

Sammy praised Sri Lanka for their display and said:

We are a praying team, we know God normally answers our prayers but, today, I guess two gentlemen who have played for Sri Lanka, given a lot not only to Sri Lankan cricket but cricket on the whole, I guess the Almighty wants them to leave on a high, so I guess they have one more game to try and win a World Cup and leave on a high. Probably that's the reason why God put a hand in this match.

Having beaten ticketing issues and the Dhaka traffic, we raised a glass at the hotel to a perfect day. The topic was centred on our previous forays into various World Cup venues.

'Jagath, do you remember when...' went my question, to Jagath's reply, 'Why, you had forgotten the episode with so and so...' followed by loud laughter.

Upali Mankularatne was staring at me with an incredulous look and wide-open mouth.

Very seriously, he said, 'I say, Ranjan, you should share those with a much wider circle of fans, man.'

'Don't waste your effort on him. I have said the same thing to him time and time again,' said a seemingly exasperated Jagath.

Then another juicy episode was related. 'Blah, blah, blah...' and so on, till the bottles took on an empty look and I remember one of us quite philosophically said, 'It takes a genie to deliver a never-emptying bottle, *machan*.' At which juncture a light-headed look at the clock confirmed to us that the session was over.

Discovering Dhaka

Though ours was a hurriedly planned trip, I did some internet research before leaving and found out that Nijhoom Tours was one of the best tour operators in Bangladesh. The day after Sri Lanka's semi-final win, provided us with an ideal opportunity to explore the outskirts of Dhaka. Without further ado, we confirmed their Old Capital Tour.

Sharp at eight in the morning, Raw Hasan was in the hotel lobby – impressively, on time. In a city dubbed 'the traffic capital of the world' because of its chaotic traffic and frequent traffic jams, he showed that it could still be overcome.

Hasan drove us towards Sonargaon, all the while explaining the environs. 'This is the historic administrative, commercial and maritime centre in Bengal. Once a thriving centre of trade and commerce, it served as the capital of the region in medieval times,' he said.

We passed some of the poorer parts of the old city. At times, I felt as if I was going back in time, when the real quality of life was said to have been better than the present.

An hour and a half later, we visited the 15th century Galdi Mosque, a survivor from the area's glorious past, now located within a rather humble village.

We were then taken to a ruined merchant city, Panam (Nagar) – built in the 19th century as a trading centre for cotton fabrics by Hindu merchants during British rule. There were rows of two-storey colonial-type houses on either side of the street, designed with a mixture of European and Bengali style. When the British left the subcontinent, dividing it in two parts based on religion, Bangladesh was a part of the Muslim majority Pakistan. Rioting after the partition forced the merchants to flee to India, leaving their houses in the care of their domestic aides.

We also had the chance to see the Panam Bridge, a brick bridge that is still in use. It had linked Panam with the main city during the Mughal era (16th to 19th century).

Our tour ended with visits to a Hindu temple in an abandoned house hidden behind some bushes, a folk-arts and crafts museum displaying the heritage of the Bengal nation, and an abandoned royal palace.

Hasan took pride in telling us that Bangladesh has three UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the world's largest mangrove swamp, Sundarbans, the 8th century Buddhist monastery, Somapura Mahavihara, and 15th century Muslim city, Bagerhat. He had many more 'must sees' in Bangladesh. It included the longest

unbroken sandy beach on earth, endless tea plantations, an amazing hilly region and many beautiful temples and palaces.

The next day, we took a stroll down Dhaka's bazaars and came across Bangladesh's colourful, legendary textiles displayed for sale at many stalls. It's known that many Indian restaurants in London are owned by Bangladeshis. Our final preparation before the momentous final on the following day included a delicious Bengali meal accompanied by a few beers.

Return to subcontinental rivalry

At nine o'clock on the morning of 6 April 2014, I was still lying in bed and staring at the ceiling. Emotions ran high.

'A penny for your thoughts,' said Jagath.

'This is the best chance we've got, after all those near misses,' said I.

'Be positive,' says he, continuing, 'You watched what happened on 17 March 1996, right?'

Not overly convinced, I said, 'Instead of butterflies, this time around I have caterpillars in the stomach.'

'That's better *machan*, because caterpillars come first in metamorphosis.'

'In 1996, by the time dark horses Sri Lanka reached the World Cup final, they had already exceeded what most thought was impossible,' I said, trying to control my anxiety, with which Jagath was now playing.

'After four "finals" losses in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2012, the benefit of the law of averages is long overdue,' said Jagath.

'Whatever your supposed law of averages says, a do-or-die battle is on the cards,' I said, still the ever doubting Thomas.

'They should give a fitting farewell to their twin towers, Mahela Jayawardena and Kumar Sangakkara.' This from Jagath.

'So, they should at least win it this time,' I said, with barely discernible scepticism.

At half past one, the three of us were at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. Shamim and the policeman chuckled on