

# How to break the curse of losing heartbreaking matches



**Madiha Athar Khan**  
is a columnist for The Daily Star and a technical writer at Optimizely. She also leads the Art for Soul movement. She can be reached at madihak1923@gmail.com.

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

Bangladesh is a seasoned customer of heartbreaking finishes. As a Bangladeshi fan, all that could have gone in our favour naturally becomes glaringly obvious and sharpens the pain of losses in tight matches, such as the one against South Africa. Bangladesh lost the match by four runs—runs that were denied to the team due to a faulty decision by the on-field umpire. As the umpire raised his finger to Mahmudullah's dismay, the ball raced behind him to the boundary. He immediately reviewed the decision and successfully overturned it, but because of a rule of the game, the ball was deemed a dead ball and those four runs ultimately became the margin by which Bangladesh lost the game. That fact is salt to the wound for Bangladeshis as much as it is a consolation prize. Fans can look to moments like this to convince themselves that we nearly did it and lost it for something that was out of our control.

Sidharth Monga's insightful match analysis of the game, "The Bangladesh SA thriller that you think you saw, but TV didn't fully show" on ESPNcricinfo sheds more light on the uncontrollable factors that did not go in Bangladesh's favour. He talked about the three full tosses that Maharaj bowled in the last over—deliveries that arguably should have helped Bangladesh score the required 10 runs. With Mahmudullah on strike and six to defend from two balls, Maharaj attempted to bowl a yorker. It was *wind* of all things that made the difference. It picked up just then behind Maharaj and turned the ball into a full toss instead of the attempted yorker. This became the batter's advantage and Mahmudullah was perfectly placed to

finish the match with one winning shot. But as Monga says, "What made Maharaj miss his execution also helped him." The same wind resisted the trajectory of Mahmudullah's shot, holding it just long enough in the air to not clear the boundary. The knife in the wound twists.

The only solution for Bangladesh to escape what feels like the curse of losing heartbreaking and close matches is to be so good that these factors no longer make a difference. I cannot say with certainty, but I am sure that other teams like ours who are often nearly there but not quite enough find a plethora of examples where if only things were slightly different, they would emerge victorious. The goal has to be to become a team that displays indomitable spirit and is so capable that they are largely always in control of the game. I doubt that achieving this high standard of cricket exempts a team from facing the short end of the stick in times of uncertainty. It's just that the team's performance would then be so strong that small factors no longer have much sway in defining the outcome of the game.

When it comes to factors within the team's control, the batters' weakness against the short ball stands out. Both Shanto and Shakib got out to similar deliveries in the same fashion where they did not seem to have any idea of how to execute a shot against a short ball. The two players' years of experience vary greatly, and yet they seemed to have the same approach. This can be an example of the fact that when problems emerge in the team—which is only fair and expected—it is allowed to persist instead of



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being addressed with a strategy in place to overcome the weakness.

The Bangladeshi bowlers maintained excellent discipline throughout the first innings. They made the most of the early breakthroughs and did not falter in line and length even when the partnership grew after the fourth wicket. They pulled it back nicely towards the end of the innings with Mustafiz bowling a stunning last over that

gave away only four runs. The bowlers seem to be in much more harmony with each other than the batters of the team. The bowlers' performance is that of a cohesive unit where if one has a bad over, they do not let the momentum get away from them. The captaincy was also commendable in terms of backing players who bowl expensive overs such as Rishad, who came back after bowling three overs for 28 runs to get the

wicket of David Miller.

Bangladesh is experienced in playing and winning low-scoring T20 matches, but sadly the support of the batters is sorely missed. Surely, there cannot be an easier target to chase in a T20 match than 114. As always, Mahmudullah Riyad continues to be the most dependable asset of the team and has perhaps been its true leader without ever donning any feathers.

## A serious book for serious times

A review of *My Golden Bengal: Views and Voices from Civil Society* by René Holenstein



**Dr Geof Wood**  
is a development anthropologist and author of several books and numerous journal articles, with a regional focus on South Asia. He is also emeritus professor of international development at the University of Bath, UK.

GEOF WOOD

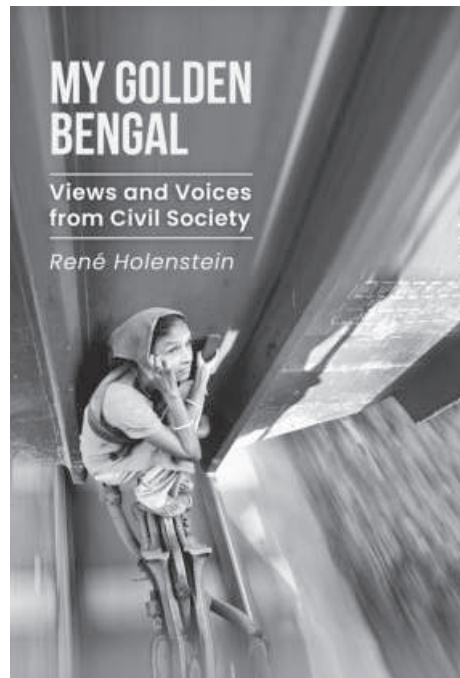
A remarkable gathering of informants have been interviewed in recent years by René Holenstein, a recent ambassador for Switzerland, who returned to Bangladesh in May 2024 to launch this book in the company of most of them. It is a testimony to his period in office here that he explored the country with affection and detail, and listened well to people in the villages as well as leading figures representing concerned academics and lawyers, and activists from many parts of the civil society. As a collection of their testimonies, *My Golden Bengal: Views and Voices from Civil Society* (published by UPL) combines recollections from the liberation struggle which outline the hopes for a distinctive national mission reflecting Bangalee socio-cultural traditions in contrast to those of the dominant, oppressing partner in the flawed postcolonial experiment that was Pakistan. It is never a bad idea to be reminded of the trauma of that struggle, especially in its final episode of crackdown. It took the lives of Bangladeshis to atone for the catastrophic mistake of a rushed exit via Partition.

With this backdrop, ambivalence is soon displayed in this volume. A sense of disappointment that the hopes and dreams of a generation quickly descended into contestation as desperate people and groups fought for their family livelihoods by whatever means possible in the knowledge that the young state was unable to come to their rescue. Perhaps the legacy of chaos left by departing forces from Pakistan and then India could have been highlighted more as the context within which inexperienced leaders wrestled for control and stability. While struggles against a common enemy can unite, things can also rapidly fall apart. And it is often observed that campaigning and voice is not always the best qualification for governing.

The author has to manage this balance between recording the views of his interlocutors and providing his own interspersed analysis that respects those accounts rather than challenging or re-interpreting them. This is what makes the book unique in a sense, because it is not a single author's account in effect. The "data" is presented in its raw form and then has to be woven into a narrative. It is a navigation between a range of views and voices, to use the book's subtitle.

These views progress to the present, reflecting on the challenges now evident in society. Of course, there is a consensus that the violent coup in August 1975 was a betrayal

of all that had been fought for, no matter that it occurred within a sense of letdown. And a further consensus of no sympathy for the period of military rule which followed up to the end of 1990, 15 years later. By this route, most of the interlocutors reach the similar point of a country faced with a prospect of unfinished dreams under the conditions of a tarnished democracy. A familiar set of criticisms emerge of hopes dashed. These amount to the imperative for a continuous need for struggle to realise ambitions, originally promised. The common theme emerges as vigilance across all sectors of Bangladeshi life, whether it is the persistence of child marriage, widespread rent-seeking and corruption enabling the megarich,



the absence of openly competitive politics and voting, the pervasiveness of violence both as a means of that competition and as perpetrated upon women, freedom of speech, shrinking of space for civil society to exercise its accountability role, or free riders escaping civic duty to pay taxes—and the list goes on, as frequently covered by this newspaper.

But the need for vigilance is not the only theme. The question of glass half full or half empty emerges. Achievements are observed. Not least from outside the state, from among the NGOs and from among business. One of

the interlocutors offers the sobering thought that it could have been much worse. This comment sets up the development/democracy discussion towards the end of the book, akin perhaps to the paradox debate. This is a sharp reminder that many societies globally have historically developed with deeply flawed governance systems—not least the UK during the 19th century. And of course, some still do, as in China with its autocratic development

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model. With his development background, it would have been interesting if the author could have coaxed a little more in this regard from his impressive list of interlocutors. It would have certainly connected Bangladesh to the literature on the developmental state. And perhaps a sharper conclusion could then have been offered referring to another literature about lost opportunities when governance in both senses of accountability and competence falls short of the needs of development, and the correlation between rising inequalities and dangers to the body politic, which renders "leave no one behind" as a hollow joke.

These missing parts leave one with a sense of widespread collusion in the "good enough governance" position, which delivers some development through cascading paths of patronage, rather than as a matter of citizen rights and entitlements, just keeping the society on the right side of fragile stability. But such collusion does not come from most interlocutors, but rather from a wider set of global observers. The participants in this book can be distinguished by the feeling that their collective job has not yet been done. And the author has allowed this sentiment to be expressed. But perhaps uncomfortably, this leaves us with the hanging question—should this responsibility be passed down the generations to youth, or should the seniors remain on the barricades having both less to lose and less to gain personally? A final altruistic gift, albeit risky, to the future of that youth.

This book should be read widely, and it would certainly enhance its value to society if it appeared in Bangla, not just German followed by English. A serious book for serious times, but also intensely readable.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

- 1 Rugged rock
- 5 Captain of fiction
- 9 Espresso layer
- 10 Isaac's mother
- 12 Jacket part
- 13 Intent look
- 14 Greed
- 16 Butter unit
- 17 Month in Marseilles
- 18 Wooden grid
- 20 "Silkwood" star
- 22 Stately trees
- 23 French landscape painter
- 25 Choir voice
- 28 Words on a November sticker

### DOWN

- 1 Neckwear
- 2 Fix
- 3 From the U.S.
- 4 Telescope pioneer
- 5 Useful skill
- 6 Bowler, e.g.

- 7 Mideast area
- 8 Malia's dad
- 9 Smackers
- 11 Toast start
- 15 Whim
- 19 Visitor to Oz
- 21 Bus. sch. course
- 24 Like type that doesn't fit
- 25 Capital of Ghana
- 26 Behind
- 27 Quiz show fodder
- 29 Asian island
- 30 Too much
- 31 Plow pioneer
- 33 Resort spots
- 37 Designer Wang
- 39 Pharaoh's symbol



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