

DHAKA WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 8, 2008

**THE SPEAKERS**

**Gazi Ashraf Hossain** (Chairman, cricket operations committee, BCB)

**Mahbubul Anam** (former BCB general secretary)

**Rafiqul Alam** (chief selector)

**Faruque Ahmed** (former chief selector)

**Roquibul Hassan** (former national captain and match referee)

**Naimur Rahman** (selector)

**Aminul Islam** (Former national captain)

**Shakil Kasem** (Chairman, game development committee, BCB)

**Salim Shahed** (member, finance committee, BCB)

**Shafiqur Rahman** (Chairman, grounds and facilities committee, BCB)

**Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury** (Member, cricket operations committee, BCB)

**Nadir Shah** (umpire)

**Mostofa Kabir** (member secretary, CDDM, BCB)

**Syed Ali Asaf** (member, grounds and facilities committee, BCB)

**INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING**

**SHAKIL KASEM**  
About school cricket, let me say, no other cricket board in the world is responsible for running school cricket as Bangladesh is. Almost all the Test playing nations have their school cricket structure, which we also had in the past. Schools in general are supposed to maintain their own ground, pitch and equipment. Either the secondary school education board or the National Sports Council (NSC) usually has



SHAKIL KASEM

the responsibility to organise school competitions. However, in our case, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has the responsibility to look after school cricket. It is very difficult for a lot of reasons - from structure, logistic and financial point of views.

We do have sponsors who are coming up for school cricket but the other infrastructural difficulties cannot be overcome with sponsorship. We lack grounds, it is very difficult to maintain good wickets over long periods of time so matches can be played in proper manner.

We are also not happy with the present format of school cricket. We want the schoolboys to play much more longer-version games rather than limited-overs matches.

BCB as well as other authorities like education boards and NSC have to think very long and hard whether the responsibility of running school cricket should be left entirely to the board or the other agencies would like to get involved.

I don't think the BCB can, over a long period of time, come up with the kind of cricket required at that level. It could be possible, perhaps, some kind of policy decisions and discussions...BCB may from a certain point onward take responsibility of school cricket. But at the initial stages, identifying which of the schools are absolutely good in a particular zone or need to be promoted or encouraged has to be done by another authority.

Obviously we could have a talent hunting team in progress and BCB can assist in that regard.

In the past we used to have schools strong in one game or the other. For example, Armanitola School was always strong in hockey and we could never think they could have a good cricket side. St. Gregory's, always cricket and basketball, Pogose and West End in football.

The schools had their own strength and played to that strength. So if there is a school in Khagrachhari or Chapainawabganj good in cricket, the board has to run from Dhaka, give them money, make sure they have a field and

other facilities. Why should we need to do that? What we are doing basically is diverting our very limited resources from areas where they could have been better utilised, to this kind of institutions where possibly the interest of the game is not that high.

Perhaps, in the long run, we could put the schools into, may be, separate tiers based on their standard and strength. They would be competing in different levels; the teams that are not performing well would be playing in the lower level, maybe 10-12 schools; then Level 2 - the mid-level - and Level 1 would comprise with the top teams.

From there the BCB can arrange a team of players who are considered the best school players of the country and may be put them to more advanced stage with coaching, etc.

About an academy, it took three years to get the ground itself, primarily because there was a lot of documentation that needed to be done. The construction of the building is going on and probably by next year we will have that.

The academy activities, however, are in progress. We have a pool of 25 players who are coming from different age-groups. We have them on board for one year.

What we are thinking at the moment is to have regional academies for six divisions to widen the pool of talented players who can put in some contribution for overall Bangladesh cricket team at the senior level.

Besides the academy, we have a pace bowling foundation. There is a spin bowling foundation; initially there is a talent hunt going on to identify the spinners from all over the country. We are also having a separate project for wicketkeepers to take their standard to a certain level.

We have also appointed a skill consultant for batting, wicketkeeping and spin. They are helping us out in these activities at this moment.

As we have not received the permanent academy building until now, we have rented a house in Dhanmondi. There are some logis-



JALAL AHMED CHOWDHURY

tical problems because the boys have to travel to Mirpur for training facilities daily. Another problem is the lack of resources. When the national team trains at BKSP, the academy boys suffer. I feel that we are not being able to give them full support at the moment.

Besides the High Performance (HP) programme needs a lot of infrastructural facilities which the BCB does not have at the moment. The exact nature of the scope of HP perhaps was not fully realised or utilised.

The Daily Star Sport organised a roundtable on cricket on September 20, 2008. The purpose of the roundtable titled 'Bangladesh Cricket: Steps Forward', second only of this kind by this newspaper, was to identify issues that are negatively affecting the progress of the most popular game in the country. It was an animated five-hour discussion at the Conference Room of The Daily Star, where fourteen speakers, who have served or is serving cricket in different capacities, shared their wealth of experience on a range of issues including the infrastructure, management, pitches, grounds and umpires, leadership, attitude and domestic cricket. The speakers ranged from former national captains, current board members and national selectors, former board members and selectors and grassroots-level organisers.

We certainly believe that by putting their words into writing, it would be possible to sketch a new and better direction for our cricket.

Following is the transcript version of the roundtable:



PHOTO: AFP FILE

When the Tigers bow their head in defeat, so does the nation. It is their responsibility to make every fan proud of the cricket team.

What we do have are coaches who have been assigned with designations for HP but at the moment I don't think we are fully utilising their potential for HP activities. We have appointed them now at the Under-16, -17 and -19 levels and they have been asked to adjust.

**JALAL AHMED CHOWDHURY**

School cricket has lost its gloss as well as importance in emergence of age-group cricket competitions. In the past education boards used to organise school and college cricket. But the whole responsibility is on the board now.

Almost the same cricketers are playing in both school and age-group cricket but the school cricket has been ignored in recent times due to promotion of the other, because age-group cricket has more attraction due to participation in international competitions. There are national teams in different age-groups, so it has more charm. We have to rethink about the prospects of school cricket and bring it back to limelight again because if we want overall improvement of the game, we have to develop school cricket.

It is true that for the BCB, it is difficult to give equal importance to school and age-group at the same time. Previously, education boards used to organise school and college cricket but the college cricket is history now. I think that the BCB can easily involve the sports officers of the education boards in its school or college activities.

One more very important thing is that because of ignoring school and college cricket, we are not getting more educated cricketers these days.

Combined university teams are part of most of the first-class competitions in Test nations but we have not entertained the idea here.

Having done many things for it, our age-group cricket has yet to reach a high standard. I have seen that 50-overs matches or the two-day matches at Under-18 level have never reached its full height for many reasons. Either we don't have proper wickets, or we are holding the matches during rainy season.

Facilities at private academies are very poor compared to BKSP, which has regimental training and picks the country's best players. They also get better facilities, so it's natural that its players get more priorities in age-group teams.

The academies need logistic support from the cricket board, especially in terms of equipment and experts.

The BCB-GP Academy is very much team oriented. Its sectors need to be widened in a bid to find regional talents, pick them for short-term trainings.

Coaching needs to have a separate cell and we should have a coaching director because coaching is involved in all types of developments.

Those who are involved in talent hunt needs more training. What should be the criteria to watch a player, who will do the job, these things should be clear to not only coaches but also to other persons involved in it. We need better hunters and a better system.

We need a different scouting system than tournament and camp-based programmes. Former top cricketers can be involved in scouting for the national team, especially in case of hidden talents who do never get the exposure, because selectors will take their recommendations seriously.



MAHBUBUL ANAM

Indoor facilities must be improved because even in Dhaka, the condition is pathetic. We need more indoor facilities outside the capital and have to reduce the dependency on BKSP by building more facilities.

Gymnasium facilities are also inadequate. We must think how we can use what resources we have outside Dhaka.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**MAHBUBANAM**

The education boards have a Tk 400-crore budget for sports. The BCB should tap this source because most of the amount has been unused due to the tug-of-war between education boards, the NSC and ministries over the authority to spend the money. The University Grants Commission also has big sports funds but these are not utilised. The BCB should also get to that.

School cricket should start 'within district' competitions with a group of about five teams. Not the best school but the best eleven teams should be picked from the group, a pyramid going up. This will integrate school cricket straight into the age-group programme. Otherwise, one is bound to fade, because both programmes cannot be run parallel.

Regarding the regional academies, GrameenPhone once wanted to sponsor all regional academies so we should think about that. The academy needs professional structure.

The government has many indoor facilities nationwide. The BCB has all the statistics and mea-

asures that can be used to have the facilities for multipurpose utilisation.

The BCB had a development plan in 2001, which needs to be rewritten because newer ideas are coming. It should be rewritten in a booklet format - which should be strategic plan and that should be converted into an operational plan. Without a plan it will never achieve the desired results. It should be the professional approach.

**ROQUIBUL HASSAN**

Can we qualify for U-19 Cricket World Cup? We have to take the Asian U-19 competition very seriously.

Age-group cricket needs to get rid of the one-day format and turn into longer version. We could introduce 100-overs matches and divide it giving more overs (40-60) for the second innings because even our national team goes up in the second innings.

We need a director of game development, who will have the experience of management with cricketing background. He will look after the coaches. We also need dedicated coaches for different age-groups.

**SHAFIQUR RAHMAN**

About pitches, I would advise to employ cement wickets so the players can play on bouncy tracks. We can't provide all turf wickets, it's very difficult.

I think that would be comfortable for the BCB. The young buds are coming in and they can have an opportunity to play where the ball comes to a certain height.

**AMINUL ISLAM**

I would like to thank Shakil (Kasem) bhai and Jalal (Ahmed Chowdhury) bhai for providing a lot of information. I have two ideas to add: one is about school cricket, which I must say is start-off cricket. Age-group cricketers' main focus centres only on cricket. They learn about how to play the game. On the other hand there are large numbers of players in school cricket and the players will not only learn how to play the game but also learn about the culture of the game. I think cricket is the only sport where there is hardly any scope to be hostile. So we will find out some good citizens in the country from school cricket. So, we can get good coaches, umpire, and thinkers and of course players of future if we put more emphasis on school cricket. I want to add one more point: We must write up our planning about what we want to do and how. But we must do it from our perspective, not from Cricket Australia. We must take our culture, mentality of our cricketers, weather, nutrition everything into consideration.

**FARUQUE AHMED**

I think Aminul gave us a very important point. Because of the

intensity in the age-group cricket, many school cricketers can't join. School cricket is a must but my observation is that we need to reduce the number of schools in the competition. It's good for talks that 1,000 schools are taking part but we have to ensure quality. We have to select some schools that have minimum facilities and try to give them at least a cement wicket and some facilities for playing the game. Shakil bhai rightly said that there were some schools in the past that were renowned for one particular game. I am not against school cricket because there are also sponsors for it but we must reduce the number to ensure quality.

**SHAKIL KASEM**

In game development we have one wing, which is game education. We have taken some programmes for development of the game. Last month we organised a divisional workshop where potential coaches who haven't had Level-1, Level-2 certificates but doing their business at different levels attended and we also invited some school sport teachers in the two-day workshop to identify who are involved in school cricket.

**GAZI ASHRAF HOSSAIN**

I want to add one thing which is related with game development. Recently I went to Faridpur to join a game education programme where game teachers joined. What I came to know there will help the journalists in investigative reporting in future. What they told me is that the headmasters are hardly showing any interest to get them involved in sports classes or sports activities, rather they involve them into other subject classes like Bengali, English



GAZI ASHRAF HOSSAIN

or Mathematics. But they are very much interested to get involved into sports and they believe that this kind of initiatives will help them improve their knowledge. It's true what Mahbub (Anam) bhai told about the government's initiatives of arranging sports but the fact is on a single day, they even held 2/3 games and the matches were completed in 6/7 overs. Some teachers even acted as umpires and there were whisperings that some even had problems with their eyes. Actually there are huge complaints about this kind of programmes.

**NAIMUR RAHMAN**

Though I have been asked to discuss on a different issue, I would love to add one point in this regard. Talking about school cricket and talent hunts, I think coaching is related with everything. At one stage when we started to bring the Level-1 and Level-2 coaches we had tried to count the numbers. We actually gave the certificates without any scrutiny and its affect was immense. Whoever it is, Dav Whatmore or Jamie Siddons, has to work with the national team players' basic techniques. It is very difficult for a national coach if he has to work with the basics.

Actually my point is that the amount of attention we pay on the monitoring system of coaches is very important because one player ultimately comes through a process. And it may have been better for an upcoming player to learn about the basics by watching the game on the TV screen rather than learning it wrongly from the coaches. We can't improve anything if someone learns wrong things at the initial stage, so the board and development committee should focus on this issue.

**JALAL AHMED**

My observation is that on most of the occasions those who completed the course don't practise it properly. My recommendation is that there should be an internship like the doctors. They will work with the senior coaches at any level for a certain period and after that the board should examine them before giving them certificates. I have already proposed it to the board and hope it will be followed in future.

**AMINUL ISLAM**

Age verification is very important part in world cricket now. We have to look at it seriously.

**SHAKIL KASEM**

As per regulation of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the prescription of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) we have continued the age verification programme for the last two years.

**RAFIQUL ALAM**

To make the game attractive to the youngsters we have to pump more money into first-class cricket. It should be a dream for the players to first play first-class cricket then the national team. In the last season the match fees and some other things were improved but it should be more and more like India, Pakistan and Australia.

**MANAGEMENT**

**MAHBUBANAM**

The topics in this subject are inter-related. Election in a country like Bangladesh never brought in the



SHAFIQUR RAHMAN

best together. Till 1997 it was always a selected panel. Till 1991 head of cricket has always been a non-political personality. In 1991 when politics took over, democracy came into the country and head of the organisation became a political figure. As soon as a person became a political figure, automatically politics had an influence on the formation of the body. And that has continued ever since and we all must accept that. In 1997 we had our first election and unfortunately the election made a division in the administration. Election means there can be a single team or a double team; whatever, there is a division. Subsequently when government changes there is a change in the body. It has also happened when there was an ad-hoc committee. It has continued the same way ever since. Whatever method you have used has not been the best of it. It's always been 'have or haven't'.

But I don't know whether it's going to stop or not. To my feeling this keeps on continuing even on an ad-hoc committee because we always help our friends and associations into the organisation irrespective of their capability and quality. It goes with everybody and I am sure... I am not naming anybody... we all are, including myself, responsible for this.

In the long run there should be influence of politics. One thing is confirmed that we need government support at the current state of the game. In the subcontinent structure the government support is mandatory because lot of infrastructures are owned by it. So, there is a relationship between the government and the body.

This topic has now become a bit easier for me, one expert has already told about that. Actually I have no experience in election or constitution. This is the first time I have had the opportunity to work on this but undoubtedly it's not enough.

In terms of constitution we have gone through a lot of upheaval courses. In a period of five years we probably have seen five constitutions, which is unfortunate, in different forms. We have not been able to design the correct one for us.

It is also difficult because in change of time we have to obey government decisions. ... this has to be done. ... this cannot be done. ... I think time has come for us now to think whether we can formulate something without government influence which would take our cricket forward in terms of our constitutional structure. As said about the president election, that could have been the best alternative but I understand that is not going forward. I accept we have never been able to come out of the clutches. We can't avoid politics.



ROQUIBUL HASSAN

There is politics in Indian cricket, Pakistan cricket and even in Australian cricket but if there is an internal politics of rivalry between two competent people that has no problem. The rivalry between incompetent people or government influence on formation of body or constitution does affect the process.

In terms of decentralisation there had been number of discussions and I was involved in a number of committees. Even in 2003 when Saber (Hossain) bhai was there, (the then coach) late Eddie Barlow had given some decisions. The cricket board was run by an old system but since we became a Test nation our responsibility got bigger ... it doesn't remain in the old stage ... and the cricket board can't be a den of Dhaka city alone, its responsibility is now for the entire country. We don't know what's happening in the Rajshahi league or other parts of the country but we must know that decentralisation is mandatory in terms of expansion and development.

And if we want to make sure this decentralisation, it must be a body which must have communication, a hierarchy and what I would say chain of command.

That has been discussed since 2001 but it did not take place because of different reasons and vested interests from different quarters. For nearer benefits we always denounced the longer benefits.

I fully endorse that there should be the regional cricket associations because in my opinion the district sports association shouldn't run cricket. A district association runs 22 sports and the same person probably looking after chess, badminton and cricket! It is not possible for one man to run more than one sport. As per our geographical standing the proposed seven regional bodies that are Dhaka Metropolitan Cricket Association and six divisional headquarters heading each divisional cricket association is mandatory. Not that we should stop it there and it should be followed up with a chain of command to the district cricket associations.

We need to look at management positions. Unfortunately we treat a CEO as an employee. In other countries and banking sector CEO is a managing director who is also a member of the board. In terms of growth of the sport there have always been honorary and volun-



FARUQUE AHMED

tary people running the show who have never been accountable. Instead of macro managing we do micro management and I think that is not right.

**ASHRAF HOSSAIN**

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