



BANGLADESH'S JOURNEY TO TEST STATUS

- Bangladesh, yet to gain ODI status, first applied for Test status in the ICC in 1996.
- ICC Development Committee proposed Bangladesh for an ODI status in May 1997.
- In June 1997, Bangladesh's Test application was first discussed in the ICC Annual Conference. The ICC formed a four-member committee, headed by Nasimul Ghani, to assess Bangladesh's eligibility.
- The committee visited Bangladesh in 1998 and after its inspection laid out 14 points which the BCB had to address before being considered for a Test status. The points included: arranging three-day and four-day matches, improving pitches etc.
- In 1999, the first vote on Bangladesh's Test status took place in the ICC. Bangladesh needed seven votes out of nine full members. Five

countries voted in Bangladesh's favour – India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, West Indies and Zimbabwe – while England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa voted against.

● Another ICC committee comprising Nasimul Ghani, Graham Dowling and Andy Pycroft visited Bangladesh in March 2000. The committee gave a glowing report.

● BCB president Saber Hossain Chowdhury and general secretary Syed Ashraf Haque visited the countries that voted against them in a bid to change their decision.

● On June 25, 2000, the first voting took place in the executive board, in which all but England voted in favour of Bangladesh. The following day, on June 26, all nine members voted in favour in the general committee meeting and welcomed Bangladesh as the 10th full member of the ICC.

TEST NATION AT 25

Greenidge's caution still echoes

ASHEAQ-UL-ALAM

"There is no way that Bangladesh cricket, with the present system, can operate at the Test match level in less than 10 years. I give you that and I stand the challenge on that. To push forward will be suicidal as far as our cricket is concerned."

West Indies legend and Bangladesh's former director of coaching, Gordon Greenidge, had said this in an interview published in The Daily Star on July 25, 1998.

Fresh off the ICC Trophy triumph in the previous year, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was then pushing for Test status, a move Greenidge was clearly against.

The BCB didn't heed to Greenidge's warning as 23 months after that interview, on June 26, 2000, Bangladesh became the 10th Test-playing nation in the world and the West Indian was back in Barbados, trying to implement the school cricket structure he had originally envisioned for Bangladesh.

A quarter of a century has passed since then, the euphoria of joining the big boys of cricket has subsided long ago, and has been replaced by memories of being the whipping boys in Tests for years.

Prior to all the ignominious defeats, attaining Test status was celebrated like a national achievement in Bangladesh. For

a country starved for success and any positive global recognition, being granted as a full member of the ICC was a matter of national pride.

The sequence of milestones in Bangladesh cricket – winning the ICC Trophy in 1997, attaining ODI status the same year and then beating Scotland and Pakistan in the ICC ODI World Cup in 1999

"In both countries, there is a third-world situation and, despite large populations, the number of high-quality cricketers coming through is relatively small. Bangladesh's population is besotted with the game. It makes my job easier because there's a cricket culture, and harder because expectations are incredibly high."

— Then Bangladesh director of cricket Eddie Barlow told The Electronic Telegraph after the country earned Test status, noting cricketing similarities between Bangladesh and his native South Africa.



— makes achieving Test status in 2000 as the next natural step, but that was hardly the case.

Winning an ICC Trophy does not necessarily catapult teams to Test status. The UAE (1994), Canada (2001) and Scotland (2005), won it once each but are still stuck in the backwaters.

Making a splash in World Cup also doesn't

perfectly: the BCB struck the iron while it was hot and had a few allies by their side to earn the full membership.

Getting to play Tests is just one of the many perks that comes with becoming a full member. The financial boost, from the ICC and local sponsors, that followed transformed BCB, which used to beg, borrow and steal, figuratively, to function, into the richest sporting body in the country.

But while cricket in Bangladesh has grown exponentially in scale, the Tigers are still miles behind the top sides in Tests as even 25 years after becoming a full member, Bangladesh has failed to develop a culture of first-class cricket.

As Bangladesh's maiden first-class competition, the National Cricket League (NCL), had begun in the 1999 2000 season, cricketers were only getting a taste of playing in three-day, four-day games before they were flung in the five-day format, pitted against countries that had been playing the format for decades.

This is exactly why Greenidge wanted at least a decade to prepare the cricketers for the struggles of Test cricket. But he never got that opportunity.

From BCB's point of view, however, had Bangladesh waited for its players to get ready, the window of opportunity to gain full membership could have passed them by, and that was a chance they could not take.

The perks that have come with the full membership have indeed turned cricket into Bangladesh's biggest sport, but failure to create a first-class culture has turned Bangladesh into the perpetual adolescent in the world of cricket, a cricket nation that refuses to grow up.



warrant a Test status as Kenya reached the semifinal in 2003 edition but have now almost faded away.

Even having a passionate fan base is not enough, case in point, Nepal, who, despite having legions of fans, are still some distance away from attaining Test status.

In Bangladesh's case, the stars had aligned

‘We should’ve been ranked fifth or sixth by now’

On November 10, 2000, **Shahriar Hossain Biddut**, regarded as one of the finest openers of the country, etched his name in the history books when he faced the first ball for Bangladesh in their inaugural Test, played against India in Dhaka. On the occasion of Bangladesh's 25 years in Test cricket, Biddut spoke to *The Daily Star's* **Samsul Arefin Khan**. Following are the excerpts of the interview:

The Daily Star [DS]: How do you recall the moment Bangladesh gained Test status?

Shahriar Hossain Biddut [SHB]: It's every cricketer's dream to get a Test cap – whether you play one or 100 Tests, you're a Test player. I remember playing a three-day match against MCC [Marylebone Cricket Club] in early 2000 at the then Dhaka Stadium where I scored 133 and 121 not out. Soon after, we got Test status. India were our first opponents, and players like Tendulkar [Sachin] and [Sourav] Ganguly were like heroes to us. We were in a camp at BKSP, and I scored a hundred in the practice match. The next day, newspapers said my place was confirmed.

When I got the cap, it felt like I had achieved everything. I'm proud I faced Bangladesh's first ball in Test cricket.

DS: When did the dream of playing Tests feel real?

SHB: We had ODI status and played in the 1999 World Cup, but didn't expect Test status so soon. Ashraf [Syed Ashraf Haque] bhai and Saber [Saber Hossain Chowdhury] bhai played key roles at the board. Our performance against the MCC side, which included some England players, boosted our case. That's when we

truly believed it was possible.

DS: Some say we got Test status too early.

SHB: I think we got it at the right time. We scored 400 in our debut Test, Ashraf [Mohammad] became the youngest centurion, and we almost beat Pakistan in Multan. Then we beat Zimbabwe for our first win. Players like Ashraf, Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza], Mushfiq [Mushfiqur Rahim], Shakib [Al Hasan], and Tamim [Iqbal] emerged quickly. We were capable, but didn't utilise the opportunity fully.



DS: Currently ranked ninth, are you satisfied with progress?

SHB: No. After 25 years, we should've been ranked five or six. We've had individual brilliance but lacked team consistency. Even now, we don't have a settled opening pair – not in Tests, not in ODIs. That's a failure.

DS: Your suggestions for improvement?

SHB: Team selection lacks consistency... Domestic cricket quality has dropped. The BPL excites people but doesn't build long-term cricket. We need more focus on longer-format cricket from U-15, U-16 levels like India... We're still recycling the same players instead of discovering new talent.

‘ARE YOU MAD?’ – Bangladesh's Test dream started with disbelief and determination

Syed Ashraf Haque is known as one of the key figures in Bangladesh's journey to attaining Test status. On the silver jubilee of realising the Test dream, the former Bangladesh Cricket Board and Asian Cricket Council official talked to *The Daily Star's* **Samsul Arefin Khan** about how they achieved the Test status. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): How did the process of gaining Test status begin?

Syed Ashraf Haque (SAH): Frankly speaking, when we applied for the Test status, we didn't feel that we would get it. In 1996, NSC appointed Saber Hossain Chowdhury as the cricket board's president. One day Saber said to me, "Ashraf bhai, let's apply for Test status." I replied to him laughingly, "Are you mad? We can't even play first-class cricket and you are talking about Test." He insisted I apply for it, saying that by doing so, we would at least be in the queue. Then I started the paperwork and in 1996, we applied to the ICC.

The ICC then formed a four-member committee regarding Bangladesh's Test status with one representative each from Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and Zimbabwe. The committee visited Bangladesh in 1998 and gave us a checklist to fulfil. We started our work and they gave us feedback after going through it. In the meantime, in 1996-97, Jaggu da (Jagmohan Dalmiya) became the



ICC president. It was a very big help for us. In 1996, we won the ACC Trophy, in 1997, we won the ICC Trophy and we also hosted the mini World Cup in 1998. That's why we could strongly push every other full member by saying that we were the best side among the associate nations.

During an ICC Executive Board meeting in 1999, when the matter of Bangladesh's Test status came up, Pakistan formally proposed our Test status, with India seconding the

motion. The same year, West Indies A visited us. Ian Bishop was the manager of that team. He was very impressed because of the crowd support and his feedback gave us West Indies' vote. England, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand didn't vote for us in the first voting, where we won 5-4. But we needed at least two-thirds of the ICC full members' votes.

Then we started working on Australia and South Africa and discussed strategic

partnership with both cricket boards. We brought Eddie Barlow from South Africa as our national team head coach and he also helped us in obtaining Test status. In early 2000, the ICC sent another team for inspection and before leaving, they told me that they would recommend us.

On June 25, an Executive Board meeting took place in Morocco where our Test status issue was confirmed by 8-1 votes. Basically, we got the Test status on the evening of the 25th, but it had to be approved in the annual conference on the next day in London. On June 26, we finally received Test status unanimously as all full members and associate members voted in favour of us.

DS: What's the most memorable moment for you during this time frame?

SAH: The fact that we got Test status is the biggest achievement I thought. I would put it as number one in my organisational achievements.

DS: Which is the thing that disappointed you the most?

SAH: I'm disappointed to see the lack of development in the country's cricket. I wanted to see Bangladesh at No. 4 or 5 after 25 years in Test cricket and in a similar position in ODIs. I imagined we would have won a World Cup at least. My biggest disappointment is that we had the money and could have ensured all the facilities for our players all over the country.

The game united people of our country but we could not take advantage of it.

DS: How much of your dream with Bangladesh cricket has been fulfilled in those years?

SAH: For me, seeing Bangladesh playing Tests is enough. But I think we should have made a lot more progress. We are the number 9 team in the world and after being here for 25 years, it means we are a total failure. If we didn't have the money and popularity, that would be different... Sri Lanka got the Test status in 1981 and by 1996, they were world champions. It's embarrassing for us that still England and Australia don't want to host us. I find a lack of forward planning in this matter as we only play series by series. We are thinking only about the present, just to save our chairs.

DS: We have heard about a model of Eddie Barlow. Why couldn't it be implemented?

SAH: After his departure, we didn't implement it. He had a long-term plan because he came from a cricketing country which had the world's best players in his time. He knew how it should be done and he had a vision. He wanted to create a structure but we didn't take it because we preferred more of a stop-gap approach. We became too ambitious and since money was flowing, it started to corrupt people at the board.