



Bangladesh team created history by invoking the first ever instance of a “timed out” dismissal in international cricket.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Cricket is not a gentleman’s game

## Nor does it need to be



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AZMIN AZRAN

Monday’s match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two of the worst performing teams in this year’s World Cup, was as dead as a dead rubber gets. Champions Trophy qualification was still on the line, but in the broader context of the World Cup, few besides Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans would have been paying attention. But the Bangladesh team kept pace with their pre-tournament reputation of creating drama. In fact, they created history this time by invoking the first-ever instance of a “timed out” dismissal in international cricket.

Every time a batter gets out in an unconventional manner during a cricket match, some fans are quick to put on their judgemental hats and bring up the dated arguments dominated by two phrases: “the Spirit of Cricket” and “the gentleman’s game.” Cricket’s origins do go back to the English aristocrats, who would sit down at high tea and clap softly as other gentlemen in all-white knocked the ball around a park. But the professionalisation and globalisation of the game has changed all this. The epicentre of global cricket is now in South Asia, where the game is competitive at all levels. Players for every national team play under immense pressure, and they are expected to take every legal advantage to win.

Beyond all that, fans need to understand that calling cricket the “gentleman’s game” has classist connotations in today’s day and age. The origin of the phrase goes back to the 17th century, when English aristocats playing it made the game more popular. They decreed that the game should be played in a gentlemanly manner. This decree has meant different things during the different historical periods of the game—as cricket moved from being the game of the nobles and the affluent living on a tiny island on the edge of the Atlantic, to becoming a game played by officers in colonies across the world. The high barrier of entry to the game, the expensive equipment, and the fact that modern cricket had originated from an upper class within a highly stratified English society resulted in the phrase “gentleman’s game” being used to exclude people from the game—an attempt that has failed in our part of the world, where cricket is by far the most popular game across classes.

But that didn’t mean the classism and the judgement had left the game of cricket. When Vinoo Mankad first ran someone out at the non-striker’s end, the Australian media had a field day. When the Pakistanis invented the art of swinging the old ball and dominated batters with their skill, they were called cheats and accused of ball tampering. Wasim Akram,

the legendary Pakistani bowler, is often heard saying that once the English learned the art themselves, “ball tampering” was conveniently renamed “reverse swing.” Sri Lankan legend Muttiah Muralitharan exploited a unique physical feature on his right elbow to spin the ball around corners and take hundreds of wickets, but no amount of testing his bowling action to prove its legality could dissuade some from claiming he was bending his elbow illegally (also known as “chucking”) while bowling. The dominant West Indians possibly faced the worst of

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it in the 70s, when the venerated former player and commentator, Tony Greig, said he wanted to make them “grovel.” The word had racist connotations, given that many of the Caribbean players had ancestry going back to enslaved people. Tony Greig, on the other hand, was born in South Africa during Apartheid.

Cricket is played seriously by a very small number of nations across the world, and they can broadly be divided into two categories: countries where the colonists had brought the sport and kept it for themselves, and countries where the colonised fell in love with the sport and made it their own. For the latter category, cricket’s perception is vastly different from the original one championed by the English. In the South Asian subcontinent, for example, cricket is an obsession—the national teams’ wins and losses directly correlate to the national mood. The “gentleman’s game” is hardly a consideration when teams are desperate to win, and when losses mean that a player’s personality

and personal life will be lambasted across social media.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are cut from similar cloths when it comes to how cricket is perceived in our respective societies, and in this year’s World Cup, both teams have struggled to get a win. The desperation was palpable, and the fact that Bangladesh took a legal—albeit rare—advantage understandably rubbed the Sri Lankans the wrong way. But using words like “disgraceful” and “shameful” to describe Shakib Al Hasan’s actions ignores the larger picture of what cricket is to us. Bangladesh needed to win, and here was an opportunity that was perfectly legal. So, the captain took it. It was the batter’s responsibility to be ready to face the ball within the time limit, and he wasn’t. The equipment failure is a non-factor, because the batter never informed the umpires or the opposition captain before walking off looking for a replacement.

The “Spirit of Cricket,” in reality, is the preamble to the Laws of Cricket published by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), cricket’s oldest and most respected institution. I own a copy of the MCC’s Laws of Cricket, and took the time to check the literature. It says that respect is central to the Spirit of Cricket. Players are expected to respect their captains, other players, and the umpires. The game is to be played hard, but fair. A positive atmosphere should be created by the players’ conduct, and players must show self-discipline. Players are also expected to congratulate and thank the opposition no matter the end result.

So, did Angelo Mathews respect the umpires or the Bangladeshi team when he walked off to fix a helmet without facing a ball and without getting a nod of approval from Shakib or the umpires, whereas Bangladesh was behind on over-rate at that point in the game? Did the Sri Lankan team respect the umpire’s decision when Mathews was given out? What about the repeated verbal exchanges between the teams when Bangladesh was batting later on in the evening? And where was the Spirit of Cricket when the Sri Lankan players didn’t even shake hands with the Bangladeshi dressing room at the end of the game?

The truth is that the Spirit of Cricket is a loose framework of principles that is broken by most teams on most days, as told by former professionals in the aftermath of this incident. We are at a point where cricket fans, players, and administrators across the world need to think about whether they will foster the principles of competitiveness and professionalism that will drive the game towards becoming a true global phenomenon, or if they want to continue being haunted by the ghost of an English aristocracy that once envisioned the game as one reserved for gentlemen, to be played on sunny days during the English summer, enjoyed alongside a cup of English breakfast tea which, if we’re all being honest, tastes a bit bland.

Politics of Fire

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**RUBANA HUQ**

“Ki hobey?” What’s going to happen, is the question. While YouTubers, TikTokers, and Facebookers are all filing their predictions, let the truth be known: no one has any idea what’s going to happen to Bangladeshi politics. It’s like being asked about the weather. Forecasts may help with disaster preparedness, but they don’t guarantee a sunny year. No one knows when it’s going to rain. So, when asked if I have the faintest inkling of what’s going to happen, I often respond in zest: “Get out there and stop the rain, if you can.” Unfortunately, the rains washing our lands are stemming from a precipitation pregnant with intolerance, inflexibility, and inconsideration.

At our end, according to official sources, between October 31 and November 1, nine buses, two covered vans, two trucks, one pickup van, two showrooms, and one police box were torched. On November 1, there was four-way fighting going on in the capital’s Mirpur area as a result of minimum wage hike protests. Between October 28 to November 4, at least 7,835 leaders and activists

are talking, bickering, and hollering on television, at the lunch table, in the living rooms, at meetings of forums, and in all kinds of groups of people all over the country—about democracy.

Almost a hundred years ago, the number of democracies increased and the spread of democratic governance began to seem inevitable. However, this reverie was short-lived as infant democracies only lived to wobble and fall. Hungary, Albania, Poland, Lithuania, and Yugoslavia were a few of them. Very soon, other bigger states began to turn to authoritarianism. Fascism toppled these governments, followed by the stock market crash in 1929, ushering in a new wave of the misery that ensued for a while. In 1932, Mussolini predicted, “The liberal state is destined to perish,” and by 1933, Hitler was in power. More epitaphs of democracy had popped up in Greece, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Portugal, Uruguay, and Spain. Japan invaded Shanghai, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. In most nations in the West, democracy

In our own land, there are talk shows mimicking battlegrounds, where guests get their time to speak and are often subjected to rounds of largely uninformed, bellicose discourse. At times, shows soared in popularity just because the guests managed to create enough controversy by coming very close to fistfights, or had exited studio sets. There have been columns reeking of dubious content that have gone unchallenged. There have been decent reports which have been refuted while indecent ones have headlined all over. Yet, even now, no one’s actually practising democracy. Who’s chronicling the strategic interventions of the politicians of ruthlessly sacrificing the regular man as a mere pawn on the board?

Someone is holding a gun; someone is hurling a bomb; someone is wielding a machete; someone is waving a flag; and there’s others burning cars, buses, homes, and bodies. Someone is hiding under cover, some are being picked up, some are being held back; and some are being sent into oblivion. Today, we need to record how many times intolerance has marked our democratic plains; how many times threats have been showered against any opposition; how many times fear has taken over our lives; how many times the economy has taken a nosedive; how many times regular people have returned from the kitchen markets empty-handed; how many times unmarked vehicles have picked up rebels from our neighbourhoods;



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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

of BNP were arrested. During November 5-6, different places reported processions, blockage of roads, and arson incidents. There have also been reports of violence in Gazipur, Narayanganj, Manikganj, and Khulna. On October 28 alone, 1,500 opposition workers were injured along with around 40 policemen and 30 journalists, while at least two people died.

Watching Parvez, the policeman from Chorakatar village die while crying for his life wasn’t easy; student leader Abdur Rashid Sarder of Natore being reportedly pushed from the roof and killed wasn’t acceptable; watching hundreds of people engaging out in the streets and betting their lives on the sanity of the political leaders wasn’t palatable either.

Yet, for many of us, these are just stats, almost proving that civil society is distanced from reality, with its members boxed within talk shows, newspaper columns, and a few petitions. Therefore, most of us

falttered, weakened by monopoly, apathy, and corruption.

By 2005, the world looked more like how it had in the 1930s. Putin, Erdogan, Duterte, Bolsonaro, and Trump marked yet another phase. The US democracy, which in 2006 was the 17th most democratic nation, became a “flawed” one in 2016. Following the pattern of authoritarianism backed by misinformation, terrorism, human rights abuses, political intolerance, toxic social media practices, and assaults on the press, many nations cut back on their levels of tolerance, leaving little to no space for criticism, protest, or dissent.

With intolerant governance structures in place—where one breathed and led wars—the only way to success was gradually considered to be through the annihilation of the other. So, if ever the “other” was attempted to be resurrected, the zombie of freedom also trembled in fear of not knowing any better than continuing the cycle of violence.

how many times families have had to borrow wings from the phoenix in their backyard to build their new homes from ashes.

At a time like this, all our diaries need to be accurate, objective, and real.

For the sake of tomorrow, we need to ensure that our Journal of Democracy does not contain any inaccurate entries so that even Rip Van Winkle, after a hundred years of slumber, has no problems catching up with what Bangladesh is now going through.

While I was finishing this column, a friend of mine candidly commented, “Once upon a time, politicians were public servants; somewhere in the middle they turned politics into a profession; and now, politics is the best business they could have ever had.”

There’s a hard truth in this. Whether we like it or don’t, our politicians have dropped the ball on all fronts, causing us all infinite grief and irreconcilable loss.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Pungent veggie

7 Petty argument

11 Right away

12 Mexican coin

13 Careless mistake

15 Ready for war

16 Sinfulness

18 Clutter

21 Pub missile

22 More active

24 Yale student

25 For each

26 Tell tales

27 Scottish beast

29 Doofus

30 Like dimes

31 Join together

32 Flight unit

34 Between-teeth cleaner

40 Out of the wind

41 Shred

42 Cabinet part

43 Fish hawk

DOWN

1 Ewe’s mate

2 Dined

3 Singer Henley

4 Unbroken

5 Frighten

6 Ship’s wheel

7 Black suit

8 Vigor

9 Braying beast

10 Sock part

14 Monkey’s cousin

16 Parking pro

17 Limerick people

19 Farm towers

20 Grab

21 Comfy room

22 Flower visitor

23 Early auto

25 Ship of 1492

28 Brother’s sibling

29 Sack material

31 Flutes’ cousins

33 Choir voice

34 Pop

35 “Evil Woman” group

36 “The Matrix” hero

37 Hockey’s Bobby

38 Take to court

39 Secret agent

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MONDAY’S ANSWERS

P	A	W	A	N	S	P	A	C	T	S
A	W	A	I	T		I	D	A	T	O
W	E	D	G	E		R	O	M	E	O
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O	L	A	F		W	H	I	N	E	D
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E	G	O		L	E	N	G	T	H	E
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D	U	E	T	O		P	A	P	A	L
S	T	R	A	W		E	L	I	T	E