



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Harsh realities of WOMEN’S CRICKET

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The 2018 Asia Cup triumph was a watershed moment for women’s cricket. It turned heads, showed that women cricketers in the country can bring glory to the nation despite taking a backseat to the men’s game in terms of the magnitude of facilities, fan following, and so forth. Five years on, there is a certain stagnation with little progress.

Many promises were made but little has come to fruition. A part of ICC’s current revenue sharing model categorises the performance of women’s teams in ICC events as a metric alongside men’s game, but the Tigresses have not made much impact besides being mere participants.

Bangladesh’s performance in such ICC tournaments has fallen below the expectations set after breakout 2018. Despite the success that year, a proper setup is still unavailable to enable growth of the women’s game. By and large, there are little means of training facilities available across the country. Thus, talents do not come through, impeding the competitive grind of domestic tournaments.

The Women’s Dhaka Premier League

Bangladesh are languishing at eighth in the ICC Women’s Championship Standings 2022-25 – used to determine qualification into the World Cup – and their only points so far have come from abandoned matches. Winning qualifying tournaments to get to ICC events have come easily for the Tigresses but continuously failing to get past the group phase in main events reflects shortcomings in terms of results.

(WDPL) is ongoing at the moment but how competitive is it when there is an inherent lack of quality players? Two teams dropped out of the tournament before the start of this season, citing they did not have enough time to build squads. Was it a lack of interest? It is the lack of long-term planning around the women’s game showcased once more. With WDPL being the torch-bearer for developing the domestic circuit, two teams dropping off at the eleventh hour shows the prevalent culture of decision-making without forethought.

If this is prevalent in domestic cricket, it is indeed more serious at

international level since without proper long-term planning and its execution, propensity for success diminishes. In the last T20 World Cup in 2023 in Australia, the Tigresses returned home without a win in the group phase – as they did in three preceding editions of the showcase event.

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A look at the current status of the women’s game around the world gives an idea of how far off Bangladesh still are but the bigger headache should be about coming out of the stagnation at present. One or two wins will certainly have merits but will not satisfy the need for long-term plans required for growth.

In the 2020 T20 World Cup, the highest attendance for a women’s game was attained in Australia. While ICC continues to boast about the growth in women’s cricket’s audience, the game here is yet to pull in crowds. As a result, it is harder to attract sponsors as the women’s game is still a supplementary commodity alongside the men’s game in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, India have inaugurated their own franchise tournament, WPL, which has been making waves.

While there are societal constraints to the women’s game here more pronounced than in most countries which impeded the growth of women’s cricket here, the lack of long-term planning, unfulfilled requirements of financial security and facilities have stagnated progress and hurt the Tigresses.

‘Parameters need broadening’

Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a revered figure in the sporting fraternity and a mentor of many cricketers here, once closely monitored women’s cricket as its wing development manager. The veteran coach identified some vital issues that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) should give highest priority in order to ensure proper growth of women’s cricket in the country. The excerpts of his observations are as follows:



● We don’t play enough domestic tournaments, which consequently keep the girls in the field for barely six-seven weeks out of a whole season. So, they need to be in a competitive environment for a longer period of time. Girls still have to wait for men’s schedules before their games can take place. The matches are loosely arranged as well, unlike the case in most countries where women’s cricket is thriving.

● The women have no separate training facilities. We have around 20 players under contract who get salaries but excluding them, the promising ones have no one to look after them. They should be brought under some sort of rookie contract or scholarship, so they don’t feel insecure financially or consider leaving the sport. I think we should go beyond what other countries are offering such players [outside the national pool].

● Barring the national team players, the rest don’t have much access to training facilities. The boys have U-19, U-17, U-15, HP, A team and Bangla Tigers camp, where more than 100 players are involved, but until now the girls only had a national pool of players, and that’s all. The parameters need to be broadened.

● We need to increase the number of players, which can be done by bringing promising players from various domestic competitions and giving them access to training facilities. This will increase the competitiveness of domestic competitions and, in turn, help produce quality cricketers.

● Most of the players I saw playing in 2017 are still playing now. My expectations were to see a good number of new players get into the national team but I haven’t really seen that. I haven’t seen much change. The ones who did come through, in most cases didn’t graduate with outstanding pedigree.

● Board is taking initiative by bringing in foreign coaching staff into the system but it’s important to look at domestic structure if we want to do well in international cricket. The height reached in 2018 was a big opportunity for us to take women’s cricket to a different level but we didn’t really capitalise on that.



‘We do not give women’s cricket the attention it deserves’

Despite showing huge potential after winning the Women’s Asia Cup in 2018, the Bangladesh national cricket team were unable to capitalise on the triumph to take things to the next level. The **Daily Star’s Ekush Tapader** spoke to the chairman of the Bangladesh Cricket Board’s women’s wing, Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel, to get an overview of the women cricketers, their current state and the future plan regarding them during an exclusive interview. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): What are the areas you feel the Bangladesh women’s cricket team needs to work on?

Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel (SACN): We will not claim to be satisfied with where we are now. Questions like whether women’s cricket is in very good shape, in a satisfactory state, or just in a good state were raised. So, in that context, we can say the condition of our women’s cricket is going well but it is not at a satisfactory level. We have already started the longer version cricket, age-level tournaments, and we are going to start the school cricket tournament form this year. We also have two age-level national teams and we have an A team and there is the national team as well, which will enrich the pipeline. However, we won’t say that we have enough players in the pipeline.



DS: Are there any plans to reform the selection committee and the coaching panel of the national team?

SACN: We have already appointed former Sri Lankan cricketer Hashan Tillakaratne as the head coach. We will also have a foreign bowling coach by the next two weeks and we are also in the process of roping in a foreign physio and a trainer for the national team. We have been understaffed but our board president [Nazmul Hassan Papon] has always supported us and now we are going to have a complete committee. Much like school cricket, we are planning to have tournaments at the district level.

DS: Since the Bangladesh women’s team got the Test status, did the board set any plans for Test cricket?

SACN: We have already started the two-day longer version tournament and we may transform it into the three-day format in the coming days so that our players are able to adapt and adjust to the longer version. After that, we will plan to play Test matches.

DS: Do you think there are limitations in terms of infrastructure and facilities in women’s cricket?

SACN: There are socio-economic influences in all aspects of life and since we live in a male dominated society, at times, we don’t give as much importance to the women’s national team as we give to the boys under-15 team. I am not blaming anyone individually. If we talk about sponsors and media coverage...we do not give the attention to the women’s cricket it deserves. I think rather than raising questions, we can take a step forward from all parts of the society and then women’s cricket in Bangladesh will go a long way.

STATS AND HIGHLIGHTS
Total number of players in central contract: 24
Grade A – Tk 60000
Grade B – Tk 48000
Grade C – Tk 36000
Grade D – Tk 25000
Total number of active women’s cricketers in Bangladesh
Around 400 cricketers in junior level
Around 500 cricketers in senior level
Tournaments and programmes
Dhaka Premier League
First division league
First division qualifier
National Cricket League consists of eight teams
Bangladesh Cricket League (two-day longer version) consists of three teams
Under-17 yearly player hunting programme
Under-18 National Cricket League consists of eight teams
The BCB Women’s wing is planning to organise Women’s school cricket this year.
Around twelve cricketers completed Level 1 coaching course.
Around seven to eight coaches currently involved in coaching with clubs and divisional teams.