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PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tamim's retirement saga shows why BCB must change



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

Before he made a dramatic U-turn on Friday, the tear-soaked, shocking retirement announcement of Bangladesh cricket's leading scorer, Tamim Iqbal, had left fans across the cricket-loving nation speechless. This also, once again, brought to fore the seemingly incurable rot at the core of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). The fact remains that the BCB is in tatters – with the one-man rule of the current president, and his high-handed management style, along with the management's unapologetic disrespect for the cricketers – and little has been done over the years to address this.

The BCB management is apparently democratically elected, but the system seems totally undemocratic, where players who are under the board's contract are treated with little to no respect by the management. And in a system that operates with seemingly no concrete long-term vision and is mired in various controversies, the mental health of the players, unsurprisingly, takes a back seat. Tamim Iqbal's decision to retire – which he has since withdrawn at the behest of the prime minister – is a manifestation of this dysfunctional system.

The current BCB management (under the aegis of its three-term president Nazmul Hassan Papon) has done little to create a conducive environment where players can grow and thrive. Rather, the president himself, through his shenanigans and irresponsible comments before the media, has nurtured a culture of mistrust and controversies, with complete disregard for how this would affect the players' mindset and team performance.

For instance, in February, the BCB chief openly commented about a rift between Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan, which according to him had been so bad that they did not even talk to each other. While, in a span of two days, Papon took a U-turn on his statement, the question remains: how could the BCB allow the situation surrounding two top performers of the

team to deteriorate to such an extent? In hindsight, the BCB modus operandi, when it comes to players, seems to have become one of conflict and suppression. The struggles of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Shakib Al Hasan in dealing with the BCB made headlines constantly, and the never-ending controversies persist while the management is not held accountable for enabling the gradual decay of the state of the game.

Tamim Iqbal perhaps did not take the decision to retire overnight. There had been constant tension between him and coach Chandika Hathurusingha – who had resigned once in 2017 after alleged conflict and tension with senior players – over various issues, along with the board. The BCB management did not do anything to diffuse the tension. Rather, as usual, the president appeared before the media before the match with Afghanistan and blurted out how Hathurusingha was unhappy with Tamim's statement about his fitness and "shouted" on the phone with Papon, and slammed Tamim himself for it. But how was it helpful for the team? Eventually, they lost the match.

Also, one would be tempted to ask, why bring back a coach whose first term had ended on a controversial note, who apparently did not even bother to provide specific reasons for this decision, and who also had a tense relationship with the players? Based on which specific merits was Hathurusingha reappointed? Could no one else fit the bill?

Whatever the BCB management thinks about its own performance, it is obvious that the players and fans are unhappy with how things are, and that a change in the BCB system has become the need of the hour in order for the team to be able to focus on the game, rather than on management politics.

But why blame the BCB alone? The media has also been highly irresponsible at times in putting

additional pressure on players, slandering them on days when their performance was not up to the mark, magnifying the slightest lapses, even finding far-fetched personal angles to "explain" professional mishaps, thus creating sensationalised news.

The passionate cricket fans, too, remain ever-insensitive to the sentiments of the players, hailing them for their brilliant performance one moment, and burning their effigies for failures in the next.

Their mental health and wellbeing remain unacknowledged in the cricketing scene of the country. At least, the BCB seems to be unaware of this reality, given how both Papon and director Khaled Mahmud made unnecessary fuss when, last year, Shakib Al Hasan wanted to take a break from international cricket citing mental health reasons. While former Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo did try to create an open environment and safe space for players to talk about their mental health, nothing much seems to have changed.

Last year, Papon did say that psychologists would be made available to cricketers to overcome mental health concerns, but the BCB's approach itself is enough to give players anxiety and depression. The rough way in which even stalwarts like Tamim and Shakib are handled speaks volumes about the overall mistreatment of players by the BCB.

While this time around the prime minister herself has intervened to ensure that Tamim will be back on the field, this is only a stop-gap measure. What cricket in Bangladesh needs right now are not curative but preventive measures that will have a lasting impact on the growth of the game.

To start, the BCB needs thorough restructuring, stringent implementation of governance and a code of business conduct. The management needs to be held accountable for its actions, and it needs to create an environment that promotes healthy discussions and destigmatises mental health concerns, while providing enough space for players to focus on both personal and team development.

As representatives of the media and cricket fans, we should also learn to show respect to the players, their wellbeing – both physical and mental – and draw the line that should not be crossed.

Why did the World Bank and IMF come under fire from Guterres?

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

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National leaders who were former allies often experience a fallout and fight each other. In Ancient Rome, Marcus Junius Brutus, an ally and reputedly best friend, eventually joined the rebellion against Julius Caesar and conspired to assassinate him in the Senate. Only last month, the Russian warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the private army known as the Wagner Group, and a sworn friend of Putin and the Russian Republic, decided to turn the table on the Russian leadership and launched a coup against his former patron.

Now comes the news of a feud between three erstwhile allied entities working in the international arena: the UN, the World Bank (WB),

Partnership Framework (SPF), which covers 2019 to 2023 and includes four key areas of cooperation: finance and implementation support to help countries reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); decisive global action on climate change; joint work in post-crisis and humanitarian settings; and harnessing data to improve development outcomes.

The two institutions pledged to cooperate in finding financial and other necessary resources to help countries achieve the SDGs and harness data to improve development outcomes. These initiatives include mobilising increased and better finance from all sources, including through domestic

The UN Secretary-General appears frustrated for three reasons: 1) The progress on SDG goals is lagging; 2) UN's climate goals have lost traction in the aftermath of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine; and 3) the appointment of the new head at the World Bank, Ajay Banga, unnerved the UN and its partners (who are concerned about poverty eradication and climate change mitigation). Some insiders in the Guterres camp are worried that "the predatory-finance background" of Banga will threaten the UN goals.

But it is not clear where the funding necessary for the lofty goals of the Paris Summit group will come from. According to a Brookings Institution study, international "investments should rise to \$5.9 trillion by 2030, compared to \$2.4 trillion set in 2019. Most incremental finance will need to come from domestic sources, but at least \$1 trillion in annual incremental external financing will be needed." The WB harbours an ambition to become a \$1 trillion bank by 2030. Scaling up to this degree (roughly



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PHOTO: AFP

and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). All three bodies emerged from the ruins of the Second World War and benefitted from the poverty alleviation efforts of the last 7.5 decades. Now, the UN Secretary-General has fired the first salvo against the WB and IMF for their deficiencies during the pandemic, but also for their failure to lift the world out of poverty (and all the other things that went wrong, including climate change, the debt crisis, and the general sense of doom and gloom in the global economic outlook).

The backdrop for this latest round of bickering is the meeting in Paris where, between June 22 and 23, about 100 international organisations and 50 heads of states gathered to discuss how to build a more responsive, fairer, and more inclusive international financial system to "fight inequalities, finance the climate transition, and bring us closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals". The goals announced by the newly formed Paris Summit group are to create a world "where poverty is eliminated and the planet preserved; where vulnerable countries are better equipped to face the crises from climate change and conflicts." The next paragraph then takes a dig at the current World Bank/IMF superstructure: "We will transform the governance of the international financial architecture to make it more efficient, more equitable, and for the world of today".

Why does this internecine dispute between the UN and the WB/IMF look so odd? First, these three entities come from the same breeding stock. The World Bank and the IMF have provided loans for poverty eradication and temporary financial assistance to countries to help ease balance of payments adjustment. The UN had a broader charter, and its area of work in helping to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and build resilience so countries can sustain progress had a symbiotic relationship with the Bretton Woods bodies.

Secondly, Guterres' missives come on the heels of the most recent UN and the World Bank agreement, known as the Strategic

resources, and helping countries attract and manage private capital; improving implementation capacity to achieve the SDGs; promoting joint action and investment to improve infrastructure and build human capital; convening governments, financial institutions, private investors, and development banks to mobilise, coordinate, and deliver financing to help countries make the transition to a low-carbon, resilient future; and strengthening

a threefold expansion) requires a change in its operational model, as well as in its finances.

The new WB head arrives at a time of growing enthusiasm within the US and other G20 nations for the "reform of international financial institutions" and also at a "moment of significant economic upheaval". However, critics point out "the preponderance of countries that implemented SAP experienced higher levels of poverty, mass unemployment, and increasing

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collaboration and joint action in post-crisis and humanitarian settings to build resilience.

Unfortunately, all of these are still but wishful thinking. Antonio Guterres seized the opportunity and used the appointment of the new WB chief, the Paris conference, and the stalemate in the Russia-Ukraine war to push his agenda.

As we know, the G7 and European Union member states control more than 50 percent of all votes at the World Bank, even as they represent under 13 percent of the global population. Non-G20 emerging markets and developing countries (EMDEs) are witnessing slow recovery from the pandemic and "supply chain" problems that have plagued these countries the last few years. And one cannot deny the disappointing trends on poverty, climate emissions, and other SDG outcomes. In 2015, when the SDG agreements were reached, there was an expectation of an uptick in the pace of development. Halfway through the SDGs, it is clear that most countries will not come close to meeting SDG targets under current trends.

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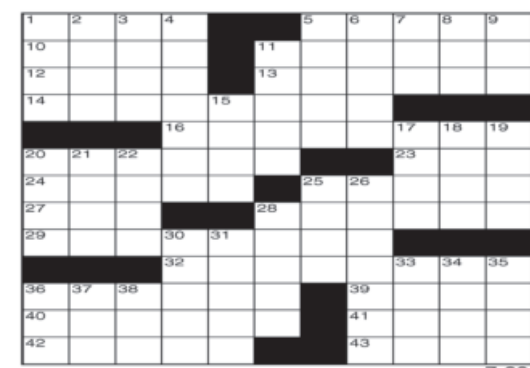
Another source of growth, international trade, fell by 0.9 percent in the first quarter of 2023, following a decline of two percent in the final quarter of last year. And now there is a global manufacturing recession.

The UN chief is aware that the US has to be on board. A US Treasury official told AP that big new monetary pledges should not be expected from the Paris Summit – rather it's viewed as a chance to push for an evolution of the development banks.

Since reforms in the three bodies will take a lot of work and could be gradual, it would be somewhat reckless to offer any cut-and-dried solutions. Over the years, many insiders and outsiders have come forward with ideas to restructure these institutions, and one can only hope that both the stakeholders (including the US, China, Russia, and the G20 countries) and other smaller EMDEs can reach a consensus on how to turn the ships around.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Went fast
5 Hackneyed
10 Troubadour's topic
11 Singer Estefan
12 China setting
13 Laceless shoe
14 Hotel staffers
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20 Pixie
23 Earth: Prefix
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27 Work unit
28 Comes to a point
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- DOWN**
1 Thick cut
2 Stance
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8 Avoid the truth
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15 Crude homes
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20 Winter glider
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26 Posh
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36 Be decisive
37 Pi follower
38 Catch some Z's



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

