



Blast from the dark past

BISHWAJIT ROY



When Bangladesh captain Mushfiquur Rahman trudged back to the dressing room with head

hung low after successful spinner Dilruwan Perera bamboozled him with one which turned into him from outside off, it gave one the feeling that the little man was trying to hide his head in shame because of the embarrassment his team had caused.

With his dismissal Bangladesh went for lunch at 150 for six, thus ensuring that there would be no fight from the Tigers in the first Test match at a time when a cold wave of fear, brought on by the threat of virtual Test relegation, washed over the country's cricket fraternity. Mushfiquur will certainly know that after such a performance no amount of protection from the administrators can silence the critics nor make claims for greater opportunities for his team.

On the fourth day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday the Tigers completed their slide back to a sordid past by suffering an innings-and-248-run defeat at the hands of clinical Sri Lanka, who recorded their second-biggest innings win by wrapping up the match an hour after lunch on the fourth day.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the home batsmen were found wanting in the rudiments of batting in both innings. From the experienced Tamim Iqbal to young Mominul Haque, hardly anyone displayed

signs of coherent thinking while batting. In terms of a result there was nothing left for the Tigers after the third day's play but there was still a lot to prove when they resumed on the fourth day on 35 for one.

A meaningful second innings played with the right approach would have not only provided them a much-needed confidence boost for the second Test, starting from February 4 at Chittagong, but would also be a good advertisement of their recent growth in longer-version cricket, but it looked like they were in a hurry to avail the extra rest an early finish would provide. Their approach yesterday seemed to say: "when the result is obvious then what is the point of working hard".

The Bangladesh team management had promised 'positive' and 'aggressive' cricket against Sri Lanka but one could not understand what it meant after watching the Tigers' performance in the first Test. One has to wonder whether the team think-tank was able to truly communicate to the boys what they meant by positive cricket.

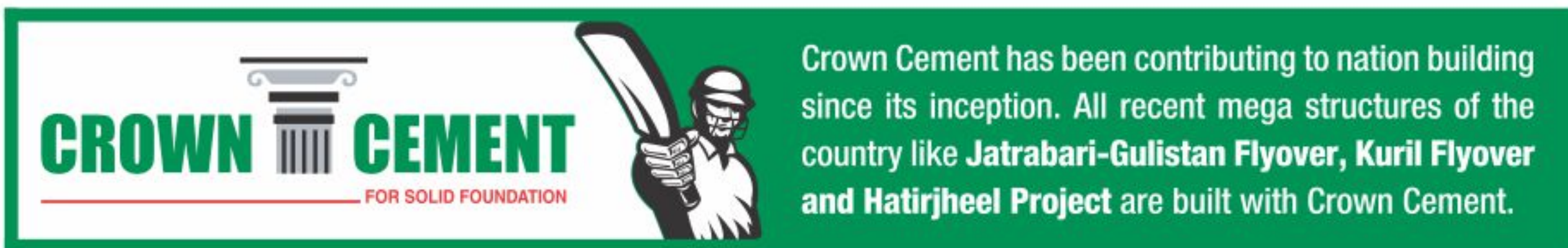
They failed to capitalise on a very good batting track while the bowling was below standard, while the opposition bowlers bowled to a plan.

This same side however has showed over the last one-and-a-half years that they have the ability to challenge their opponents, especially in their own den. They must identify what went wrong before the second Test rolls around, because Test opportunities for Bangladesh are too rare to squander.



PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: Bangladesh skipper Mushfiquur Rahman bears a defeated look while walking back after being dismissed on the fourth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. His team were no better as they were routed by an innings and 248 runs.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Crown Cement has been contributing to nation building since its inception. All recent mega structures of the country like Jatrabari-Gulistan Flyover, Kuril Flyover and Hatirjheel Project are built with Crown Cement.

'Batsmen weren't ready to fight'

NAIMUL KARIM

Bangladesh slumped to their fourth-largest innings defeat in Tests yesterday. While a loss of this magnitude was not considered anything out of the ordinary in the past, the thumping defeat in the face of the hosts' impressive progress in the last two years makes this seem like an anomaly.

The flow-stopping loss was described as 'alarming' by Bangladesh captain Mushfiquur Rahman yesterday, who is desperately in search of a way to revive his side's confidence ahead of the second Test in Chittagong.

"Even if there's a collapse it could have happened in one innings, but that it happened in both is an alarming sign. These batsmen have also played against better bowling attacks," said Mushfiquur at the post-match press conference.

Mushfiquur was especially disappointed

with the way his batsmen threw their wickets away. "Batsmen can obviously get out. But the way we got out was disappointing and that needs correction," he said.

"I don't think the batsmen were ready to fight. We tried to stay motivated, but unfortunately our batsmen were disappointing. On a wicket like this, if you don't commit any mistakes then it's quite difficult to get out," he added.

Speaking on the manner in which Tamim Iqbal threw his wicket away towards the end of Day Three, the captain stated the need for his batters to 'read situations' appropriately.

"Everyone should play their natural game, but there are situations that we need to read as well. We had eight overs that day and we needed to survive. It's not that he (Tamim Iqbal) did not know that. I think in such situations we should think deeply. He is one of our best batsmen and we need him to stay

at the crease for as long as possible because that gives us confidence," said Mushfiquur.

Short deliveries accounted for a large number of Bangladesh's batsmen. Mushfiquur blamed his batsmen's uneasiness against bouncers to improper application.

"It's quite obvious that at this level everyone will bowl this way. There were problems in our application. You can play pull shots, but they need to be within your control. The wicket became easier to bat on after five to six overs, we just needed to wait," said Mushfiquur.

Having succumbed to the worst defeat of his captaincy, all Mushfiquur can do now is look for a better outing in Chittagong.

"We made the game difficult for ourselves. It was a sporting wicket just like we wanted. We made many mistakes in one game and that is what led to the big loss. It's difficult to look for a win from here, but we need to revive ourselves and come back strongly."

Test-filled future: Papon

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon painted a bright picture for the future of Bangladesh cricket yesterday while talking with the media regarding his stance in the much talked about just-concluded ICC meeting in Dubai. He also responded to questions about the BCB directors' vote that reportedly supported the controversial draft proposal by 20-3 votes.

The BCB boss, who returned yesterday after attending the meeting, expressed his disappointment over media reports after the board meeting on January 23 but later in an official statement thanked the local media for their 'outstanding support given to the BCB and Bangladesh cricket'.

When asked about Bangladesh's position, Papon, receiving assistance from director Mahbubul Anam who sat beside him on the dais, said: "We will be in a better position than others. We will go to India to play Tests, they will come here. We will go to England. Australia will come here."

"FTP [Future Tours Programme] didn't have a legal basis. Now, there will be the Members Participation Agreement (MPA), which is bound by law, despite what anyone says or does now. FTP is still in existence. We haven't signed anything yet but we hope to do so in the February 8 meeting," he continued.



When asked whether Bangladesh will have 30 Tests till 2020 as per the existing FTP, Papon said: "Whatever we have, it will only increase. There's no chance of it decreasing. The teams which don't play regularly against us, they will all give priority to Bangladesh. I can assure you that. Within two years, we hope to play against everyone."

Papon also informed that they were not in any alliance and there were no threats from India as reported in some newspapers; the principles were unanimously backed by all ten members. He also expressed his gratitude towards the Indian cricket authorities for their support for

Bangladesh hosting the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20.

The BCB president said media reports regarding his directors' position hampered his campaign and that the alleged 20-3 vote had led to three countries cancelling their appointments for discussion with the BCB. He went on to say that the vote put forward was to discuss the BCB's course if seven countries had already voted in support of the proposition in the ICC meeting, which would mean that the proposal would be passed regardless of Bangladesh's say. According to Papon, only three had recommended opposition to the proposal in that scenario.

Mahbubul Anam advised the media to give importance to what was written to the ICC by the BCB, which according to him was the outcome of the meeting.

Ahmed Sajjadul Alam, who reportedly voted against the proposition along with Tanzil Chowdhury and Showkat Aziz Russel during the board meeting, cleared his position again.

"This letter to the ICC was not raised at the meeting. All those present in the meeting know very well what was being raised, discussed and voted upon. But I am happy that they have realised what we wanted to say and I stand by my action that day," said the veteran organiser before adding:

Same song, different tune

AL-AMIN

A lot has been said and circulated regarding Bangladesh's future in Test cricket in terms of participation. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hasan Papon on Thursday assured the whole nation that our cricketers will not only continue to play Tests, but promised more.

The BCB boss deserves kudos for the way he fought against the two-tier Test concept at the just concluded ICC (International Cricket Council) meeting in Dubai. His uncompromising approach in the ICC board meeting compelled the Big Three to readjust their original draft position paper, with notable omissions of words like "two-tier", "promotion" and "relegation". But the game is yet to be won on the table.

After a six-hour discussion regarding the radical draft on Tuesday, the ICC circulated a media release saying that all board members have unanimously supported a set of principles of which the most pertinent for Bangladesh is: "There will be an opportunity for all Members to play all formats of cricket on merit, with participation based on meritocracy; no immunity to any country, and no change to membership status."

The BCB boss on his return said that those principles including the ones above were unanimously agreed upon. We are actually not in a position to care about the other serious structural and financial issues since beggars can hardly be choosers at a stage when the ICC is hell bent on abandoning its ideology and chasing monetary gains in every aspect of its endeavour.

But whether the BCB boss is clear about his understanding, that this particular principle would protect Bangladesh's "Full Member rights in terms of status and participation" is a burning question for us at the moment.

If we read between the lines we will be amazed to see the subtle trickery which suggests that there is hardly any change in the principle, from the original stance of a two-tier Test system.

It read "all Members", which constitutes not only the Full Members but also the Associate Members, will be allowed to play Tests based on the principle guideline of "meritocracy".

If we assume that Test cricket will be played in the future in the way that it is played now, then the question of relegation should not exist. But the words "no immunity to any country" would only exist if there was the possibility of relegation.

If we go through the original draft position paper, it was stated that the ICC would create "a playing system based on meritocracy and not on the category of membership".

Arguing that the existing FTP is not financially viable for many countries, it recommended a two-tier Test system with numbers nine (Zimbabwe) and 10 (Bangladesh) to play in the Intercontinental Cup. The draft also suggested that while playing in the lower tier their Test status would not be stripped and their existing FTP commitments "would be honoured".

Interestingly, the ICC has already adopted and implemented the concept of "meritocracy" in the shorter versions. And this is why Bangladesh and Zimbabwe are playing the qualifying phase in the coming ICC T20 World Cup.

And if the principles are adopted as resolutions in the next ICC board meeting on February 8, then Bangladesh will lose the legal ground to fight their case for playing Tests after their present FTP commitments are over in 2020.

According to the BCB president, we may play more Tests than now. But that will be at someone's mercy, not by bragging rights. We believe the BCB still has time to sit and find out a formula to save the Tigers from suffering a painful demise.

'Bowlers got us there'

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lankan captain Angelo Mathews credited his bowlers for his side's thumping innings victory over Bangladesh in the first Test. He believed that the win, which was their second-largest innings victory in Test cricket, was set-up by his bowlers.

"I thought we played some pretty good cricket to get there. The bowlers got us there in the first innings, when Bangladesh were all out for 232. It was a stepping stone for us to make a big score. Once we got 700 there was no way back for Bangladesh," said Mathews at the post-match conference.

"Our bowlers have improved quite a lot in the last few games. They've been bowling brilliantly. The fast bowlers were in really good rhythm -- so were the spinners. I'm really pleased with the way Dilruwan (Perera) bowled in the second innings because we had to give him that exposure," he added.

With two spinners and three pacers, including him, Mathews believed that his current bowling line-up had the perfect balance.

"In the past we had Murali (Muttiah Muralidaran) running through sides and in the recent past we had Rangana Herath running through sides. I haven't been in a team where we had all four bowlers equally good. They are delivering with the new ball and with the oldish ball," said Mathews.

Bangladesh lost the game during the pressure situations, according to Mathews, who plans to expose the weakness in the next Test as well.

"There were no demons (in the pitch). But I thought we handled those pressure situations well, whereas they (Bangladesh) didn't," he said.

Shuvagata, Rokibul start with tons

SPORTS REPORTER

National discards Rokibul Hasan and Shuvagata Hom scored centuries on the opening day of the National Cricket League to take Dhaka to a commendable 357 for 4 against Rangpur at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium at Rajshahi.

The game at the Sylhet Divisional Stadium saw the hosts bundle out last year's finalists Rajshahi for 217. Sylhet's Abu Zayed and Enamul Haque Jr shared nine wickets in between them. In reply, the hosts finished the day on a comfortable 95 for no loss.

Last year's champions Khulna rode on half centuries from Tushar Imran and Anamul Haque to finish on 252 for 6 against Barisal at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium at Khulna.

At Chittagong, Dhaka Metro were bowled out for 221 in the first innings. The hosts in reply finished the day on 84 for three.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA: 252 for 6 (Tushar Imran 61, Anamul Haque 55; Fazle Rabbi 3-25)

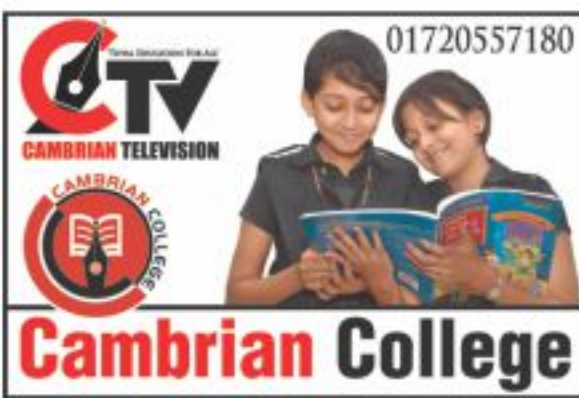
DHAKA: 357 for 4 (Rakibul 154, Shuvagoto Hom 101; Sajedul Islam 2-42)

DHAKA METRO: 221 all out in 59 overs (Saykat Ali 59; Moniruzzaman 4-49)

CHITTAGONG: 84 for 3 (Nafees Iqbal 60; Mohd Shohid 2-19)

RAJSHAHI: 217 all out in 65 overs (Junaid Siddique 63; Abu Zayed 5-58, Enamul Jr 4-57)

SYLHET: 95 for no loss (Sayem Alam 61)



SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH: First innings 232 (Shakib 55, Mushfiquur 61, Shohag 42; Eranga 4-49, Lakmal 3-66)			
SRI LANKA: First innings 730-6 declared (Karunaratne 53, Silva 139, Sangakkara 75, Jayawardene 203 not out, Mathews 86, Vithanage 103 not out; Shakib 3-159)			
BANGLADESH: Second innings (overnight 35-1)			
Tamim c Perera b Herath	11		
Shamsur c Chandimal b Eranga	9		
Ayub c Silva b Lakmal	18		
Mominul lbw b Perera	50		
Shakib lbw b Perera	25		
Mushfiquur b Perera	14		
Nasir c Herath b Perera	29		
Shohag lbw b Lakmal	23		
Robiul lbw b Lakmal	1		
Rubel c Silva b Perera	17		
Al-Amin not out	32		
Extras: (b-9, lb-10, nb-2)	21		
Total: (All out in 51.5 overs)	250		
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-35, 3-50, 4-102, 5-133, 6-150, 7-183, 8-197, 9-197.			
Bowler	O	M	R
Lakmal	14	4	39
Eranga	6	1	26
Herath	9	3	47
Perera	19.5	0	109
Mathews	3	0	10
Result: Sri Lanka won by an innings and 248 runs.			