to lay good and lively pitches like the one in Australia instead of typically slow sub-continent wickets.

Maintenance of the grounds round the year is the other aspect we are lacking. Presently we have 33 grounds where domestic cricket is being played but out of that only six have been allocated exclusively for cricket and would be ready before the Under-19 World Cup. But only making the grounds is not the main thing but to maintain them properly and to do that we need funds, equipment and permanent ground staff.

Being the chairman of the grounds committee I want to say that we are working relentlessly to fulfil the standard ICC requirement in all the grounds. Standard grounds will only lay

competition. After the scouting was completed we can provide those selected schools with proper facilities on condition that they have their own grounds, good pitches and a proper coach. That is what we are planning at this moment and I think it won't need lot of money. So, if we start from that point, I think we can build the platform of getting future cricketers.

Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu: I'm very happy to know from Mahbub bhai's words about so many stadiums are coming up. But I want to know who is going to control it?

Basically, the district sports associations, who control those grounds, always hamper our national cricket by making under-prepared wickets for most of the time. So, a regional cricket association is very important to control those district sports associations if you really want to improve the structure all over the country. Otherwise, I'm afraid we will not be successful.

Secondly, we have seen on so many occasions that commitments made by governments are being broken. There were commitments in that past that

for the national cricket last year was the Fatullah Stadium. So, when the calendar is being made we must ensure a lot of grounds to play the domestic cricket and is not effected by international events. To implement the calendar, the Board should bring the district or divisional levels organisers under its jurisdiction.

Mahfuz Anam: Please can you explain that again. You want the district organisers to come under the central Board.

Mahbub Anam: I think what Lipu and Mainu bhai are talking it is a management issue and the regional association, which should come under administration in the later part of discussion.

Mahfuz Anam: So, it will come later and can we stick to facilities and domestic cricket. (interruption, former BCB president Saber Hossain arrives ...)

I would like to welcome Saber. **Mainul Haq:** We don't need a stadium actually for the spectators but what we need is grounds for players to begin with. We need six to seven permanent cricket fields



equipped with good wickets, practice pitches and a gym and if possible a swimming pool.

Mahfuz Anam: Okay. Now, I'm told that this year you really did not have a good domestic cricket tournament. Am I right?

Mahbub Anam: I think the publication was not right because we organised the national championship sponsored by Emirates which is participated by 64 districts and now we are holding the national league and that will be followed by the Dhaka leagues.

KZ Islam: When I was president my concept was to take cricket out of Dhaka. I saw

the platform for our boys to get accustomed with the faster pitches outside the country.

Mahfuz Anam: Thank you. Anybody from this side who would like to?

Khandoker Jamil Uddin: I do not dwell into resource allocation, practice facilities, indoor facilities since Mahbub and Shafiqur Rahman have already discussed it at length. I want to add something with it, which is decentralisation of cricket activities.

We all know our domestic cricket over the years centred on the Dhaka Premier League. Nowadays we are playing four-

the Bangabandhu National Stadium would be given to cricket. But it did not happen so far. So, I'm confused whether the six new stadiums would solely belong to cricket.

Thirdly, we need a proper cricket calendar and without that one can't judge how the Board and its various committees are performing. It's easy to judge the national team's performance against Australia, India or Pakistan, but is does not reflect the total activities of the Board.

As Mahbub bhai mentioned that cricket is affected by rain for five months a year, I want to add that the Board should make sure