

A movement long in the making

MAZHAR UDDIN



Many may wonder why around 50 Bangladeshi cricketers -- including the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad -- have suddenly chosen to boycott cricketing activities yesterday unless an 11-point list of demands was not met by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The answer is that it is anything but sudden. The simmering discontent started six years ago in 2013 when the BCB first introduced a players-by-choice system in the Dhaka Premier League with a salary cap based on gradings. The board had scrapped the traditional players' transfer system through which the cricketers could choose their own clubs and also negotiate their salaries.

BCB President Nazmul Hassan had assured the players that the players-by-choice system would take place only for one season and that the traditional players' draft would return from the following season.

Six years have gone by but the BCB have persisted with the system that takes the power out of the players' hands and gives it to the clubs. Cricketers of the country kept fuming over the broken promise but remained silent for various reasons, until yesterday.

Apart from Hassan, there is a board director -- IH Mallick -- who has been known to wield a lot of influence in the BCB with the president's blessing. Mallick's umbrella seems to cover all matters, be it BCB's management, financial, organising, policy-making issues and even in team selection -- name the issue and he is there to influence it.

Known as the all-in-one of the BCB, it is widely known that even a leaf will not stir without his consent as he became the undisputed figure of Bangladesh cricket who however does not come in front of the scene often.

Among the 11 demands from the cricketers, the first was a demand for proper respect from the board that they do not get and although they were reluctant to name anyone, the reality is that it is the fear of this powerful director, who has the power to destroy the career of a cricketer, that has kept the cricketers silent.

Among many instances there was one incident where Mallick held the hand of a current national cricketer who has tattoos on his arm and said in front of many journalists: "You haven't scored as many runs as the tattoos you have painted on your arms." It left the cricketer shocked that he was humiliated in front of so many people.

The fire was finally ignited among the cricketers when the BCB president announced that, unlike previous editions, the upcoming seventh edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) would be held without the involvement of franchises after BCB failed to resolve conflicts with the franchises.

It came as a huge blow for the cricketers who were benefited financially through the franchise-based



Bangladesh Test and T20 captain Shakib Al Hasan speaks while placing their 11-point demand before the media at the BCB Academy yesterday.

PHOTO: FROZ AHMED

tournament. There were rumours that top BCB officials were displeased at Shakib's move to Rangpur Riders from Dhaka Dynamites without telling the officials.

According to sources close to developments, players started to discuss on what should be done after BCB's decision to scrap the franchise system last month and they eventually decided to go on a strike on October 16, which was postponed to yesterday's players' press conference at the Academy Ground in Mirpur.

Interestingly, Mallick -- it was learned -- got to know of the cricketers' initiative on Sunday night and called a few cricketers to ask whether they had any action planned, but the cricketers were united in their secrecy and denied knowledge of any such plans.

However, news spread that the cricketers were going to hold a press conference yesterday to announce their demands and a worried Mallick once again started to call the cricketers, but knowing that they may be influenced or even threatened to call of their plan, the players decided to switch their phones off.

Robin even managed to send someone with a phone to talk with cricketers, who gathered at the gymnasium before heading to the press conference, but the players refused to

talk to him and eventually staged one of the most dramatic incidents in Bangladesh cricket.

'Why go to media instead of BCB?'

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) always gives their messages to the players through media. So this time, we chose to let our demands be known through media," said a player on the condition of anonymity after being asked as to why they had come to the media with their 11-point demand instead of discussing the matter with the BCB. When the same question was asked to Shakib Al Hasan, all the premier all-rounder did was laugh as if going to the BCB would have made their demands come true. The national cricketers of Bangladesh called a press conference yesterday in Mirpur to put forward an 11-point demand and decided to boycott all cricketing activities until their demands are met.

Crises down the line

1998-99

National stars of the day like Akram Khan, Aminul Islam, Naimur Rahman, Minhajul Abedin, Mohammad Rafique, Athar Ali Khan, Khaled Masud, Khaled Mahmud, etc. lined up with fellow cricketers in front of the Press Club with banners and slogans demanding that a date for the Dhaka Premier League -- for most cricketers the sole source of income -- be set and adhered to. The players also sat out a 50-over match for Bangladesh A against Marylebone Cricket Club.

September 16, 2008

A fledgling cricket nation was rocked to its foundations when news broke that 10 Bangladesh cricketers, including then national captain Habibur Bashar, had signed up for the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL), seeking early retirement from international cricket, effectively leaving a national team of inexperienced players. They -- others included Shahriar Nafees, Aftab Ahmed, Forhad Reza and later the likes of Alok Kapali -- were handed 10-year bans by the BCB. Many have since been allowed back into the fold.

June 4, 2013

News broke in a Bangla daily that former Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful confessed his involvement in match-fixing to ICC's Anti-Corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) in the BPL. Six days later another Bangladeshi daily did an expose on Ashraful, saying that he and other Bangladesh cricketers fixed international matches in addition to BPL. On June 4, Ashraful confessed to the media. The fallout from the BPL match-fixing scandal was that 2014 edition of the tournament was cancelled.



Most of their demands are logical but their action was not. They could have discussed with the BCB before adopting the hardline. They even have access to us and our honourable Prime Minister. This incident tarnished our image. Anyway, what happened has happened. I talked with the BCB officials and asked them to resolve the issue immediately and bring the cricketers back to action.

ZAHID AHSAN RUSSEL
STATE MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND SPORTS



WHAT BCB SAID

Most of their demands are logical -- with none being such that cannot be met. And most of their demands have or are already being implemented. And all their other demands are also negotiable.

JALAL YUNUS
BCB'S MEDIA COMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN

'THEIR DEMANDS
ARE LOGICAL,
BUT...'



SCAN THE QR CODE
TO READ THE STORY

The players are a part of the board. Decisions can be taken through discussions, whatever the issue. We just came to know of it. We will try to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

NIZAMUDDIN
CHOWDHURY
BCB CEO

STRIKE 'IS
A BIG
ISSUE'



SCAN THE QR CODE
TO READ THE STORY

Shakib's concern over lower-tier corruption

SPORTS REPORTER



Corruption in the lower-tier of Bangladesh cricket is not something new as this issue has been raised a number of times following different incidents in the past. Biased umpiring, alleged favouritism and even buying and selling of points is a common issue in first, second and third division cricket and has spread like cancer in the past few years.

For the development and improvement of the National team's performances, it is very crucial that the pipeline from which the players emerge, is kept clean. Just as recent as in January of this year, a second division team, Dhanmondi Progoti Sangha refused to play their game against Azim Cricket Club at BKSP-3 ground in protest of alleged biased umpiring. Progoti Sangha had called their players off the field after the umpires had given three wrong leg-before decisions, one of which was given despite the ball being hit way above the waist.

Before that, Purbachol Sporting Club were also accused of being favoured by umpires against Amber Sporting Club. With these two incidents just being the tip of the iceberg, there have been numerous occasions in the past when the nation's lower tier cricket has seen many shameful incidents take place.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have only made promises to take strict action in such cases however, their words never materialised and corruption in the lower-tiers kept on spreading like wildfire. There have also been murmurs that it is

one of the board members that acts as the kingpin of such operations. And thus it is not a surprise that the BCB's promises have never turned into action till now.

Bangladesh cricket was shaken to its core when the national players decided to go on strike after putting forth an 11-point demand in front of the media at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. And although the cricketers did not put the issue of alleged favouritism and biased/poor umpiring at the grassroots level in their demand list, they surely did not forget to mention it.

Bangladesh T20I and Test captain Shakib Al Hasan spoke about poor umpiring and the alleged favouritism in lower-tier cricket and emphasized on the need for these issues to be addressed.

"The players sometimes get to know about the result of the match even before stepping onto the field. This is really disappointing and needs to be fixed because it concerns the career of a player," said Shakib to the media yesterday.

The message from Shakib and Co was clear, that if the country's cricket is to have a future, then the corruption at the base needs to be wiped clean first. However, it now remains to be seen whether the BCB will take action or will even this message fall on deaf ears just as it was in the past.

"A player can get dismissed off a good delivery but if that player gets out because of two or three bad decisions from umpires and then go on to get out to a good delivery in the next game then the career of that player kind of ends at that moment. If we want players to emerge then we need to make changes here and develop this field," concluded Shakib.

'Why should we resign?'

SPORTS REPORTER



The national cricketers, who went on strike yesterday, have also put forward an 11-point demand, which includes the resignation of the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) president and secretary. The players added that they would choose the next CWAB president through an election.

"Why should we resign? This committee's tenure ended six to seven months back and through an election the new committee will be formed. A huge number of former and current cricketers represent CWAB. My question is how many cricketers are with them? What they did today is shocking," CWAB president Naimur Rahman, who is also a BCB director, told The Daily Star last night.

"Their demands are very much valid but there is some norm and process. You have to place your demand to the concerned authority first before taking such a stern action. Without discussing with anybody, including the CWAB, they took such a stern action, why? I am not sure of whether or not they are being misguided by somebody," added the former national skipper.

"CWAB is not sitting idle as we are negotiating many things for the interest of the players. The salary is increased because of your bargaining. We are not a mega star like Shakib [Al Hasan] and that's why our works are not given enough attention by the media," he continued.

"How did the players get their BPL dues? It was through negotiation by CWAB. What happened today is very unfortunate for our country's cricket," he concluded.

Cricketers' 11-point demand

1. The players need to be respected more. Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) president and secretary has to step down immediately. The players will choose who will become CWAB president, chairman etc through election.

2. The Dhaka Premier League has to go back to the previous way in terms of how players used to deal with club officials and hold power over which team they could play for and what their salary will be.

3. After the end of this edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), it has to go back to the system of the previous years. The disparity between the salary of local players and international players must end and there should be a more balanced salary structure. The players must be able to decide which grade they are.

4. The match fee of the first-class cricketers should be 1 lakh Taka. Our salaries must be increased by 50 percent.

5. Facilities like gym, indoor and ground must improve. Coach, physios and trainers must be appointed throughout the 12 months of the year. Even if the facilities cannot be ensured immediately, we want it to be ensured before the next season begins. Every division has to have practice facilities so that players do not have to travel to Dhaka. The quality of balls used in first-class cricket must improve. The daily allowance of 1500 Taka, allocated for players by the BCB is not adequate and the amount must be considered so that the players can meet the demands of the fitness level which was required by the BCB. The plane fares of the players must be ensured by the BCB when they travel for games. No allowance is needed for players but the hotels they reside in must contain a gym and swimming pool since the players go through a rough time after each day of a four-day game. The bus service afforded to the players when they go to the ground must be improved.

6. The number of players who are handed national team central contracts must increase as well as the salary of the contracted players must be increased.

7. Salary of groundsmen must increase. The local coaches here get very little in terms of salary and a foreign coach's salary sometimes equates to the salary of 20 local coaches. The umpires need more financial security if we want them to carry on the task as professionals and it is the same for physios and trainers. It's time we give priority to Bangladeshis.

8. We play two domestic leagues with four-day matches, namely the BCL and NCL. Premier League is the only one-day format. There must be another one-day format introduced. There should also be another T20 tournament before the BPL.

9. There must be a fixed calendar for the domestic league so that the players can prepare for tournaments beforehand.

10. The owed salaries of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), must be paid on time.

11. The rule that a player cannot play more than two franchise-based tournaments in a year must be overturned.

An internal matter of BCB: BCCI

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Bangladesh's upcoming tour of India was on Monday thrown into jeopardy after their national team players refused to participate in any cricketing activity until their demands, including a hike in salary, are met.

India responded with a guarded statement, calling Bangladesh's internal matter. "The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will wait and watch the developments closely. This is an internal matter of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and until and unless we hear from them, there is no need for us to make any comments," a senior BCCI functionary told PTI.

However, many in the Indian cricket board feel that President-elect Sourav Ganguly's cordial relations with both players and officials in Bangladesh cricket might help in salvaging the situation.

"There is a Test match in Kolkata which will certainly generate a lot of interest among the Bangladesh fans keeping the local connect in mind. A lot of fans are expected to travel from Dhaka and it's surrounding towns to watch the match, a first in Kolkata," another BCCI official said.

