

Just look at his pace." That's a BPL team official describing a young fast bowler from Pakistan he picked for last year's tournament. The pace bowler didn't turn up because of clearance issues, which meant that the team owner would have to wait longer before seeing him in the flesh. The official had actually only seen him on YouTube.

But he isn't the only one. Many other BPL team owners, in fact several other T20 team owners from across the world, rely on television coverage and YouTube clips if they want to look at a player. It is the way of the world that we live in, although richer IPL team owners send their scouts and analysts to tournaments in Bangladesh, Australia, England and the West Indies to find talents.

Bangladesh though doesn't offer much in terms of T20 experts. Shakib Al Hasan is one of the format's highest wicket-takers but he hasn't really made much of a splash as a batsman despite his experience in T20s. Tamim Iqbal has played a lot of T20s too but can't be called a specialist. Mustafizur Rahman has had one really good IPL season while Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim have played in one or two foreign franchise-based leagues.

But Bangladesh doesn't have anyone close to a Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo or Kieron Pollard, big-hitters who evolved themselves into a T20 monster. West Indians like Sunil Narine, Dwayne Smith and Samuel Badree, to name a few, have also re-engineered their skills to suit T20s, and have become the most sought-after players in the business.

Bangladesh also can't have someone like David Warner who started from T20s and made his way up to the Test team, nor can they have someone like Chris Lynn who is now fully focused on the shorter formats because of his explosive talent.

The closest Bangladesh have come to finding T20 talent is players like Nazmul Hossain Milon and Ziaur Rahman who have talent for hitting sixes, but are constantly ridiculed by coaches and officials for throwing their wickets away.

BANGLADESH'S T20 CONUNDRUM

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Do Bangladesh have a good pool of T20 players?

PHOTO: STAR FILE

In fact, if a Bangladeshi batsman hits a six and defends the next ball, there is a lot of appreciation.

Which is why the aforementioned BPL team official has to look at YouTube to find talented players; there are not enough T20 talents in Bangladesh. And for it to change, administrators must open their mind or be left behind.

Although Twenty20 originated in England, short-format amateur cricket in Bangladesh and other parts of the sub-continent was always 20 overs per innings. These tournaments were played with a taped-tennis ball, but when the cricket-ball version was commercialised by the England Cricket Board, it became an instant sensation.

The BCB had to skip holding the tournament in 2014 in order to clear the mess which left many suspended, including Mohammad Ashraful, a former Bangladesh captain, who was disgraced for his involvement in corruption.

The resumption in 2015 saw the involvement of some political leaders in franchise ownership but the quality of

already sprung up in countries like Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, and now the others joined in.

The BCB had a couple of T20 tournaments in 2006 and 2010 but it went big in 2012 by launching the BPL, modeled after the IPL. With the existing big-hitting talent in the country, it was always going to be a challenge to make for attractive viewing so the owners and organisers decided that five foreign players should be allowed. Initially it attracted some great talent and experienced cricketers but by the second season, it was rocked by match-fixing scandals.

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Zimbabwe started off with a four-team tournament while South Africa have been planning a franchise-based competition of their own but hasn't been able to launch it. Sri Lanka had the SLPL some years ago, which failed miserably, and now they are trying out the Lanka Premier League, possibly from this year.

About Town



PROJECT
ROOPKOTHA
PHOTOGRAPHY
COMPETITION
Organiser: Project Be
February 23, 3-8 pm, Bangladesh



ANTORJATRA
KARU TITAS'S
SOLO ART
EXHIBITION
Organiser: Shilpangon
February 17- March 2, 3-8 pm, Shilpangon Gallery



DIGITAL
WOMEN
SERIES
Organiser: Women in
Digital and EMK Center
February 24, 3-6 pm, EMK

SPORT

cricket, which depended much on the pitches in Mirpur and Chittagong, didn't live up to the billing. Surfaces tired of constant use only produced low-scoring matches, which may have pleased some journalists due to early finishes (certainly yours truly), but the crowd were left short-changed.

Perhaps the 2017 BPL had the most number of experienced and talented cricketers ever in the tournament's history. Rangpur Riders, the eventual champions, Dhaka Dynamites, Comilla Victorians and Khulna Titans formed great teams, which made for some solid bits of cricket in between all the gimmicks that organisers, broadcasters and marketers pepper the T20 tournament with.

Even teams which didn't make it to the 2017 playoffs—Rajshahi Kings, Chittagong Vikings and Sylhet Sixers—spent a decent amount of money to form teams. But they fell short of the top four, who literally broke the bank to form some of the best teams that the world of domestic franchise-based T20 teams has ever seen.

In the current market, Australia's Big Bash League is probably topping the list of T20 tournaments if the quality of cricket is given first priority. The IPL is certainly at the top of the pile of T20 tournaments, by a long way, in terms of the money it offers to players, the quality of players it attracts and the overall global appeal.

The BPL is high on money but not much on local talent, and it is getting hard competition from the Pakistan Super League, England's NatWest t20 Blast and the Caribbean Premier League. With countries like Afghanistan, Nepal and Hong Kong also coming up with their own T20 tournaments, the onus is on South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe to revive their own competitions.

But it needed a bigger market, which duly arrived in 2008 when the BCCI launched the Indian Premier League. The first innings of the competition saw Brendan McCullum blaze away 13 sixes and 10 fours as he made 158. It didn't take too long to catch on. Tournaments had

TORTURE

ANOTHER BCL CASUALTY

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texts and beat me up mercilessly. At one point, they told me that if I admit that I'm a Shibir activist, they will only throw me out of the hall without doing any harm. Then, even though they did not find any involvement with Shibir, they told me to leave the hall," Ahsan explains.

According to Ahsan, when he was leaving the hall gates, BCL men including Omar Faruk, Ruhul Amin, Samiul Islam Sami, Ahsan Ullah and Mehedi Hasan Himel attacked him again, this time with iron rods and sticks, targeting his head and eye. The severe injury to his head at one point rendered him unconscious. The BCL men eventually took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and told the duty doctors that he had met with a road accident.

Ahsan's father Rafiqul alleges that the doctors helped his son contact him after tactfully driving the BCL men out of the room. "Although the doctors suggested that he [Ahsan] be admitted as his condition was deteriorating, the BCL men took him back to the hall again at 4:00 am after he received some primary treatment. I sent my nephew, who also studies at Dhaka University and lives in Surya Sen Hall, but they didn't allow him to enter the dorm at night. Instead, they confined my injured son in the room of the BCL president of the hall, till the following day. They didn't even provide him any food and constantly pressurised him to not share the incidents with anyone. At last, at 2:00 pm, Ahsan managed to flee from the room with the help of my nephew and one of his dorm senior

brothers," says Ahsan's father.

However, Tahsan denies instructing the BCL activists to beat up Ahsan or confine him in his room. He claims that he told Ahsan to rest in his room. "As Ahsan would share different posts of 'Basher Kella' or 'Islami Chhatra Shibir', the juniors were very agitated after checking his mobile phone. This is why the seniors told him to leave the hall and they were standing inside the hall gates. But when Ahsan went there, the juniors attacked him. When I heard that I told them to take him to the hospital immediately. The doctors also said that it was not a very serious injury. His left eye was swollen because of several punches. A simple drop and a few days' rest is enough for him to recover from this," says Tahsan.

Even if one were to go by Tahsan's words that Ahsan was allegedly a Shibir activist, it does not explain what right the BCL men had to charge him at 2:00 am by seizing his mobile phone or checking his Facebook accounts or personal texts and beating him up ruthlessly. Also, even without any proof of Ahsan's involvement with Shibir, is it acceptable to assume that he is a Shibir activist just because he has a beard or shares Islamic posts on Facebook? In addition, it would also be interesting to know how a severely damaged cornea is not a "very serious injury" or how a simple drop and a few days' rest can repair the damage.

The BCL president also informs us that when Ahsan returned to the hall, he called both Ahsan and Omar Faruk and heard everything from both sides. "I even asked Ahsan what punishment he wants, but he said that he had no issues or demands. Yet, on the following day, when Ahsan's father came, one of my anti-group activists named Farid, took Ahsan and his father to the

journalist association and gave false statement to the journalists," he claims.

Tahsan also claims that he got information from the officer-in-charge of Kaliganj police station at Jhenaidah that Ahsan was involved with militant groups and that he had been jailed for nearly three months prior to that. Ahsan refuses that allegation and says: "At first they tried to make me a 'Shibir Activist' but they failed to prove that. Now they are trying to make me a militant. These are totally fabricated and I want you to investigate that."

Star Weekend also contacted the Kaliganj thana Officer in Charge to crosscheck the information, but the OC said clearly that he knew nothing of such allegations. "Also, I didn't talk to anyone about such allegations and no one has contacted me about it," says the OC.

Star Weekend also talked to Ahsan's school teacher who taught him English for more than six years, and he said that Ahsan was well-known in his Upazila for his merit. "He would always stand first in the exams, received two talent-pool scholarships in both primary and secondary levels, and obtained GPA 5 in both public examinations. He was never involved with any political activity," says Ajibor Rahman, teacher at Government Naldanga Bhushan Pilot Secondary School, Kaliganj Municipality, Jhenaidah.

Although Ahsan's parents are demanding justice for their son's victimisation and financial support for better treatment from the university authorities, there has not been any significant action taken in this regard till now. However, when contacted, Professor Shabbir Ahmed, who is the head of the probe body that was formed to investigate the incident, informed that they have successfully submitted the report to

STARDARY

A CNG DRIVER'S KINDNESS

A week ago, I was looking for a CNG one night to take me home from Dhanmondi to Mohakhali. Unfortunately, I had only BDT 150 to pay the fare. As any regular CNG-user can vouch, drivers will rarely take passengers unless promised at least BDT 20 over the meter. The fact that I was a woman looking for a CNG late at night put me at a further disadvantage. At least five different drivers declined to take me home before one agreed. He approached me himself, saying that he had seen me struggling to find a transport. He said, *Manusher shomossa thaktei pare* (People may have problems.) For the rest of the journey home, he carried on a one-sided conversation while I listened. He told me about his life. He has been a resident of Dhaka for 25 years, having moved here to give his family a better life. He has a daughter who had just graduated from Dhaka Polytechnic Institute and a son who had a steady job. This encounter reminded me that kindness isn't a lost virtue, no matter how elusive it may seem.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

OF TRAFFIC AND OUR COMPLICITY

I was walking home from university a few days ago when I had an interesting thought. I'm a student of Dhaka University. Unlike many other students, we are blessed with a spacious campus and lush greenery. Despite the availability of ample pavements within DU, I was walking on the road. It was a choice—one that I, and many others, make everyday. I realised this was borne out of habit, an involuntary action I could not control. Whether it's overcrowding or the presence of countless illegal vendors blocking the pavements, jaywalking had become a knee-jerk reaction for me. In my haste to circumvent Dhaka traffic, I was unwittingly contributing to it. Jaywalking is one of the main causes behind the worsening traffic conditions of our country. No matter how much time we waste complaining about traffic, I realised that we will never solve this issue if we do not acknowledge our own complicity. We can construct all the flyovers and pavements we want but what we need is a change of behaviour. Only a collective change of mindset can