



There is money in cricket, and there is fan interest; it doesn't make sense that cricket in Bangladesh could fall so far behind the eight ball.

PHOTO: AFP

Has the Bangladesh cricket team reached their ceiling?



Azmin Azran is a journalist at The Daily Star.

AZMIN AZRAN

The end of a disappointing world cup means fans would rather stop thinking about these last nine matches as soon as possible, and they will. But administrators shouldn't have that luxury. In between the humiliating defeats and the inexplicable performances, if there is any semblance of a silver lining, it could be that this world cup has been an eye opener. One of the best prepared ODI teams in the history of Bangladesh cricket could only muster two wins against the best in the world. Could they have done better? Or is this the limit of their abilities?

It could be argued that a more conducive environment could have been provided for the team, with stability in leadership and harmony among star players. The argument would be sound, but Bangladesh didn't lose any of their games in close encounters. The margins of losses and the nature in which the team wilted indicated a real gulf in quality, or at least a lack of self-belief. Players are human beings; they are individuals who have trained their entire lives to become professional cricketers, to get to the world stage for an opportunity to prove themselves. It would be a disservice to their lifelong struggles to assume that they would allow petty drama and ego contests to get in the way of their shot at glory. Should the realisation be that the rest of the world had raced forward into an era of cricket that is far more modern and aggressive than the brand played by Bangladesh? That would take the wind out of the sails of even the most motivated athlete in the world.

But how could that happen? Cricket gets so much priority in this country. The Bangladesh Cricket Board is by far the richest and the most high-profile sports governance body in the country. There is money in cricket, and there is fan interest; it doesn't make sense that cricket in Bangladesh could fall so far behind the eight ball. Well, it doesn't make

sense right until you start looking at the details, and then it all falls into place.

Much of Bangladesh's success in ODI cricket has come during a period when most other cricketing nations have focused on Tests and T20Is. ICC held two world T20 events in the last three years, and while Bangladesh's performance in those events were lacklustre, they ranked third on the table of the confusingly named ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League (a league where every national team played 24 ODIs between the years of 2020-2022). But this performance has some important asterisks attached to it.

Bangladesh did not play Australia, India, or Pakistan as part of this league. The series Bangladesh won included home contests against Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and West Indies, and away against Zimbabwe, Ireland, and South Africa. Bangladesh lost two series against England and New Zealand, the first at home and the other away. The team also won a series against India at home during this time, an achievement of miraculous proportions owing to the performances of Mehidy Hasan Miraz. The heavy reliance on home

The current model of relying on talented individuals to show themselves and take the game to the next level is bound to falter, like it has now. Talent acquisition in Bangladeshi cricket is poor. Simply consider the fact that in 2019, the team was desperate for a leg spinner. In 2023, we still don't have one.

conditions and the tendency to only play lower ranked sides instead of the best in the world has possibly painted a fictitious picture of the calibre of Bangladesh's ODI team. The away win against South Africa could be pointed to as proof that the team had matured, but it could also be pointed to as an anomaly. South Africa have beaten touring sides from India, England, and Australia in ODIs before and after Bangladesh, and clearly those sides are better than us.

Add to that the fact that most national team matches take place in Mirpur, a ground where the pitch is often low and slow. While Bangladesh have excelled in these conditions, the rest of the world has moved on towards pursuing higher scores, with faster pitches that are conducive to batting. National team cricketers, especially the batters, have spoken up about the need for better pitches. Nazmul Hossain Shanto urged the BCB for more sporting wickets, and Towhid Hridoy said playing more games on tracks like the ones found in Sylhet and Chattogram will help the batters get used to scoring 300 or 350.

The domestic circuit must be looked at too. The BCB needs to sufficiently support domestic cricketers through finances and facilities, so that these cricketers are motivated to take their game to the next level for the national team, and only then will there be a pipeline of cricketers ready to represent the country. The current model of relying on talented individuals to show themselves and take the game to the next level is bound to falter, like it has now. Talent acquisition in Bangladeshi cricket is poor. Simply consider the fact that in 2019, the team was desperate for a leg spinner. In 2023, we still don't have one.

If things don't change, if home matches against good teams are played on the drab pitches of Mirpur, if domestic cricket continues to be neglected in terms of endorsement and planning, if the BCB cannot negotiate more matches away at India, England, and Australia, and if a leg spinner cannot be produced for the national team, it is fair to say that Bangladesh cricket has reached a ceiling. It's up to the administrators now to take a long hard look at things, and raise that ceiling. Otherwise, once the likes of Shakib and Tamim leave, we are in for dark, dark days.

Rafi Reza
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RTI unearths discrimination against female students

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SHAMSUL BARI and RUHI NAZ

With so much negative news flooding the media in recent times, a piece of good news has provided some warmth. Bangladesh's High Court has asked the authorities of a public university to allow pregnant and married female students to remain in the dormitories for the time being. The discriminatory nature of such a restriction has been highlighted and the university has been asked why its recent notice requiring such students to leave the residential hall should not be cancelled or withdrawn.

While the news was widely welcomed, very few realise that this move has come after a series of information requests under the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009 of Bangladesh were submitted by staff members of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) to 38 public universities between December 2022 and July 2023. They were reacting to news reports published in national dailies alleging that pregnant students were not being allowed to stay in the residential halls of Dhaka University.

The reports referred to a policy relating to the allocation of seats in five residential halls of Dhaka University which read as follows: "If any female student is married, she must inform the authorities immediately, otherwise her seat will be cancelled due to violation of rules. Only in special cases married students will be given the opportunity to study from the hall in the current session. If she is a pregnant student, she cannot stay at the hall anymore."

The RTI requests sought to discover what actually happens when this policy is implemented

It has been a constant complaint of this column that not many RTI applications originate from socially conscious and responsible citizens of the country, who fear the negative, sometimes threatening, attitude of public officials towards applicants seeking "bothersome" information. We posit that one way to overcome such fear would be for citizen groups, rather than individuals alone, to use the law in matters of public interest.

and what the specific university guidelines are for male and female students. Based on a response from Jagannath University, BLAST filed a public interest litigation (PIL) suit on October 30, 2023 in the High Court, challenging the gender-discriminatory nature of the notice—issued on September 25 by the university, under an

internal Rule (from the 2021 Rules)—requiring pregnant and married female students to leave a residential hall.

BLAST, through its RTI requests, queried whether there were specific policies for male and female students living in residential halls; whether the policies were the same for both male and female students; whether there were specific policies for married and pregnant female students; and whether there were specific policies for married male students.

The responses received indicated that most of the authorities did not have separate policies for male and female students and no specific policies for married and pregnant female students. A few indicated strict

play in advancing the hallowed objectives of the RTI Act. While awaiting a denouement of the case, we would like to highlight two important elements emanating from the case so far: 1) the efficacy of the RTI mechanism's use by institutions like BLAST, rather than by individuals, to sidestep the negative reactions of many public officials towards individual applicants, including harassment and threats of retribution, and 2) the readiness of our Courts to accept information derived through the RTI mechanism as admissible evidence.

On the first point, it has been a constant complaint of this column that not many RTI applications originate from socially conscious and responsible citizens of the country, who fear the negative,



VISUAL: JOHANNA KARMAKAR JUI

time limits for female students returning to the halls each night; five universities barred married and pregnant female students from residing in the halls at all; and six restricted the categories of visitors seeking to meet a female student to include only her parents, guardians, siblings, and husband.

In response to BLAST's PIL, Justices Naima Haider and Kazi Zinat Hoque of a Division Bench of the High Court, passed a rule nisi on Jagannath University and its officials on October 31, asking them why they should not be directed to cancel or withdraw the notice and the 2021 Rule. The Court's Rule was made returnable by February 7, 2024. It included an interim order staying the operation of the notice till that date.

The Court further directed the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission (UGC) to submit a report within February 7, 2024 on rules and regulations based on sex, marital status, or health in Bangladeshi universities, and the measures proposed to ensure gender inclusive policies for all students.

This development augurs well for the RTI regime in the country and testifies to the readiness of our judiciary to safeguard basic rights of our citizens. It is also indicative of the critical role our courts can

sometimes threatening, attitude of public officials towards applicants seeking "bothersome" information. We posit that one way to overcome such fear would be for citizen groups, rather than individuals alone, to use the law in matters of public interest. The requests to the universities received positive responses largely because they came from a reputed NGO and not from individuals. There is clearly a lesson to learn here.

On the second point, it is heartening that our High Court took cognisance of evidence obtained through the RTI Act in issuing its Rule, as has happened in similar situations in the past. This is encouraging, as courts in neighbouring India are split on whether RTI responses are acceptable as evidence, and if so, how they should be presented and whether they should be considered as secondary or substantive evidence. Some courts have ruled that RTI responses may be read directly in court, others have ruled that they are inadmissible. There is thus a need to establish uniform norms of admission in this regard. Hopefully, our courts will take the lead, and the example established by BLAST in making use of RTI to address public interest issues will be emulated by other NGOs and civil society organisations of the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your letters to letters@thedailystar.net

Make Pragati Sarani safer for pedestrians

Footpaths and the sides of the road along Pragati Sarani, from Kuril Biswa Road through Shahajahanpur to Badda, are extremely dangerous. The footpaths are mostly taken over by temporary shops and hawkers, which is illegal. However, the most dangerous part is the deep drains

that run beside the roads, which are covered by concrete slabs with 4-5 inches of gaps. These slabs are already dangerous, but in many places, they are broken, making them even more dangerous. Pedestrians can easily get their feet stuck in the gaps, severely injuring themselves. This road is

one of the busiest in the city, and countless people rely on it daily. I urge the authorities to look into this matter and take immediate action to make the road safer for everyone.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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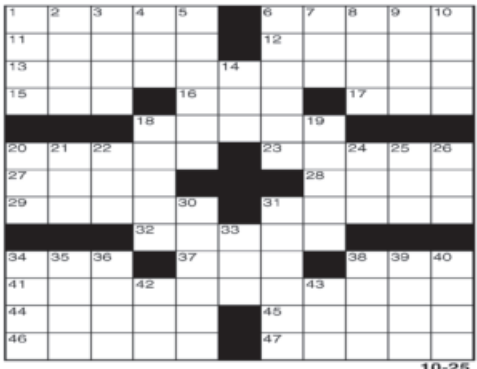
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

