

BCB's masterclass in mismanagement

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A day after Bangladesh's feeble World Cup campaign ended in an apt whimper, a Supreme Court lawyer on Sunday sent the Bangladesh Cricket Board a legal notice asking its board president, CEO and national captain to step down.

It is a mark of how much the Tigers' performance matters to the general public that such a notice was sent, and to demand stern action after an ignominious show on the global stage seemed to reflect the sentiment of the hour. However, there was one element in the legal notice that did not seem to reflect reality – that the BCB played a 'silent role' in the national team's slide.

A glance at BCB's actions this year in the lead-up to the World Cup strongly suggests that, quite apart from playing a silent or passive role, in most matters concerning the national side it has actively engineered the steep slide in what will be remembered as a masterclass in mismanagement. In some other aspects, it stayed silent when it should have acted.

Consider where the team finished in the Super League – a points table where the top eight teams, based on performance in 24 matches played over the previous two years, gain direct qualification to the World Cup. Bangladesh finished third in that league, with only table toppers New Zealand having more wins (16) than Bangladesh's 15.

What no one would have thought, say, after Bangladesh beat Ireland 2-0 away in May this year, was that Bangladesh's tournament would be all but over before November, that they would lose seven out of nine matches including to the Netherlands, and they would not even be competitive in those losses – basically the worst World Cup performance in the country's history, just months after they were poised to put on their best show.

With good performances and a settled team over the past two years, the BCB's role should have been to ensure that a functioning team continues on a promising path, but what did they in fact do?

Whatever one may feel about Russel Domingo's calibre as head coach, the fact is that he took charge of a team at the end of another disappointing World Cup in 2019 and, along with new Test captain Mominul Haque (a first ever Test win in New Zealand), new ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal (a maiden series win in South Africa) and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan (a home series win against Afghanistan), delivered some historic wins for Bangladesh.

Domingo resigned at the end of last year, but even before that there were signs that he never quite had the confidence of the board despite seeing Bangladesh through some of its best times. That is not surprising – the board's preference for coaches has often not been linked to the latter's performance or track record. In keeping with that tradition, instead of encouraging a successful coach to stay on till the end of his contract post the 2023 World Cup, they brought back an unsuccessful one.

The board appointed Chandika Hathurusingha on January 31 this year, less than six years after the Sri Lankan left Bangladesh unceremoniously, before expiry of his contract and without public explanation, following a disastrous tour of South Africa in late 2017.

When he departed, Hathurusingha left behind a team short of confidence, divided and with the feeling that the coach had undermined the playing leadership, with then Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim hinting strongly at this during the tour. Hathurusingha then took up the head coach's role in Sri Lanka, and was sacked by the country's board in 2019 for, among other reasons, creating disharmony in the team.

In his first stint with the Tigers, Hathurusingha butted heads with all of Bangladesh's top cricketers – Shakib, Mushfiqur, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Tamim, and Mahmudullah Riyad.

Part of BCB's masterclass in mismanagement was bringing such a character, who had already shown them his true colours and a reputation for sowing disharmony, back to helm a settled team.

Less than a month after Hathurusingha's appointment, BCB boss Papon made sure the Sri Lankan had enough disharmony to work with by publicly stating that there was a rift between then ODI captain Tamim and star all-rounder Shakib. That there had long been tensions between them was an open secret, but the two had managed to keep it out of the cricket Bangladesh played. However, Papon saying it was "harmful for the younger generation of players who look up to them" seemed to suggest that something had to change. In a World Cup year, in a team that was successful and settled.

By his own admission, Tamim is emotional. He should not have made an impulsive retirement announcement in the middle of a series and three months before the World Cup. It obviously harmed the team's preparations and stability.

The BCB tried to talk him out of it, but we do not know what went on behind the scenes – only that Papon had very recently blasted Tamim publicly for saying he was not 100 percent fit. Neither do we know if the board examined the role of the head coach, who should have been creating an atmosphere of harmony that would enable the team and its captain to keep going from strength to strength.

The retirement decision was reversed at the behest of the prime minister, and Tamim chose to step down as captain while continuing as player.

Tamim said his recurring back problems played a role, but was not the only factor. Whatever those unknowns, for a board president who prides himself on being a guardian to the national cricketers, it was a failure.

That failure, however, pales in comparison to what followed. A day before the squad was to depart for the World Cup, Tamim, the team's only quality opener, was dropped. In a social media post, Tamim said he could not take the nasty games being played around the national team. He said he was asked to bat lower down the order in the first match against Afghanistan. This was before the squad was selected or the team management had assessed the conditions first hand.

Tamim also said a board high-up had made the communication about batting lower. This was highly irregular as, according to Mashrafe, Bangladesh's most successful captain, that communication should only have come from the captain, coach or a member of team management.

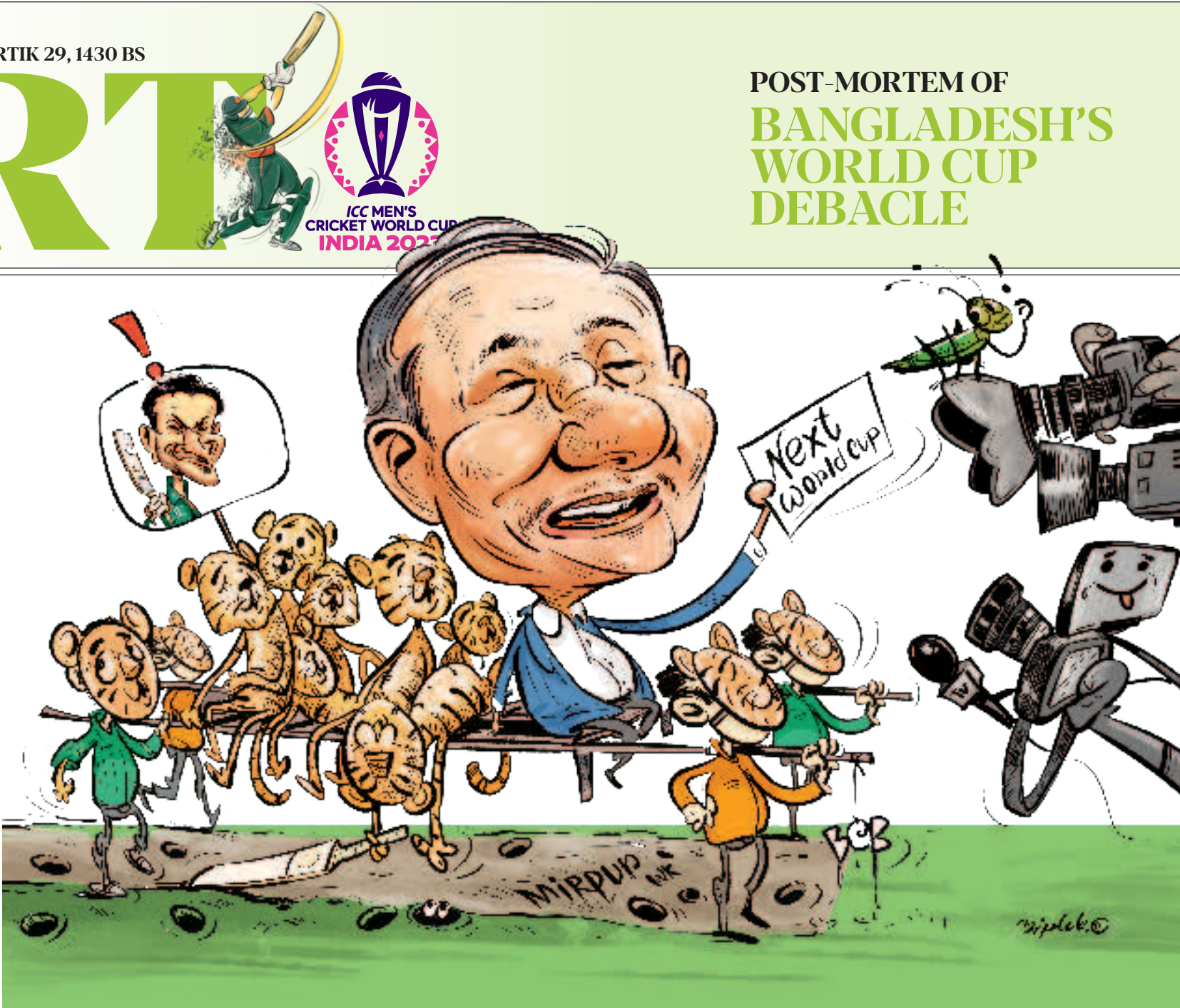
Then came perhaps the most toxic turn in Bangladesh's path to World Cup disgrace. Shakib Al Hasan's interview with a local TV channel, aired hours after the team's departure, featured the national captain viciously attacking Tamim.

Shakib also said he had nothing to gain from being captain.

From a settled and successful team led by the country's best opener to a fractured, divided one under a reluctant captain – this has been the journey on which the BCB has led the country's cricket and its supporters, who invest both emotion and money into the Tigers.

After the last World Cup, BCB sacked then head coach Steve Rhodes. This time too, they will likely take some action, but after two consecutive World Cup failures and a decade of failing to advance the country's cricket, are Papon and Co in a position to make moves?

Or, as the SC lawyer said in the legal notice, should the high-ups resign and a committee be formed to probe their failures? Papon's board has tried one of those options before, and it has not produced any changes.



‘Enough is enough’ Saber calls for entire board to resign

In the wake of Bangladesh's disastrous World Cup campaign, The Daily Star's Al-Amin communicated with former BCB president and Member of Parliament, Saber Hossain Chowdhury. Saber, who oversaw Bangladesh's first qualification for the ICC World Cup in 1999 and the country's subsequent elevation to a Test-playing nation, expressed his frustration with the state of the sport in the country, putting the current cricket board on the dock for its lack of professionalism, accountability and nepotism. Following are the excerpts of the interview:

The Daily Star (DS): Bangladesh made their World Cup exit with only two wins against seven defeats. How disappointing was the result to you?

Saber Hossain Chowdhury (SHC): Acutely disappointing. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and even the players were fuelling expectations prior to the World Cup that we would make it to the semifinals. The shocking reality is that we were the first team to be out of the race for a top-four finish; we lost to one of the two qualifiers (Netherlands). We finished just above the two qualifiers (the other being Sri Lanka) and the margin of defeat in each instance just added insult to injury. If we only consider the teams who did not have to qualify for this 2023 World Cup, we are in fact at the bottom of the final points table.

DS: People are saying that it was the second most disappointing World Cup for Bangladesh since their maiden appearance in the showpiece event in 1999. What is your take on that?

SHC: In our World Cup debut in 1999, as an Associate Member of ICC, we notched up two wins (against Pakistan and Scotland) in five matches. Here, we were with 23 years of Test experience and we have won two matches out of nine. Astonishing!

We are literally going backwards and regressing whereas a country such as Afghanistan, who secured Test Status 17 years after we did and are confronted with manifold challenges, are marching ahead. We have also lost to the Netherlands who are not even a Test-playing nation. Ireland, though they were not able to qualify on this occasion, is another country that is making great progress.

I, thus, see this as our worst World Cup and BCB has saved up the worst for its latest World Cup campaign.

DS: Players and team management can certainly be blamed for the debacle. Do you think the BCB should share equal blame?

SHC: Passing the buck and putting the blame on others has been a consistent hallmark of the BCB



leadership over the past decade. When fingers are pointed and shortcomings exposed, it is always either someone else's fault or it is a conspiracy. Who has appointed team management; who has appointed the selectors; who interferes in team selection?

We all know, and I am not revealing any secrets here, that despite the glorified titles and job descriptions, BCB continues to be an absolute one-man show with no semblance of accountability or collective leadership.

DS: There was a lot of drama over the selection of the team for the World Cup. The country has also painfully witnessed an open rift between two iconic players. Do you think the whole episode played a big part in Bangladesh's failure?

SHC: Preparing and planning for the greatest spectacle in the form of a World Cup is no child's play and should have been taken seriously. What is needed is stability, continuity, integrity and professional competence, not clowns providing comic relief amongst the chaos and drama.

DS: The BCB reappointed Chandika Hathurusingha as head coach of the national team ahead of the World Cup. Was that a wise decision, considering his departure in an unprofessional manner in his first stint?

SHC: Till date, we do not know why he departed, let alone why he was reappointed for a second stint. Was there a full and open discussion underpinning a transparent process in either or both of these instances?

DS: Do you think the current BCB leadership followed the standard procedure in appointing a captain and his deputy?

SHC: These are both very important positions and the choices merit careful consideration and evaluation, including those peculiar to a limited-overs competition and that too in the context of a World Cup. One would hope that the process and procedure has indeed been a comprehensive and inclusive one, but this question

has been issued with a show-cause notice for speaking to the media whereas this individual is evidently above the rules that apply to others. We are all familiar with Individuals disowning or distancing themselves from failing leadership and this is of course nothing new.

DS: After the debacle, some heads may roll. Do you think the changing and chopping will really solve a deep-rooted problem, starting with the poor state of domestic cricket to an obsession only over the senior men's team?

SHC: Heads have rolled in the past and will also, no doubt, roll again as scapegoats will be conveniently identified. I suspect, yet again, it will be the appointed ones, and not those who have decided on and finalised these appointments, that will actually be taking the fall.

Domestic cricket continues to be in a mess, does not have the needed focus/priority, there is hardly any governance and allegations of match-fixing and biased umpiring remain uninvestigated. Our international cricket will only be strong to the extent of the strength of the base provided by our domestic calendar and structure.

DS: People are calling for the incumbent BCB President Nazmul Hassan Papon to take full responsibility for the failure and resign. Are you on the same page?

SHC: Enough is enough. I think all the board members of the BCB should resign as it is their collective failure when looked at through the lens of accountability. They have let the nation down big time and the buck must stop with them.

It is staggering to comprehend and grasp that a game which is the number one sport in the country, is a passion for millions of Bangladeshis across the world, has a rich tradition, is supported robustly by sponsors, has high visibility and media interest and, last but not the least, is sitting on a fund of BDT 1000 crores (thanks to the share of global sponsorships we earn as a Full Member of the ICC), is ironically being run by a board which is perhaps the most inept and unprofessional in Bangladesh's cricketing history.

should be directed at the BCB.

DS: A lot of things happened in India that highlighted a lack of discipline and cohesion in the team. Venting his frustration to the media, team director Khaled Mahmud had said that he was not involved with some issues that his position mandated him to do. It indicates that the board has given free reins to certain individuals which eventually backfired. Do you agree with the notion?

SHC: Interesting that you are quoting someone who has been favoured all along by the current leadership and has been tasked with multiple, conflicting roles in the past. It's even more interesting that Allan Donald

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