

Nothing can stop cricket

Visually-challenged play the game in their own style

DURDANA GHAS

They play cricket in a new style. They evolved their own rules and play it with a different type of ball.

They are visually challenged cricketers.

Sharif Ahmed, now studying law at Dhaka University, is one of the 30 visually challenged persons who played cricket at National Centre for Special Education (NCSE) at Mirpur-14 in the city.

"From my childhood I used to play cricket with my friends at school. We used to play for fun

enthusiasm. With that ball we could play anywhere we wanted, even on the grass. We did not have to wrap the ball with polythene anymore," said Sharif.

"There was a narrow street beside our school which we used as a pitch."

After completing study at NCSE Sharif moved out and got admitted to Comilla Victoria Collegiate School. There he practised cricket with 9 other visually impaired students.

"But we missed the sound ball," he said.

After completing SSC Helen Keller Foundation provided

cricket before losing sight in 1995 due to genetic problems.

"We played with the Indian team that took part in the World Cup for visually-impaired cricketers. I hope one day we will also be able to take part in the World Cup," Amit said.

Hafizur Rahman, another cricketer, said, "Life came to a standstill for me when I started losing my sight five years ago. I never thought that I would be able to play cricket again," said.

Hafiz used to play in under-16 cricket team and coached children at Mirpur Young Cricket Club, but in 2003 he lost his sight

The National Association of Sports for the Persons with Disability (NASPD) is working to promote cricket for visually-challenged persons. In 2000, NASPD for the first time arranged a seven-day training camp at Sher-e-Bangla Stadium with a special coach from India.

"After the training we arranged a demonstration match which was an eye opener for all. Everyone watching the match became stunned to see them playing," said Jowaherul Islam Mamun, director, NASPD.

"But in the next seven years we could not arrange a training camp due to financial constraints," he said.

In November 2007, NASPD arranged a three-day cricket camp with the help of ActionAid where 20 visually-challenged persons including 12 students of Dhaka University took part.

"To arrange a camp we need to bring special coaches from India and Pakistan. If we had had coaches here then we would not have to bring them from outside," said Jowaherul. "We need local coaches."

He suggested that people with disabilities in the physical education institutes in Bangladesh can be trained for this purpose.

"We need Tk 10 lakh to promote the game. We have approached BCB [Bangladesh Cricket Board] so that they come forward and recognise cricket for people with disabilities," he said.

Mohammad Rafiq, former player of the national team, said silent places and special ringing balls are needed for this game for better outcome.

Khaled Mahmud Sujon, former captain of the national cricket team, said the most important thing is the commitment of the visually-challenged persons while playing cricket.

Asked about the lack of coaches, Brig Gen Shaukat Hossain, director general, Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP), said, "If we are asked by the government specifically, then we can train up special coaches within our existing infrastructure though it can be difficult."

Ishtiaq Ahmed, vice chairman, media committee, BCB, said that the matter has been discussed and is under consideration.

"We have discussed the matter among the members of BCB. We hope to discuss it in the meeting of our executive committee as soon as possible because it is a matter of their human rights too," he said.

"We will try to help them financially or by providing them with sports gear," he added.

However, the visually-challenged cricketers have not lost hope. "We have a commitment to move ahead and if the Almighty wants we will win the World Cup one day," said Sharif.



COURTESY: NASPD

Visually challenged players practice cricket at the Dhanmondi Club ground.

and follow self-designed rules," said Sharif.

Sharif started playing cricket from his school days. He played cricket at National Centre for Special Education (NCSE) at Mirpur 14 with 30 other visually impaired playmates.

They played cricket on the floor of the veranda because they had to listen to the sound of the ball's coming. "When we played on the field we wrapped the ball with polythene so that we can hear the sound," Sharif said.

When the boys were in class four at NCSE, they got 'sound balls' from a Norwegian visitor. "It filled us with so much

them with two sound balls and Dr Zobaida Hannan, a social worker, took initiative so that they could play at the Comilla stadium and at the local Eidgah Maidan.

"But when I got admitted to Dhaka College, I had to stop regular practice because there were no facilities there," said Sharif.

"When I first heard about it I was a bit doubtful whether I would be able to play. But after a 7-day course in 2000 I got back my confidence," said Ashkur Rahman Amit, a graduate from the National University.

Amit used to play inter-school

for retinal pigmentosa.

Sharif and other visually impaired cricketers said lack of proper cricket gear and places is the main obstacle to their regular practice.

"The sound balls are not produced locally. We need to import more sound balls. Secondly, we need an indoor stadium with a silent atmosphere, which is needed for listening to the sound of the ball," said Sharif.

He said the visually impaired cricketers need a strong organisation and should practise for at least two to three months a year. "But we can't do it because of lack of proper ground," said Sharif.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

Gigantic chimneys at brick kilns belching out black smoke into the air at Aminbazar in the city. The city's air quality, which improved with the introduction of CNG in the vehicles in the last couple of years, has again started to plummet because of lack of monitoring by the authorities.



STAR PHOTO

A PWD signboard at the entrance to the Dhanmondi children's park declares it a public place open to all.

Children's park finally freed from clutches of occupants

TAWFIQUE ALI

In the wake of public outcry, the Public Works Department (PWD) has recovered a children's park in Dhanmondi from unauthorised occupancy.

The PWD on March 25 pulled down two signboards of Dhanmondi Cricket Academy and put up a notice that says the playground is meant for use of the locals for sports purposes and that it cannot be used commercially anyway.

Dhanmondi Cricket Academy had been occupying the playground at the intersection of road-3, 4, and 5, for past several years without permission from the authorities and using it exclusively and commercially to earn money.

The locals in the neighbourhood became very vocal in

recent times demanding retrieval of the park from unauthorised occupancy.

"We came to know about its illegal occupancy recently. We have already informed the chief architect of Bangladesh verbally, seeking a plan on how to maintain the park," Abdullah-Al-Safi, chief engineer of PWD, said.

"We will develop it as per the architectural plan," he added.

Abdullah said that he would officially write to the Department of Architecture soon on how to enhance natural beauty of the park. "PWD never handed over this children's park to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)," he noted.

Replaying to a question on PWD's silent role for the past several years, he said, "Nobody had ever reported to us before that unauthorised people were

occupying the park."

According to Safi, parks and playgrounds in the capital should be under the supervision of the respective owning agencies to ensure better and proper maintenance.

Locals of Dhanmondi, expressing a strong resentment over unauthorised occupancy of the park, demanded recovery of it from exclusive and commercial use.

On the other hand, DCC, official custodian of a good many city parks and playgrounds, has failed to live up to its duty of preserving and protecting the public spaces.

The role of DCC in maintaining the city's public parks, playgrounds and open spaces has always been dubious, leaving them in a deplorable state, environmentalists alleged.

According to Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, a noted environmentalist and chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), DCC is duty-bound to preserve and protect open space for the people, as obliged by its institutional mandate.

But the DCC has consistently been apathetic to conservation of open space and devoid of commitment, as it itself has destroyed a good many open spaces, said Prof Ahmad.

The DCC regularly rents out playgrounds allowing commercial events like fair, music concerts and wedding ceremonies in exchange of money.

Sources said an unspecified number of city parks and playgrounds are either commercially used or in unauthorised possession.

BNWLA HELPLINE FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN IN DISTRESS

Make it toll-free, nationwide

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

It was about 3 in the afternoon last Sunday. A crowd collecting on a road at Paribagh caught the sight of a newsman who was on the way to his office.

The newsman found two kids Kalam and Shahjahan weeping on the sidewalk while the crowd trying to find the cause of their distress.

As they were sobbing their heart out it appeared from their tale that the two brothers aged around 8 and 10 had come to visit their elder sister in Mirpur section 12.

Their visit annoyed the heartless brother-in-law who at a stage beat up his wife for that.

"My sister was seriously hurt and angry at my brother-in-law's behaviour. She gave us Tk 50 and told us to go back home (in Bhola) at once," said Kalam, the elder one.

The boys without knowing what to do ended up on the sidewalk crying there for hours.

The newsman picked up the boys and rang up an organisation. It is their sheer luck that the kids landed at the shelter home of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), an NGO, which looked for their legal guardians. Later the boys were returned to their sister.

In another such incident, BNWLA received a phone call from Faridpur on its hotline on January 12, which helped save 12 boys from probable trafficking.

The caller suspecting child trafficking informed the association that a man was travelling with 12 young boys aged between 8 and 12.

On receiving the call, BNWLA

officials rushed to Gabtoli bus terminal and confronted the man. The case is still being investigated.

To report incidents like these, the BNWLA, in association with Plan Bangladesh recently set up the hotline to support distressed women and children.

Anyone can call over the hotline set up at Gabtoli bus terminal and ask for help. Phone calls

officials rushed to Gabtoli bus terminal about 5 months ago after the Bus Truck Owners Association provided a small space at their information and complaint booth for the service. A group facilitator is made available by the NGOs to stay at the booth from 9am to 5pm everyday.

The number is yet to be widely publicised for lack of proper campaign. "A single phone call

saved. Akter lamented that a toll-free phone service was planned but it could not be established for lack of support from the government or any private companies.

"A toll free number would definitely attract many callers. The person in need or somebody with information about an incident might not have enough money to make a call. That's why a toll free call is needed," Akter said.

BNWLA has some other helplines to support distressed women and children opened four years ago. The helplines provide services including basic information on women and children related legal issues, aid to families looking for missing persons, information on available law enforcement services in the caller's locality and also legal assistance and shelter if any incident calls for.

These hotline numbers are 01713335991 for any information related to children including brutality against children and runaway kids, 01711800406 for report on suspected trafficking and 01711800400 for incidents of violence against women.

The association also operates hotline numbers in different districts -- 01711800402 for Rajshahi, 01711800403 for Khulna, 01711800404 for Satkhira, 01711800405 for Jessore, 01711800407 for Lalmonirhat, 01711800408 for Benapole, 017113338486 and 017113338487 for Sylhet.

BNWLA also plan to set up a nation-wide 24-hour helpline service. The association's helplines so far received 14,400 calls during the last four years.



STAR PHOTO

BNWLA helped these kids, Kalam and Shahjahan, go back to their legal guardians Sunday.

can be made at 01713335535 to report children and women related incidents that need legal attention, to inform about distressed women and children who need counselling, protection and rescue. The number is open 24 hours a day throughout the year.

On getting a call, officials from the NGO rush to the place, intervene if necessary and follow up the case.

The hotline was set up at

from a witness or a family member can save many children from being trafficked and rescue battered women and wives," said Advocate Fahmida Akhter of the BNWLA.

"There is a large number of women and children around the country who need help. Legal service is quite complicated in Bangladesh, for which most distressed women and children cannot have easy access," she