

## Bangladesh cricket

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HUSAIN IMAM

THE second test of the two Grameen phone test match series between Bangladesh and India, held at Dhaka Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla stadium last week (May 25-29), has been a nightmare for Bangladesh cricket. The visitors by a record margin of an innings and 239 runs comprehensively defeated them, in less than 3 days of a 5-day match.

The Bangladeshi tigers, given their talent and potential, did not deserve such an ignominious defeat. They are certainly a young, talented team with potential. At the moment, there is probably no other team in the international arena, with an average age of 23, as talented and promising as the Bangladeshi team.

Not many countries in the world of present day cricket have as many

young, talented and courageous players, like Ashraf, Aftab, Shakib, Mashrafe, Shahadat and Rajjak, as we have in the Bangladesh team.

What they need are training facilities, proper guidance, and nurturing by a group of competent and knowledgeable persons at the helm of the affairs. Because they are young, they are restless and impatient.

It is for the seniors to help them master the art of playing a test match, which is all about talent, technique, temperament and concentration. They have the talent, but are not learning the techniques quickly. They need to master the other two qualities -- temperament and concentration -- sooner rather than later.

If anybody is to be blamed for the miserable performance in the recent test series against India, especially in the second test, it is

firstly those who had decided to keep Habibul Bashar Sumon in the team after his continuously poor performance, first in the West Indies series and then in the world cup.

Secondly those who, in extremely sultry weather and on a batting-friendly pitch, decided to field first after winning the toss. No body having even a minimum level of common sense, let alone a cricketing brain, could have taken such a suicidal decision. No wonder Indian captain Rahul Dravid was taken by surprise when skipper Habibul Bashar decided to field first after winning the toss.

The consequence of that stupid decision was instantly visible. After fielding for a long one and a three quarters days in scorching sun, when the tigers came out to bat, chasing a huge score of 610 for 3 dec., they looked like dehydrated mice with no strength to open their

eyes or move their feet. They quickly lost 4 wickets for only 7 runs. The rest was a foregone conclusion.

I remember Indian cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar, while commenting on the performance on Suhan the then skipper of the Bangladesh team, saying: "Suhan is not bowling, he comes to bat at number 8 or 9 because of his poor form. Why is he then in the team? Is he there only to be a captain?"

The same question may probably be asked about Sumon. He is not a bowler. Nor is he great fielder. Once he was certainly a fascinating batsman. If we go by the statistics, he is still the highest run scorer for Bangladesh.

But now, at least for the last one year, he has been out of form. Why was he then in the team in the present series against a powerful team like India? Is it only to be a skipper? As a skipper also, I would say that he has been more prominent because of lack of dynamism, ingenuity and innovative ideas, not to mention his poor and irresponsible batting. I am sorry to say, in the field he resembled an absent-minded professor more than a cricket captain.

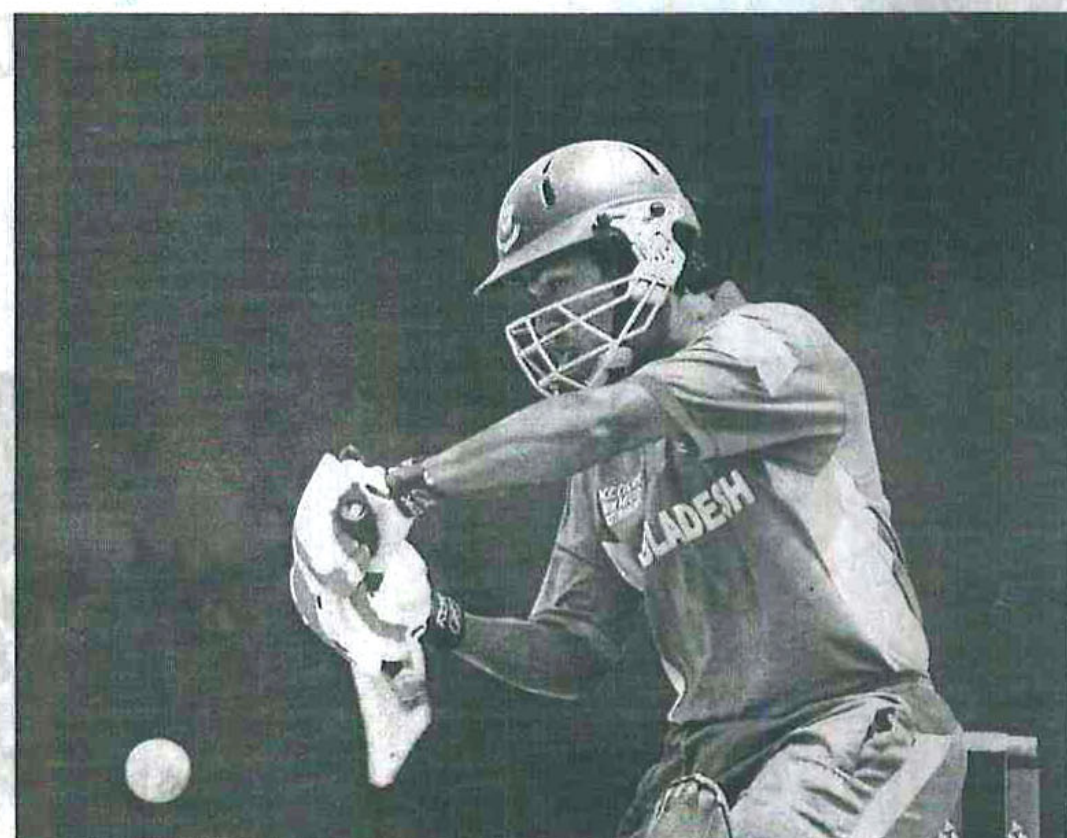
A question may be asked of the

selectors of the Bangladesh cricket team as to why Javed Omar Bellim was included in the ODI team in the recent series. Bangladesh is no longer a minnow, able to play a full 50-over quota and then going down in the record as the loser.

In the one-day version you either lose or win, there is nothing in-between. What is the point of hanging around at the wicket, as Javed Omar usually does, to face 60-70 balls for only for 20 or 30 odd runs in the name of giving a solid foundation if, in the end, you lose the match? Bangladesh is now certainly in a position to win an ODI against any team in the world on a particular day. That they are not consistent in their performance is a different matter.

We see in newspaper reports that Habibul Bashar Suman has decided to step down from the captaincy of the Bangladesh ODI team. He has taken the right decision. He should, in fact, step down from captaincy of both the versions -- test and ODI -- and work hard for a place in the team as a batsman purely on the basis of his batting performance.

I believe he can still be a thrilling



batsman and make significant contributions, especially in the one-day matches. With due respect to his contributions to Bangladesh

cricket, I must say that it is probably time for Javed Omar Bellim to retire from international cricket, and look for a place in the management or

some other cricket related field.

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## Much ado about voter list

MUSTAFAZUR RAHMAN

THE Constitution gives the Election Commission the mandate to prepare an authentic and verifiable voter list, without any exclusions, for each constituency. As the election commissioners also point out, preparation of national ID is not in their mandate or jurisdiction. In fact, a project for preparing national ID was taken up by the Ministry of Home, but did not materialize.

To avoid occurrence of proxy votes, absentee votes by pre-registered fake voters and multiple-registered voters, the idea of a voter list with photographs has now been well accepted. To preempt ballot box stuffing, the idea of transparent ballot boxes is being explored.

To eliminate chances of declaration of wrong or fabricated results, the declaration of results at every voting center is going to be adopted. To avoid intimidation of voters, the election code of conduct is being reviewed, and a method for protection of voters is being devised. The Representation of People Order (RPO) 1972 is being amended to effectively curb indiscipline in, and disruption of, the election.

The Election Commission also has the mandate for delimitation of constituencies so that all votes carry acceptably uniform weight in each constituency. Election is not a new exercise for Bangladesh, and people know very well its importance and purpose. The problem has been the betrayal of public trust by the people entrusted with the election process.

A voter list with photographs just adds one item of biometrics. A digital camera makes it a very simple exercise. Even when the digital camera was not available, and the personal computer was not in general use, correct voter lists



and national IDs had been prepared manually in many countries, especially where the local government system prevailed, family registration system was practiced, and individual citizen registration was in vogue.

If we speak of a nation, every national must be identifiable by a unique citizen number. The issue seems to be big just because we are going to start a system for the first time without properly set institutions. We shall have to do it, and we shall have to set effective institutions in place.

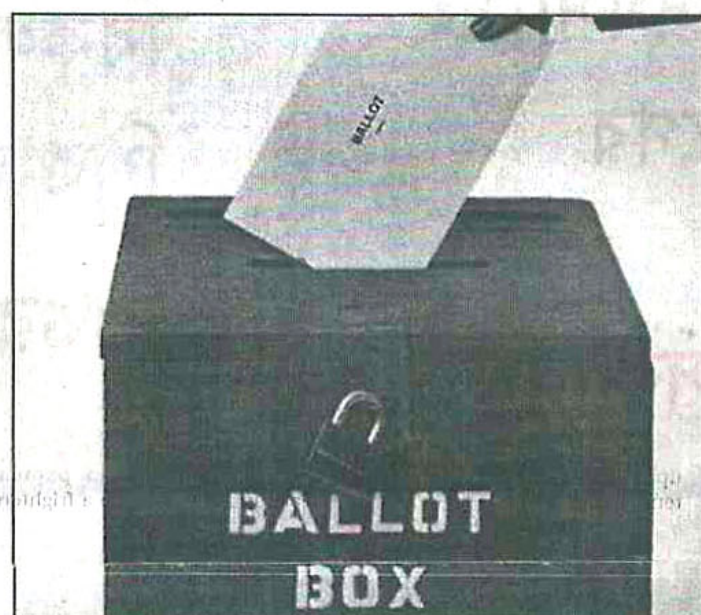
The question of preparing voter list by visiting door to door, or asking the eligible voters to go to camps for photographs, is coming up again. We have *paras*, village, union, *upazilas*, *zilas*, wards, municipalities, towns, and city corporations which people belong to. Union parishad, upazila parishad and zila parishad have elected local public representatives. If the local government system is made strictly non-party based, they can guarantee authentic

ity of documents related to any citizen or voter.

Most city dwellers have their origin or link in the rural areas, though it may gradually change over coming decades. A record of the permanent and present addresses of all citizens must be maintained. One way is to register all voters at their permanent addresses, and transfer the registration to the present address at the written request of the person concerned.

The registration system may require that any change of residence must be reported to the local office concerned, so that official documents are transferred internally as a matter of routine.

The citizen registration may be recorded at the union or *upazila* level. All members of a family living in Bangladesh or abroad (as Bangladeshi citizens) should be registered with permissible and required information, including photographs, without causing infringement on privacy protected by the Constitution or any law. No



information shall be recorded without the knowledge of the person concerned. The law, as in most countries, may regulate the protection of private information.

All births and deaths must be registered within, say, 30 to 90 days. This record is not with the Election Commission. The Election Commission shall ask the local government authorities, through the competent ministry, to furnish the list with photographs or other permissible biometrics of those above eighteen years of age, as of a certain date, to prepare the voter list.

The Election Commission shall prepare a voter list for any national or local election, check its authenticity for each constituency and correct the discrepancies, if any, with information to the local government office concerned.

Based on local governments' citizen registration record, plastic or other smart or IC multi-functional cards may be issued. A copy of the relevant part of the voter list with photograph, which

may serve as voter ID for the time being, may be sent by EC to each voter by post or other means. This should be an important part of the EC's entrusted service.

The EC seems to be inclined to think that it is authorized to command the citizens to go here and there for photograph or registration. It suggests a fine or imprisonment for discouraging a voter from registering.

A qualified citizen may be too old to move, or may not feel like taking the trouble. Some ladies may not like to be photographed, or cannot go out for such a purpose. The EC is basically a service institution, and it must first be oriented toward providing service to the free citizens of a free nation.

Once the system of citizen registration is functional in five to ten years, it will become regular work for the local governments to maintain records for providing various services to the citizens, such as old age pension, health insurance, child healthcare, schooling, training, employment orientation,

education and re-education service, etc.

As the system is not yet in place, the services of the armed forces and volunteers may be necessary to get the system operational in a year or two, though it may take decades for it to mature. This time the process may need new equipment and extra manpower, but future voter list preparation will not involve any significant cost. The major cost is borne by the local government, and it must given sufficient funds and logistics in the initial period.

Many may rightly think that the local government institutions we have may not be able to deliver the result. A non-party local government system must be established in this opportune period.

For a healthy political system, people must have a wide choice to elect their representatives from. Lack of money should not prevent any capable person willing to serve the people and the state if the election campaign process is rational and election campaign costs can be brought down to the equivalent of, say, ten month's remuneration.

The state may reimburse the election cost of upto, say, Taka three lac per constituency, in proportion to votes earned by the contesting candidates. This payment may continue every year until the end of the term of the parliament.

It is difficult to think of political activities without political parties, which, however, must be registered juridical entities with their own democratic constitutions, and registered with the EC for election purposes. They must account for their earnings and expenses, under certain restrictions on fund raising.

Students or professional societies may be barred from using their position for practicing politics of

any political party. Political parties shall not violate other's rights, and shall not call *hartal* or disturb public peace.

Parliament membership is supposed to be a fulltime position. All candidates must relinquish their office of profit, if any. The author has already some publications on the subject and improved RPO 1972.

The EC suggestion for inclusion of 33 percent women executive members in the party may not merit any consideration. Ability shall determine their position. Party formation or registration, and participation in election, cannot be arbitrarily restricted, except when conflict of interest may arise.

The EC, with the help of law enforcement and administrative agencies, shall conduct election in a peaceful atmosphere, but it may not be given disproportionate powers. An election review board with judicial power may be established to expeditiously dispose of election law violation cases, and cancel or reverse election results for gross violation of election law.

Having done everything necessary for a fair election, is there any guarantee that a government to serve the people will be in charge? The Constitution has built-in scope for the government to give a damn to the people, silence the party members, harass the adversaries and turn the parliament dysfunctional.

Unless the Constitution is amended to eliminate all weakness in management of the affairs of the state with people's interest at the top, our future may again be hostage at the hands of another group quite soon. The author published a number of papers on constitutional amendments to safeguard national interest for rapid development peacefully.

Introduction of a Provision on People's Right of enactment on direct initiative may provide the people an alternative way of reacting to government misdeeds without *hartal*. As readers may well understand, it is not elaborated here.

From discussions with the EC, it is evident that local self-government restructuring is not within its mandate, though it showed its support in principle. It was not optimistic about public fund allocation for election campaigns, or reimbursement of cost to the candidates in proportion to votes received.

We must understand that the merit shall outweigh the small cost in eliminating present and future money politics, before the trend can be firmly rooted for escalation of the growth of economy.

For desired long-term development, we need systemic overhaul. We must have the courage to say that the administrative system that dragged us backward, and kept us that way for last 36 years, is not fit for development of a free nation. We have to select and revamp our policy instruments to guide us to our cherished goal in this unevenly competitive world.

This is the time for us to get together to launch the systemic reform for development initiatives. We need fresh ideas about industrial, educational, economic, fiscal and monetary policies, we need austerity for some time, and we need legal system overhaul.

The advisory council and the president, backed by army, can go into the depth of the problems to solve them with national vision and courage. I am confident all sensible and patriotic people will look forward to it with great hope.

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## Exit from Iraq should be through Iran

WILLIAM E. ODOM

INCREASINGLY bogged down in the sands of Iraq, the US thrashes about looking for an honorable exit. Restoring cooperation between Washington and Tehran is the single most important step that could be taken to rescue the US from its predicament in Iraq. Understanding why requires some historical reflection.

Since the mid-1950s, US policy in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region was implicitly based on three pillars -- Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. As the British withdrew, Washington established nervous but lasting ties with Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the US built strong relations with the shah of Iran.

After 1948, when it recognized the new state of Israel, the US slowly became a guarantor of that new state's survival. London's role in the entire region became marginal, especially after the Suez crisis in 1956, when President Dwight Eisenhower abruptly stopped the joint British-Israeli military operation to seize the Suez

Canal. Thus by preventing any of the three camps from overrunning the other, the US provided regional stability.

Whether American leaders employed this strategy by design or by trial and error is arguable. At the time, they were more concerned with the Soviet challenge, trying to organize the so-called "northern tier," i.e., with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, as a barrier to Soviet influence. They probably did not foresee they had undertaken an equally demanding task of sublimating two major intra-regional quarrels, virtually irresolvable ones.

Although the Arab-Israeli quarrel is well known, the Persian-Arab quarrel is poorly understood. Iran has long made claims on territories on the Arab side of the Gulf and especially with Iraq over the Shatt-al-Arab waterway at the mouth of the Tigris River.

The Sunni-Shiite religious fissure reinforces Persian-Arab animosities, but no less important is the old sense of cultural superiority among the Iranians toward the

Arabs. By keeping strong diplomatic ties in all three camps, the US maintained regional stability with limited military power.

Unfortunately, this strategy collapsed with the fall of the shah in Iran in 1979. President Jimmy Carter confronted a dilemma: either to abandon the Persian Gulf region, where the Soviet Union was trying to exert more influence, or to restore the old balance by projecting considerable US military power into the region.

He chose the latter, what was known as the Carter Doctrine after Soviet forces intervened in Afghanistan. The US Central Command, although it was only one aspect of Carter's "Persian Gulf Security Framework," became its most visible part. Started in the spring of 1979, it became operational in early 1981.

As a planner on the National Security Council (NSC) staff at the time, I soon realized that restoring ties with Iran, whether in a year or two, or a decade, or much longer, had to be the US goal. Only thus could the US lower its military

costs.

Moreover, Iran shared strong interests with the US that its revolutionary fervor had obscured. President Carter understood this. So did President Ronald Reagan, although his NSC staff's attempts to re-establish informal ties were ill-designed and clumsily executed.

All subsequent presidents understood it until George W. Bush. By placing Iran on the "axis of evil" list, threatening to change its regime, he abandoned this strategy outright. Had he not done so, he might have secured tacit Iranian support for his invasion of Iraq, given Tehran's desire for revenge against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980.

Meetings just started between US and Iranian envoys could reestablish the basis for regional stability that existed until 1979 and may be the best hope for containing the chaos that the US invasion of Iraq is unleashing.

Unless the US convinces Iran to play a cooperative role, the conflict will spread. Indeed, fear of sectarian

violence spreading is why the Saudi leadership, usually supportive of Washington, recently called the US occupation of Iraq illegal.

Thus the US footing in the Arab camp has been eroding. If that continues, the cost in increased US military power to maintain Israel's ultimate security will soon be beyond US means. A rapprochement with Iran, therefore, is the key to restoring regional stability as the US withdraws from Iraq.

Can it be reached? Yes, if the US is willing to pay the price of dropping its "all sticks" policy for stopping Iran's nuclear-weapons program. Put plainly, the US has two choices: It can have an Iran with nuclear weapons that refuses to cooperate on many shared interests. Or it can have an Iran with nuclear weapons that is willing to cooperate.

Tehran has as much interest in stability in both Iraq and Afghanistan as does Washington. Both oppose Al Qaeda. Iran needs US oil-production technology. Greater Iranian oil and gas production benefits the US. Iran's ties with

Russia are without historical precedent and strained.

The US could offer more and better technologies than Russia provides Iran. Iran's record for spreading radical Islamic political movements is more limited than is generally realized. In fact, beyond Hezbollah in Lebanon, and a few terrorist groups trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and directed toward Israel and Iranian émigrés in Europe, it has behaved conservatively, especially in Central Asia and the Muslim parts of the Caucasus.

Iran was hostile to the Taliban in Afghanistan. And it does not like the radical brands of Islam that Pakistan sponsors with Arab money in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Iran realizes that although its influence in Iraq has increased immensely, it faces limits. Once US forces leave Iraq, even Shiite Iraqis will view Persians with suspicion. Moreover, Iran -- like Turkey, Iraq and Syria -- does not want an independent Kurdish state. US cooperation will be required to prevent that.

Only nuclear weapons and

Hezbollah remain obstacles to US-Iranian tacit cooperation. And Iran will eventually acquire nuclear weapons if it is determined to do so, although not in less than a decade.

The nation is less likely to go all the way to exploding a nuclear device if it has good ties with Washington than if it does not. Improved relations with the US will inexorably reduce Iranian hostile policies toward Israel.

Iran can't help but observe the examples that the US has set with India's and Pakistan's nuclear-weapons programs. After opposing both for years, Washington essentially embraced both countries once they acquired nuclear weapons.

The lesson for both Iran and North Korea is simple: acquire nuclear weapons and the US will not only stop threatening "regime change," but will also seek good relations. Effectively the US has demolished the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Iran might settle for a security guarantee against an Israeli nuclear strike, but its fears of

Pakistani nuclear capability are probably more acute -- especially as Al Qaeda, hiding in Pakistan, is dedicated to the destruction of Iran's Shiite-controlled regime and openly calls on the US to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities.

Once this is understood, the makings of a deal are straightforward. The matter of Israel and Hezbollah can probably be sublimated if Washington preemptively drops the nuclear issue, along with its threat to change the regime in Iran.

The old "double-straddle" strategy may once more be feasible, and most parties in the region will be the beneficiaries, allowing the US to begin the long road back to restoring its credibility as a regional balancer. The US has no better way out of the cul-de-sac in Iraq. And even then, the US needs European and Asian allies to help.

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