

T20 WC 'preparation ongoing' sans solving pending issues

BISHWAJIT ROY

It may not appear so, but Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is preparing for this year's ICC World Cup, and that too without understanding the real reasons behind the men's senior team's latest World Cup debacle.

The Tigers' performance in the 50-over World Cup in India was nothing but shambolic, and their elimination from the group stage with seven defeats against only two wins had placed the Nazmul Hassan Papon-led board on the receiving end of a barrage of criticism.

Bangladesh had their worst-ever show in a mega event, no doubt, given the expectations carried by the squad. It is an opinion that is unanimously shared by the board members, media, and the fans.

Naturally, in the aftermath of such a calamity, a major overhaul was expected. Reality, however, had remained polar opposite as the board conveniently adopted to sweep the dirt under the rug.

In response to the outcry, BCB formed a three-person special committee -- consisting of directors Enayet Hossain Siraj (convenor), Mahbubul Anam (member), and Akram Khan (member) -- to investigate what went wrong last November.

However, with valid concerns, many had hoped that an independent body outside the board would be in place to uncover the truth.

Almost two months had passed since the probe began but Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan is still yet to formally appear to the fact-finding committee.

However absurd it may seem, the committee's side of work is "almost" over, according to its convenor.

"The only thing left is a talk with Shakib before placing the finalised report to the board," informed Siraj, adding that Shakib's busy schedule and health issues has halted proceedings.

The build-up to the ODI World Cup was marred by controversies surrounding the exclusion of Tamim Iqbal and his public spat with Shakib.

Siraj further informed that they are also chasing for a "not so important" interview of Tamim and "will formally talk with him within the next two-three days."

"Tamim didn't play the World Cup, so his interview is not so important, but we want to talk with him to clear a few things that came as a reference in our findings."

Another member of the committee and also a former Bangladesh captain, Akram Khan, echoed the same puzzling sentiments, saying the probe body's job is "almost done" despite not knowing Tamim and Shakib's side of the story.

At the end of day, does their report bear any importance for the board, one that is apparently immune to criticism?

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed: "We have identified the reasons behind the debacle. The [probe committee] members shared their views with BCB high-ups."

If Shakib's unavailability delays the committee's final report, it further impedes the long-awaited board meeting which could provide the resolution of many issues, involving who will lead the team in the upcoming T20 World Cup -- to be held at the West Indies and the United States in June this year -- and whether the Minhajul Abedin Nannu-led selection panel will have a shot at redemption after their contract expired last month.

Nizamuddin, however, said that their World Cup "homework and planning has been going on", and a board meeting would eventually see the light of day in the "second week of February".

As things stand, the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) hogs the sole focus of the board. If history repeats, as it often does and more so when BCB applies a quick-fix policy under pressure, the next World Cup will only come to the forefront when it's fast-approaching, with little time left to steady the ship.



Durdanto Dhaka players train at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium with the picturesque mountain range at the backdrop yesterday as the 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League moves to the northeastern city of the country. Dhaka, however, will not be in action on the opening day of the Sylhet phase with Khulna Tigers taking on Rangpur Riders in the day game before Sylhet Strikers facing Comilla Victorians in the evening match. [Inset] Meanwhile, with it being a holiday, fans could come in numbers to enjoy today's matches as people queued up to get tickets yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Malik's part in 10th BPL over

SPORTS REPORTER

Fortune Barishal's Shoaib Malik will play no further part in the 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), confirmed the Pakistani cricketer's franchise on Thursday.

Malik, who recently grabbed headlines after the news of his separation from his former wife Sania Mirza and his marriage to Pakistani actress Sana Javed, left for Dubai for personal reasons following Barishal's final game of the initial Dhaka phase against Comilla Victorians on Tuesday.

The Pakistani all-rounder was supposed to rejoin his Barishal side yesterday, but later informed the franchise that he would be able to return on February 4. With Malik possessing a No Objection Certificate (NOC) till only February 10, the Barishal franchise decided not to onboard the cricketer any further.

The 41-year-old cricketer played all three matches for Barishal in the first Dhaka phase but could not make an impact, scoring a total of 29 runs.

Barishal will be replacing Malik with his compatriot Ahmed Shehzad.

'A coach has to get the stick out at times'

Dav Whatmore was more like an angry young man during his stint as the Bangladesh coach from 2003 to 2007. This time, he is in charge of Fortune Barishal as technical director. During an interview with Abdullah Al Mehdi of The Daily Star, the Australian shared his views on coaching, the national team's success curve and importance of a strong selection panel.



The Daily Star (DS): Did you feel like staying longer during your stint with Bangladesh?

Dav Whatmore (DW): Well, I was naive. I was in two minds and had a real opportunity to be involved with the Indian national cricket team. You know, I was in for that. Well, that's a long time ago and it didn't work out. But, you know, subsequent positions were good for me too. Whilst it would have been nice to stay a bit longer, I also shaped my career pretty well.

DS: You were part of a World Cup-winning Sri Lanka (1996) team. What differences did you find between working in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh?

DW: I am very mindful that the players should get the bulk of the credit and they [Bangladesh cricketers] worked pretty hard from time to time in 2003 through to 2007 and got their reward. They were supported well. The cricket board also was very supportive, I had a good selection committee, had good support staff, the players and the cricket board.

DS: Back in your day as Bangladesh coach, how was the selection panel? Did they work with absolute freedom?



DW: We had Faruque [Ahmed], Athar [Ali] and [Golam Nowsher] Prince [in the selection panel]. They had good cricket knowledge. They had played the game and supported me as well. It wasn't hundred percent every time, particularly towards the end of my stint. They had certain views and I had also my views. But by and large, I was lucky to have that group of people.

Selection committees in any team, in any country, is very, very important. I was lucky enough to have a really good selection committee [with Sri Lanka] before

the World Cup in '96. But I've also had experience of difficulties with selection.

DS: Do you feel that Bangladesh should have set a higher standard after the 2007 World Cup?

DW: It's hard to say. Other teams also improved. The conditions that they have played in also make a difference. So, yeah, I would think there's a lot of Bangladeshi supporters who probably hope the graph will go up, but it's not easy.

DS: Are you a little calmer as a person now compared to how it was back then?

DW: Oh, yeah. I am, but you know, I think a coach needs to be a number of people, a number of different types. It's very much like being a caring parent; you teach players, but there are times when the coach has to get the stick out. And the players have to allow the coach to do that, otherwise the coach is not doing his job. There is a time to give bamboo and at that time, it's the correct thing to do. Because if it's not, and it's done too often, then it loses its effect. Players will say, 'here we go again'. But really, if you are careful when you do it, it has a big effect. But you have to do that at the right time.

SHORT CORNER

Cummins named ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year

Australia skipper Pat Cummins was announced as the winner of the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2023. The inspirational captain had a stellar run with the bat and ball, and garnered remarkable team accolades, including a victory in the ICC World Test Championship Final, retention of the Ashes, and a record sixth triumph in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.

Saikat red-faced after 'odd decision'

Bangladeshi umpire Sharfuddoula Saikat had a nerve start to his first outing as a neutral on-field umpire on Thursday, handing out an 'odd decision' on the opening day of the second Test between Australia and the West Indies in Adelaide. Saikat, standing at the bowler's end in the second over of the Test bowled by pacer Josh Hazlewood, declared Kraigg Brathwaite out lbw but the decision was rightfully overturned later as replay showed a clear inside-edge.

Sura Krishna shines in Bangkok

Renowned Bangladeshi boxer Sura Krishna Chakma on Thursday captivated the audience in Bangkok on his way to winning a battle against Thai boxer Somram Sopakul in the lightweight category of the event titled: "Way of the Champions: Roar of Dragons". Although the match was scheduled to be a six-round bout, Sura Krishna, who is acclaimed for his lightning-fast hands, knocked Somram out just within a minute and 50 seconds in the second round with strong punches and striking jabs.

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Aryna Sabalenka took a big step towards retaining her Australian Open crown by beating American fourth seed Coco Gauff 7-6(2), 6-4, in a thriller on Thursday to reach the final where she will meet Zheng Qinwen or qualifier Dayana Yastremska. The Belarusian tamed the fourth seed in one hour and 42 minutes on Rod Laver Arena, avenging her defeat to the American teenager in last year's US Open final. PHOTO: AFP

Mauritania's rise and lessons for Bangladesh

SABBIR HOSSAIN

In 2012, Bangladesh were ranked 168th in the FIFA rankings, while Mauritania, a little-known African nation, were languishing at 206.

Fast forward to 2024, Mauritania have rose to 105 in the rankings and have made history by reaching the last-16 of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) for the first time.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have regressed to 183, is struggling in regional competitions and have never even qualified for their continental competition, the AFC Asian Cup.

Mauritania's meteoric rise from the pits of international football in just 12 years is astounding and a testament to how proper planning can lead to rapid change, something sorely missing in this part of the world.

Gaining independence in 1960, Mauritania, like many African nations, was a country embroiled in territorial dispute, leaving scarce resources for football, which manifested in them going winless from 1995 to 2003 and withdrawing from the World Cup and AFCON qualifiers multiple times.

The turnaround began in 2011, when Ahmed Yahya became chief of Mauritanian Football Federation (FFRIM).



The new president quickly set about transforming the domestic league, securing investment from Mauritel, the country's leading telecommunications provider. This cash injection allowed clubs to offer players regular salaries.

Yahya also expanded the league and recruited talented Mauritanian footballers playing abroad, something the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has never done.

Although the current Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan and national team defender Tariq Kazi are two Bangladeshi-born players who came from Denmark and Finland respectively, they came to the country to play football of their own accord and had to go through many hoops before getting opportunities.

To improve the country's football

infrastructure, FFRIM jumped at the chance when FIFA launched a programme in 2016 to use its earnings from the World Cup to fund development projects, securing a USD 11.1 million funding.

FFRIM used it to renovate their headquarters and stadiums, build a new medical centre, install three synthetic pitches and set up an Under-15 youth academy in Nouadhibou.

The investments started paying dividends, as they qualified for their maiden AFCON in 2019 and repeated the feat in 2021, although they failed to register a victory.

By 2024, several of the graduates from the U15 academy were part of the Mauritania team and helped them qualify for the AFCON for the third time in a row.

They were staring at another elimination after losing to Burkina Faso and Angola, but a stunning win over 2019 winners Algeria on Tuesday earned them a place in the final eight.

FFRIM revolutionised their football scene by utilising FIFA's funds while BFF, which annually receives USD 1 million from the world football's governing body, has been accused by FIFA for mishandling the funds.

FIFA banned BFF's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag in April last year for falsifying documents to justify payments made by the BFF with FIFA funds, an incident that shows the difference between the football administration of the two countries.

Mauritania's improbable journey at the AFCON continues next Monday, when they face Cape Verde, and many are wondering if the underdog team can pull off another upset.

While Mauritania are enjoying a renaissance under Yahya, Bangladesh are facing a different story.

Kazi Salahuddin, the much-criticised president of BFF, had announced the goal of qualifying for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. But while it promises fell through and Bangladesh remain in the backwaters of international football, Yahya and his federation has transformed Mauritania's football.