

'We are on the RIGHT PATH'

Chandika Hathurusingha looks calmer and more composed and appears to have been doing his homework since starting his second stint as Bangladesh's head coach. The Sri Lankan has come with the purpose of transforming Bangladesh cricket with short and long-term planning. The 54-year-old spoke with **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin** about his plans in restructuring the grassroots level, strengthening the pipeline and a few other topics in the first of a two-part interview. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): After joining for a second term, you spoke about focusing on developing local resources and grassroots. Have you pitched any suggestions to the board about improving the domestic structure?

Chandika Hathurusingha (CH): What I had talked about was having a system in place, for which I had recommended David Moore, who was the general manager of cricket in New South Wales. He joined [BCB as head of programmes] before me and has done some work. We also presented our ideas to the board once. So we are starting the process to create a structure in terms of the Bangla Tigers programme, the High Performance unit and coaching procedures. I think he [Moore] is even focusing on bringing in umpires, coaching mentors and things like that. So, these things are in place but will take some time to implement. However, things that we could have done immediately, we did.

The competition in the National Cricket League (NCL) and Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) is good because there are eight and four teams in the tournaments respectively.

But a player who plays for one team in the BCL and for a different team in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) and another team in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) does not know which particular team he can call home. In that case, where will he go and train [during off-season]? That's the biggest area we can improve. In Sri Lanka, if I am not in the national squad, I can go to my club and train because that's my home and the same goes for Australia. So, one of the suggestions from David and I was to establish eight centres where players can set up base and practice.

That's a long-term initiative and then in the short term, the players are getting into the national set-up and HP squad. We make sure to give them tactical knowledge and skills development and also an understanding of nutrition, fitness, game awareness and confidence. And then we pick the best of the best and fast-track them closer to the national set-up. We want that system with the HP unit and the Bangla Tigers programme. We can also help that along by enhancing the knowledge of the local coaches, physios and trainers. If the facilities in those centres have proper nets and indoor nets, then they can train without coming to Dhaka.



So then the competition in the NCL will rise and they will understand how to compete and absorb pressure. All that will come with good people around and having competition there. The skill level is there -- that's why they are at that level. The board did a good thing by preparing good wickets. And what was the result? We are getting some good fast bowlers and the batters are playing better against good pacers. I think we are on the right path.

DS: We talk about Bangladesh not having enough players in the pipeline. Have you suggested any plans in order to strengthen the pipeline?

CH: You say there are no players in the pipeline, but I see a lot more in the pipeline waiting for an opportunity. I think there's a lot in the pipeline. I look at the fast-bowling unit and I see about seven or eight players fighting for three or four places. But we can play a maximum of three unless the fourth one is an all-rounder.

And in the batting department, there's competition for spots. Regarding your question, I would love to see a few spinners. I have been crying for a leg-spinner for quite some time. That has

been my mantra since 2014-15. That's one area I would love to see. But the fact that Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam have established themselves now makes it very hard for other guys to break through.

There's competition but I am looking for a niche group of players who can actually become world-class. And then the areas where you may say we are lacking are in terms of a leg spinner and probably a little in terms of all-rounders or fast-bowling all-rounders.

DS: It seems that most of the newcomers who break into the national team are not prepared for international cricket given what they face in domestic competitions and hence have to learn in the international arena. What's your take on that?

CH: In the sub-continent -- apart from India now as their level has gone up -- for the likes of Sri Lanka and for us, it's a big jump from domestic to international cricket. For me, India and Australia are the closest in terms of the gap between domestic and international standards. But for every other country, it is a jump and it takes time.

We need to close this gap and I think that's where we are heading now. I think

we are closing the gap because we have a good domestic system in terms of the programmes. We have two four-day competitions, a well-established 50-over competition and we have a good T20 competition in the form of the BPL. So I think we are heading in the right direction. Having good competitions help. The reason we understand the 50-over game so well is because of the Dhaka Premier League. I don't know if it has been there for more than 50 years. That's why we compete well in this format.

DS: Compared to your first stint, are there any striking transformations that you have noticed in the current crop of players?

CH: I think the biggest difference that I have noticed is a change in work ethic. Their work ethic has improved. They recognise that high intensity in training is more effective than the volume of training. Especially the ones who were there before [during Hathurusingha's first stint in 2014], they were more proactive this time around -- doing their own work instead of waiting for instructions. That's the biggest difference. Their fitness has also improved a lot and the competition for each position has also increased.

DS: What about the new guys?

CH: Some of the young guys who I have not seen like Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud -- these guys know what they are doing. They are very athletic, let's put it that way, they are more complete and very skilful. For instance, fielding has improved a lot [because of the young players].

DS: Have you set any goals for yourself or for Bangladesh?

CH: I am always trying to get the best out of the people that I lead. That's the aim. I like providing the best environment for the players' success. If I can set up that environment, I think that's my satisfaction. It's not about results. The result will take care of itself if I equip them and maximise their potential.

For example, I am bringing people around who have resources. I am not a mental coach, nor am I a psychologist. So I bring them in and get expert support around the players so they can become the best versions of themselves. For me, it's about making that environment and the culture right and making sure they do the right thing for the team.



Ruman Sana and Diya Siddique -- the two star archers of the country -- fist-bump after clinching the top position in qualification round of recurve mixed event of the 14th Teer National Archery Championships in Tongi yesterday. They will fight for the gold medal today in this event. Diya can add a third gold after already bagging two in recurve individual and recurve team events while Sana will have the opportunity to win medals in three events today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Rehan called up for second Ashes Test

AFP, London

Teenage leg spinner Rehan Ahmed has been added to England's squad for the second Ashes Test against Australia as cover for Moeen Ali.

Ahmed, 18, became the youngest man to play Test cricket for England when he was picked to play in Pakistan in December.

The Leicestershire player made an eye-catching debut for Ben Stokes's side in Karachi, taking seven wickets in the match and 5-48 in the second innings.

But Ahmed has taken just six wickets in seven matches in the second division of the County Championship this season.

Off-spinning all-rounder Moeen struggled with a finger blister in the dramatic first Test at Edgbaston, which Australia won by two wickets.

Neymar and Co. want Ancelotti as coach

AGENCIES

Brazil star Neymar welcomed the idea of having a foreign coach for the Selecao with speculations suggesting Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti is set to take charge of the record five-time world champions after his contract with the Los Blancos expires in 2024.

"I know it's the priority of the national team. The CBF president wants to sign him and as players we also want it to happen. For myself, for Vini, for Militao," Neymar said in an interview to BandSports.

"We all know him, we know how amazing he is," Neymar added. "To have him in the team would be very important. But there is nothing confirmed as of yet. We hope that he comes after his contract ends".

Despite the president of the CBF Ednaldo Rodrigues remaining confident of getting the signature of the Italian coach, Ancelotti has repeatedly asserted that he wishes to honour his contract with Real.

Rodrigues said he would also approach the Spanish club's president Florentino Perez and described Ancelotti as their first choice to replace Tite, who left Brazil after their quarterfinal exit at the World Cup in Qatar in November.

'That experience will make them a better team'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bengaluru

As the luxurious bus carrying the Bangladesh national football team stopped in front of the imposing iron gate in front of the Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) Sports Club, the dejected looks on the faces aboard following Thursday's self-inflicted defeat to Lebanon in the SAFF Championship became apparent.

Even when the players exited the bus after it slowly moved to a practice ground surrounded by lush vegetation, they did so with little in the way of a smile before collecting their bags. Tariq Raihan Kazi, who made a costly mistake leading to the first of two goals, entered the ground with a net full of footballs and cast it aside before all the footballers and coaching staff gathered for a team meeting.

But after Spanish coach Javier Cabrera was done briefing the players, they erupted in applause and the atmosphere shifted completely. The players were still cheerful in the dressing room after completing a one-and-a-half-hour training session and it appeared they were ready to bounce back against Maldives on June 25.

Bangladesh's initial plans of playing the semifinals had basically hinged on results against Maldives and Bhutan. Although they delivered a good performance by holding the game to a goalless draw till the 80th minute, the gut-wrenching manner of the defeat raised questions about whether the team could move on from their

disappointment.

"You were that close [even to winning the match], so obviously the disappointment is bigger. And that is normal, but now is the moment to take positives from yesterday," Cabrera said after training.

"It is about maintaining focus. Right now, the players should not be demoralised but instead be motivated and excited. That experience [against Lebanon] will make them a better team. And that will give us more of a chance against Maldives and get us closer to winning against them," Cabrera said, adding that they would have to be more aware since he considers the tie a 50-50 affair.



Bengaluru's sanctuary for athletes

ANISUR RAHMAN from Bengaluru

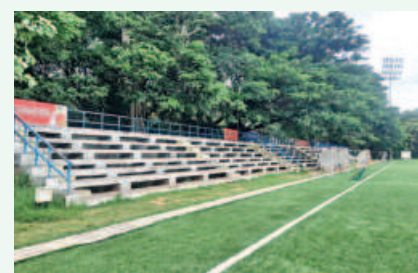
As footballers from the Bangladesh national football team entered the Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) Sports Club after travelling 12km from their hotel in Bengaluru, a group of young footballers were walking off the artificial turf.

Bangladeshi journalists in town to cover the SAFF Championship were in pursuit and upon arrival were greeted by lush green trees creating a calm backdrop for a serene training session.

More impressively, the HAF Sports Club, under the care of the Ministry of Defense, serves athletes from multiple disciplines. The facility not only boasts a swimming

pool and a gymnasium but also a cricket ground, one court each for basketball and volleyball, an artificial turf and a grass-covered pitch.

Eyes were also drawn to a photo of illustrious Indian forward Bhaichung



Bhutia, who scored against Bangladesh in the SAFF Championship finals in 1999 and 2005, promoting his football school and finding a home for more than 300 footballers at the HAL Sports Club.

Before calling time on the domestic circuit in 2015, Bhatia had established numerous Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools (BBFS) in 2010 spread across the country, aiming to repay his country. The schools have played a big role in producing footballers, with current Indian national team midfielder Rohit Kumar one notable product.

"It is the fourth year of the BBFS in Bengaluru. We have 370-plus footballers, aged from Under-6 to the Under-16 level. 25 coaches conduct training while five officials look after everything else," Fejin J

Felix, operations and business development manager of BBFS in Bengaluru, told The Daily Star while Bangladesh were training under the afternoon sun.

"We provide two types of training. One is foundation training, which anyone can avail, and the other is development training. Coaches conduct foundation training three hours a week and development training six hours a week," Felix said, adding that they were renting the premises at a cost of 4 lakh rupees per month and other sports clubs were using the HAL Sports Club as well.

"The school is mostly run with fees from the students," informed Felix, who opined Bengaluru would become the hub of Indian football given the number of football-related initiatives in Karnataka.

"Only one league was held in Bengaluru before but now there are four leagues. The super division consists of 20 clubs, division A of 10 clubs and Division B of 14 clubs. Division C has more than 200 clubs competing on a zonal basis before a centralised tournament from which only two teams are promoted," Felix said.

"If you compare the football culture of Kolkata or Kerala with Bengaluru, we know about their legacy. But at present, Bengaluru is also booming and has a lot of games at the grassroots level. There are activities 300 out of 365 days a year. The Karnataka football association also helped a lot," Felix said. "There are also knockout competitions and five youth leagues ranging from the U-9 to U-19 level. I think Bengaluru is going to be a football hub in the coming days."