

A STUNNING NEW HOPE FOR CRICKET

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'THE WORLD CRICKET PASSPORT'

It is asked so often why cricket is the poor relation of all the major international sports. It is a question based on the frustrations so often encountered when hand to mouth arrangements are made by the poor major cricketing nations, in taking their turn in holding major cricket tournaments in the spirit of egalitarian responsibility. The excuse often made is money, or the lack of it, as one cricket official said using that corny old adage, 'We have to cut our suit according to the cloth'.

The Under 19 Cricket World Cup of 2006 held in Sri Lanka is a case in point. I attended several matches and whilst the playing baize out there on the green and pleasant turf presented no significant problems, it was quite apparent that the attendance, and the arrangements for maximising attendance, was a travesty. An eye cast over all the major grounds told of just handfuls of spectators populating vast empty areas. So much so that the officials supporting the flash cards in some matches almost matched the spectators in numbers, and this in a country that is head over heels in love with the game.

I sat heavy hearted and leaden with frustration watching some of the best cricket I have seen in recent years. The future of the game out there on the green baize toiled with youthful exuberance and expertise to a smattering of stalwart fans, about three handfuls of them, mostly proud mums and dads. Withered desultory cheers greeted the exponents of hand and eye, bat, ball and wicket, as these magnificent young men did their best to ring out their talents on behalf of their nations.

The new world of cricket is empty. The sound of crows and sparrows louder than the cheers. Here on this premier stage of cricket artisanship,

the future of the great and noble game seemed dark and hollow and bereft.

The last match I attended in Sri Lanka was at the P. Saravanamuttu stadium situated just on the outer environs of Colombo. Once the doyen venue of the Sri Lankan game, where the legends of the game played to thousands, we saw the officials and the ground staff almost outnumber the spectators. The stadium had seen better days, but it was evident that a great effort had been made to keep what was decaying and bare in its best solicitude. A huge life size wall relief showed the great Bradman and along one of the walls arguably the greatest batsman Sri Lanka ever produced, M. Sathasivam, had a whimsical notice speaking of the magic of his talent. Ah those bygone halcyon days of cricket splendour! Set against the here and now. It all spoke of neglect and foolishness, vanity and lost purpose. In present times things in Sri Lanka have reached a World class standard in some grounds, with their Galle ground one of the most picturesque in the world. An infusion of money post World Cup win and a visionary President did that.

That, it seems, is where we stand today in the game. The halls of the rich and mighty display the vaults of splendid Cricket Academies, whilst the romantics wax lyrical about lost opportunities for those playing in paddy fields and cul de sacs. Yet such as this reached out and won the Cricket World Cup. The last edge of a poet's pen.

The colour of the cricket field is green and so is the dollar. A man called Kerry Packer saw to that. Whilst those who have it prosper, those who haven't reach for the skies and play a game of whimsy in cloud cuckoo land. We aim to make the game strong all over the world, say the heralds of the ICC. 'Look at the steps we have taken to do this and that, in bringing the game to women and the blind'. Worthy though this all is, they miss the whole point by a beamer and deliver themselves a Doosra. The ICC can only drive with the investitures open to them. Without more pervasive

control of the game and thus putting more bums on seats in pleasant stadia, in mostly poorer countries, they have lost the game before they start playing it.

Money now rules and there is no going back. It is a fact of dressing room size. Look at the fiscal horizons of Soccer, Basketball, Golf, Tennis, Rugby Union, Rugby League, Athletics, Ice Hockey. Billions sight their value and Cricket, arguably the best and one of the oldest of them all, languishes for most part as the last post of the pound, dollar, rupee and cent. The 20th player on the professional golf circuit makes more money than the Sri Lankan Board does in an average year. Imagine how many national Cricket Boards can be run with the earnings per annum of David Beckham. It is that mind haltingly bizarre.

There are some who will claim that money or the lack of it is not the root of all cricket evil. Mismanagement, lack of vision, and the personal ambitions of various cricket administrators is more the demon of it all. There is powerful truth in this. But the final notice that moves the red and white ball with sparkle to the boundary and the stumps, is now alas the power of the fiscal root to get the best to the game and to keep them there: To keep them in the secure pool of an assured future in the game, where their presence in it does not mortgage the long term well-being of the family, because the road to cricket glory starts when you are young and building a future career.

Whilst I might seem a tad lyrical about it all, I think all those who know the game through their hearts, for its power to bring out the best in the minds of men and women, the straight reportage speaks starkly about opportunities lost. The worst of motives and purposes cover the Cricket Boards all over the world too, often with the ugly sap of ambition, narcissism and self-interest. It all points in one direction. It all points to a simple solution. Bring in more money. Ironic and contradictory isn't it. Bring in so much money that it will

erase corruption at a stroke and provide incomes so attractive that every young aspirant's heart on every cricket scratch strip, be it in the streets of Karachi, Colombo, Mumbai, Adelaide, Birmingham, Wellington, Dacca, Soweto, or Harare, will beat with an ambition to take on the leather and the willow.

It is easy for any commentator to prescribe the malaise and provide no idea of a cure, so here goes one idea, for what it's worth. One I believe will make Cricket one of the richest sports in the world and bring back a huge field of talent to the game. Bring it back and control it in such a way that its investiture leads to the best that the art of cricket can produce in terms of players' skills.

A NEW ICC ROLE

The present structure and constitution of the ICC has no brief for what is proposed. It will need a new larger spread of responsibility, where its menu is extended to include bilateral control over certain indentures and debentures of member countries' fixtures, including Test matches and have a supervisory and controlling role in certain fiscal matters relating to domestic Club cricket where direct ICC funding is appropriate. This will apply to both Full member countries and Affiliated member countries.

There will have to be an ICC office in each Full and Affiliated member country under whose Inspectorate approval ICC sanctioned fiscal payments will be made.

The huge financial benefits of what is proposed will make it essential and worth all the changes necessary. It will become clear why this is, as you read this through.

THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is that the ICC create a single unit admission mechanism to all matches played under the auspices of any individual National Cricket Board in the World called the:

'World Cricket Passport'

This passport will provide the means that will enable the poorest fan in the cricketing world to become an annual holder of the right to be admitted to any cricket match in the world, under the purview of the ICC.

The passport will admit, free of any other individual match charge, to: All Test matches and World Cup formats and all other world significant matches and domestic matches controlled by all national Cricket Boards in the world.

The passport will admit free of an individual match charge to any local, or any foreign country, domestic Board controlled matches when the holder is abroad.

Hold whatever emotions you might have at the moment about these provisos and please follow this through. It is really not as zany as it might at first sight seem, to perhaps the less imaginative amongst you.

The cost of the passport would be minimal. A value of US \$ 6.00 per annum is suggested as a nominal price, so that every cricket fan at the poorest level might be a carrier of the means to attend matches they could only dream of doing. This is to allow the man in the street, be it the slums of Kolkata, Soweto, or Dacca, the office worker, manager, or Chairman of the Board around the world to be 'stakeholders' and hands-on spectators in the great game. It is absolutely essential that the poorest of the poor be able to afford the WCP, as the whole exercise is to try to involve every single cricket fan as a member of a world family centred on cricket, outside race, culture, ethnicity and most of all buying power. There should be no privileges, in terms of social status or positional hierarchies, dependent on affordability.

The 'ICC World Cricket Passport' will draw on the vast fan base for the sport of cricket, mostly in the Indian

sub-continent (where undoubtedly cricket has its most ardent followers pro rata) and all over the cricket playing world, and propose a mechanism whereby a fan base of over a **billion** is given an opportunity to actively support, through an 'emblem' or 'stake holding', the 'right of entry' to the game of cricket wherever it is played and seen in the sense of a worldwide quantum. The 'passport' would entitle the holder to admission to any ground, match, or venue (excluding private games especially designated) conducted under the general authority and auspices of the ICC, and or, supported fiscally by the ICC. This should include all club and local matches organised under a nation's national cricket authority. Most of all it should include Test Cricket and World Cup scenarios. No reserve or compromise should be made on this.

I say again, the idea is that the future cricketers of the world - the adult or child in the poorest situation, in the poorest regions of the world, and those from the richest backgrounds - are nominal equals in the support and enhancement of the great game, for the cheapest possible cost.

The size of the cricket fan base is so large that a mere \$ 6.00 stipend for the passport could be afforded by everyone and would provide enough money, estimated as large as US\$ 6 billion per annum or more, because not just cricket fans are likely to buy them at this price. It will make cricket one of the richest games in the world and ensure a fair dispersal and remuneration for everyone who plays and administers it. As things stand, privilege measured in fiscal or societal terms usually determines who sits at a ground and watches a match. Even in India where tickets seem to be the cheapest. The occupants of air-conditioned stands and boxes, where those who can afford it, too often determine the most important things in the furtherance and practice of the game. With the cricket passport the street boy from the streets of Kolkata might sit with

his employer with an equal right to admission.

ADMINISTRATION

The **'WORLD CRICKET PASSPORT'** should be ordained exclusively under the world cricketing body's authority and auspice - the ICC. It can only work under the purview of the World Cricket Authority perhaps under a newly set up nominal financial designation: **THE ICC 'WORLD FUND FOR CRICKET'**.

The revolutionary nature of the idea and the huge impact it is likely to have on the game fiscally, requires the straight governorship of the world body controlling it all.

It is critical that the gathering and disbursement of the funds has to be done by the world governing body, under its total and specific umbrella, and no one else, because national governments have to play ball and only a world authority can get this to happen. That of course will entail a big change in the whole ICC set up and that I fear might be a needless stumbling block to those in the ICC with small minds. It just needn't be this, when all the values about the proposal are carefully considered without bias or entrenched prejudice.

THE 'WORLD CRICKET PASSPORT'

The passport may be a little laminated card, perhaps under the title **'World Cricket Passport'**, or **'International Cricket Passport'**, or some such nominal. The card would be internationally registered under a security code that specifies the bearer.

The method of acquisition, security and distribution of the little laminated passports will be carried out through simple management procedures controlled and supervised by the ICC, with each specific country's capacity to carry them out deciding the best and most suitable methodology.

In Western countries for instance the passport may be bought at any

newsagent where one would buy a lottery ticket. On the other hand, specially designated selling venues with a cricketing relevance may be used set up and supervised by the ICC.

A seat reservation fee of US\$ 0.50 (50 cents) per game would ensure a place in the stands. This could be made on-line or at designated selling WCP booths and venues specially set up for the purpose, in advance of a particular game. Non-attendance after a booking incurs a penalty that invalidates the passport for its use in any two subsequent matches. This is to stop frivolous booking.

Whilst the security aspects of the procedure might provide some problems (it is always the way with such things) a good and well qualified management team with a few approved **MBAs** in their number should be able come up with a marketing procedure and security strategy, specifying the buyer, that works both in-house and internationally. Technology now provides multiple ways of doing this.

INTERNATIONAL ENTITLEMENTS

National entitlements from the fund should be equal for all nations in the first **ten** years of the fund. This is to allow affiliate and associate members to build up their cricket augmentation to required international standards.

The pooled sum, let's say **US\$ 6 billion per annum**, should be **equally** divided among the Full member playing nations, after deduction for collection, running the Fund, advertising and various administration costs in-house are subtracted.

The fund proposes to provide:

US\$ 300 million per annum to each of the Cricket Boards of the **10** countries with Full membership, for administrative staff costs and ground and cricket facility building, maintenance and general cricket promotion, coaching and development purposes and the staging of the various

matches and competitions including the Test series.

Affiliated and associate members of the ICC with the 10 highest attainment (ICC judged) signatures should be provided with stipends amounting to **US\$ 100** million per annum during this time for in-house cricket development purposes.

This rate should continue for the first **TEN** years till the world setting of the game is transformed. It *could* then change in its disbursement ethos. It may be that countries with a higher player number base, seen pro rata against total population, should get more. It may be that allocations are requested as and when they are needed by nations and again granted on a pro rata basis, seen against in situ cricket facilities after suitable studies and results are inspected and approved.

Where the national political needs conflict with the internationally aspected notional need, the ICC opinion, as the world body controlling the international game, should take precedence over the national 'Ministries for Sport', or the nation disqualified from participating in any world relevant scheme.

At all costs no advantage of any fiscal benefits from the Fund should be allocated to the site where the most WPCs are sold.

Cricket fans are an international fraternity and I like to think a fraternity of gentlemen with a sense of international comradeship and fellowship, proved by the minimal cricket related altercations that have taken place at all the major cricket venues through the years.

Whatever system is employed for the disbursement of funds from the central collection source, the **WCF**, the crucial thing is that this whole process is done in as fair and democratic a way as possible, in the interest of **ALL** cricketers and world cricket as a whole and no single national, ethnic groups, or personal interest groups. In this way a cross multi-cultural stance and fellowship may be established in the

interests of all cricket fans as a single quantum, regardless of where they come from. It is hoped that in this way we can see off the corruptor, whether he or she is a bookie, or covert racist, and the past noble ideals and dignity of the game be maintained and defended into the future.

BENEFITS

The hallmark and fundamental proposal is that the majority of seating space at any given match be reserved for holders of a '**World Cricket Passport**' at all venues governed by the ICC.

An ICC delegated statutory **80%** of the spectator stand space in any ground supported by them should be reserved for WCP holders and admission should be given on a reserve booking basis as said. The rest (20%) could be for privileged stances that are paid for with a value commensurate with their provisions. Air conditioned cubicles, Champagne and Cucumber sandwiches or whatever.

At the grounds it will be primarily be on a first come first served basis, but I repeat again, a mechanism for the advance reservation of these seats will have to be instituted for a small reservation fee of just **50** cents per match to ensure a seat.

The proposal that in all eventualities at least **80%** of the seating capacity of a ground where ICC supported first class cricket is played has to be reserved for the WCP holders, is to make the notional idea that the poorest, who are in the highest majority, are equal and meaningful 'shareholders' in an international fraternity of cricket fans. It is the underlying ethos of the whole scheme. This will ensure no favourites and courtiers get preferential treatment, simply because they can afford it, or 'know someone', and that the ordinary fan whose collective money power runs the engine, and most of the car, will get, and be seen to get, the most benefit.

It will, it is hoped, ensure that every seat, so often seen empty, at so many

Test and non Test matches, will be filled by perhaps the young future aspiring stars of cricket, who will be able to see the game first hand. It will perhaps serve as a point of encouragement for the propagation and promotion of future talent. The aspect of any game is so different when seen live at first hand. The young aspirant will be able to gauge much better the merits of a particular cricketing situation in a real context and not through the distorting and removed stance of the same game seen on TV. They will be there yards away from the real thing.

If done efficiently and expeditiously the Fund could be set up in a year and, if advertised and collected properly, the revenues from it could easily top **US\$ 6 billion per annum**, as I have said. The sum speaks for itself. It simply underlines the love for the game millions have for it and the duty of care the administrators of the game might provide for furnishing that which is necessary, so that the best resources might prevail.

It will be critical of course how it is all sold to the public. Advertising it spectacularly, pervasively, and effectively is the key to its success.

This vast amount of money of course will provide all the grounds world-wide stand space, national cricketing facilities and player and ancillary staff remuneration and emoluments to the administrative professionals, to make cricket as it deserves to be, one of the richest and most well furnished games in the world of sport. I believe it will at a stroke bring corruption in the game to a halt.

It will not touch the commercial exploitation of Cricket by private enterprise. The various IPL type enterprises can continue separate from the bedrock assignments and presentations of world cricket under **ICC** governance.

New additional exciting game innovations might also be brought in under a wider and strengthened **ICC** purview. Most of all the game will stand on its own feet with no inherent

dependence on sponsorship and TV rights. The enhanced facilities provided will serve to ensure the survival of the game in the parts of the world it is threatened (the West Indian islands for instance) and encourage the highest standards of play and administration of any game. It is likely to see off forever the few, but sad, bribery and corruption episodes in the game we have all witnessed.

The idea that the poorest of the poor fan and supporter will be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with his richer counterpart, as an equal supporter of the world game, is to many an attractive and just one. Of course the assertion will then be levied that it is unfair the poor should be supporting the rich. (Sociologically of course they have been doing this in every country of the world throughout history.) The fact remains that the returns from the scheme, as proposed, could be so enormous and so significant and serve the game so well, the question is best posed thus: Is there any other idea or way that would bring about so much for so many in cricket, with relatively so little effort, that we can afford to ignore it.

A SUMMARY OF BENEFITS

The following are only offered as guideline suggestions that could be easily achieved with a properly run and administered Fund by the ICC: An ICC that means something pertinent to the new ways that fiscal thinking has imposed in all walks of life.

The urge to greed and social status sits deep in some of us. I can see many County, State and District club members in some countries, with a good smattering of snobbery and class consciousness, swallowing their single Malts and Prims No 3s with gulps, at some if not all of these suggestions. Though powerful, fortuitously they are a tiny minority and a law unto themselves and best left alone. They usually smite each other's ambitions and pretentiousness with their poisonous thinking and burn each other up. No organisation anywhere is free of such as them, as we all know.

There will of course be those who will say that this amount of money may add to corruption and corrupt practices in all the test playing nations, to the detriment of the game. Of course this might well be true. But this is a specious argument in the end. Other sports with billions coming in are run well. Corruption and corrupt practice will always be there, in all walks of life. The point is surely that the ICC rises to the challenge and, in the interests of our noble game, introduces measures that will minimise it and its effects. The wonderful advantages that will accrue from a well-managed fund are so advantageous to the world game this alone cannot be a reason for not adopting it.

Those who know anything about Cricket know it is primarily a game of the mind and less a game of the hand and the foot. It is also a game of the heart. A heart that beats together in its fans and a family of nations that have for over a century seen it with a fond parochial sense, unlike most other games.

For example. The land that gave us so many great world's great sports Soccer, Rugby, and Badminton among them - England, languished until recently with a cricketing malaise that saw it droop in submission to the rest of the world. The 'Motherland of Cricket' wilted for too long. But the phoenix in us all never dies and we have recently seen it take flight in magnificent splendour to rise above Australia. It all proved of course that it is all about rising above prevailing norms.

To me cricket without a strong West Indian contribution is unthinkable. Their Boards are at the moment in great financial need. The beguiling dollar seems to take so many out of the game of cricket on the islands, for the richer dollar fields of American Football, Baseball and Basketball, and of course better paid jobs. The thought that we might never again see a Sobers, Worrell, Weekes, Walcott, Lara, Richards, Hall and Griffiths and indeed all the other glorious talents of the game will for me take most of the gilt off cricket's gingerbread. It must

never be allowed to happen. In their day money didn't matter. It matters now in everything.

The West Indies, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and their funding mechanisms are in tatters.

I might mention here the cricketers of Pakistan. They shine with the talent of a famous and noble people with a magnificent history. Cricket valiants - dazzling us all with prodigious cricketing talent that too often seems so elegantly natural, as many in opposition on the field of play have found. Gentlemen all, to a man. Not coloured in any way with the lethal lies and machinations that are perpetrated and issued about them, by politically motivated vested interests in Israel and the USA, but alas reactively and aggressively responded to by a small number of their national and religious cartels, who are by and large also victims themselves more than they are victimisers.

Pakistan now languishes in foreign fields, unable to play the game so many of them love, in-house, at the highest levels. It's just not Cricket – is it!

A LOOK AT THE HUGE EXTENT OF BARE STANDS IN THE 2007 WORLD CUP IS TO MY MIND A SAD AND IGNOBLE SIGHT FOR ALL CRICKET LOVERS.

The proposal for a World Cricket Passport will put 'bums' on seats and make empty stands a thing of the past. All grounds could be filled to capacity. TV revenues of course are unlikely to be affected at all. In fact as the game prospers, so will their fiscal returns. Their own TV transmission deals are between them and the requisite match protagonists and venues and not centred through the ICC.

The Indian nation will probably be the Patriarch of the world game in the future. Most of the WCPs will of course be sold in India and the sub-continent with their huge fan base.

I had an Indian journalist friend of mine on seeing this proposal smile obsequiously and say:

"You don't know these Indian bu...s as I know them. They will steal your idea and run it up themselves in their own self-interest not giving a hoot about anyone else. No one from outside India gets their work released in India because they steal, copy, and print it as their own and your work won't give you more than a rupee or two. That's if you can get that rupee out of India in the first place."

Yes I have of course heard this all before. But I must believe they will not do this, because no nation wants to so be disgraced in world eyes. India has huge pride as a nation. And the most spiritual one in the world, collectively, at that. I believe instead that it will be their hearts in outlook and assertiveness that will rescue the game. They will have to allow an *equal* distribution of the funds in the interests of the whole game for the first TEN years of its operation at least. A noble plebiscite. I believe the Indian nation through her cricket loving throng will rise to this proposal and be the main saviours of the world game.

All the Test playing nations are equals in the context of the spirit of the game itself, if not in the skills of the game, and as such the equitable distribution of the FUND in at least the first 10 years should be an imperative insisted on, till we have all the basic infrastructure. Minimums and maximums of salary levels should be centred for all and should be the same for all countries and not related to GNP.

The distribution of the fund must not be based on any gradient that separates the world cricketing quantum's total benefit and its fair and well balanced overall needs. Any action that reflects exclusively a particular country's own endemic populations and talent to the exclusion of others should be deemed anathema, or we will end up with those with the most powerful fiscal bases always in the ascendant in getting the best talent, especially in

Cricket goes the way of football and you can buy your talent abroad. The best players will end up with the richest countries. I hope that cricket will never go the way of soccer and so many other sports, where players are bought and sold regardless of notional nationality under special agreements that allow this. Diversification deployed integrally is crucial to bring out a population's own special and different approach to the game. A nation's own best face reflected against their peers in brotherhood and genuine mutual respect.

Sri Lanka in winning the World Cup in 1996, without Cricket Academies and with the then frugal infrastructure, proved that great talent can be home grown. It would be nice if the situation where money does not matter could continue, but in the real world the fiscal imperative blows at hurricane force and the richest countries with the highest value winds now hold a great advantage. The case of the West Indian predicament, and of course some other countries in the Third World, prove this. The rich countries may see this scheme as something that will lose them the advantage of money and what it provides in terms of facilities. They, I am sure, can see the writing on the wall. The Sub Continent, and its billion or so avid fans of the game, is cricket's future. Yet any marginalisation, for whatever reason, should be anathema when seen against the interests of the game as a quantum whole and all its fans worldwide.

Is there any hope that the present ICC incumbents are visionary. The revamping of Cricket is not an ethos that some might want. In my consultations about this proposal I was stunned by the number of mainly Euro-Caucasians who implied they "don't care about the fate of little brown men out there." "It's better as things are." "They will have to fend for themselves", as two said straight out. This response of course signed no inherent love for the game, but a deep set sense of social and racial destitution in their natures and values. Gladly this attitude and such as their

kind, on later more pervasive inquiry, proved to be in a stark minority.

Are there any brave independent unselfish minds within the cartel of Cricket's administrators that care for the game itself and its future. My journalistic solicitations tell me that there are. If far vision was necessary in any great sport, cricket needs it now. Too often demons walk the open gate and Corruption Committees are marshalled too late. The Cronje affair and the conviction of some Cricketers more recently, for corrupt betting practices, have raised an ugly cloud over International Cricket. Though small in number the grey clouds gather. I am sure the ICC keeps a sharp and abiding vigilance in such matters.

The game deserves its reputation for being an honourable one, that for over two centuries cherished and guarded and kept outside the touches of wretched turpitude seen in other sports. Fair play, in my opinion, still prevails in Cricket. I believe it holds the best behaved and most honourable fan base of any world significant team sport. Most of all the game deserves large open minds, not small, parochial and the sometimes covertly nationalistic and even the downright racist ones, as so often seen in Football.

With a well thought out fair schematic for the collection and administration of the 'World Cricket Passport' through the ICC sponsored 'World Fund For Cricket', it might just be that we see only winners all round now and in future generations.

So here I go again. A plea from a simple cricket fan, to take the initiative and rescue this most noble of games from a silent and unnecessary demise.

These are my illustrative suggestions that might demonstrate the value of the 'WORLD CRICKET PASSPORT.'

The ICC should first establish a: WORLD FUND FOR CRICKET.

Each year: From the entire sum collected per annum the ICC should take responsibility for dispensing this fund through a specially set up Inspectorate, under whose auspices authentications and verifications the money would be released directly to the various member cricket boards and expressly not to their respective Ministries of Sport, to:

***Pay US\$ 300 million per annum to each of the Cricket Boards of the countries with Full membership, for administrative staff costs. Ground and cricket facility building, maintenance and general cricket promotion and development purposes and the staging of the various matches and competitions, including the Test series.**

***Pay US\$ 100 million annually to each of the 6 Associate Members (that are accepted through ICC derivations for the nations competing for the World Cup competition) for cricket development purposes to be spent within their own countries to:**

***Build at least one new Cricket stadium with their grounds, each year, till sufficient stadiums are built commensurate with population and logistical needs. This continuing stipend can then be used to provide land for cricket pitches and the provision of cricket relevant residential training facilities in developing skills at school level, through ICC funded international exchange matches. Situations that would make their game stronger and more weather versatile.**

***Pay every single one of the top 15 Test players, in all the Test pools of the ICC selected Test playing nations in the world, through their various Boards a basic salary of US\$ 1 million per annum minimum. Performance incentives could increase this sum.**

***Pay an ICC stipend of US\$ 50,000 per annum to 1000 players judged to be of first class level but outside Test team selection level. This is to encourage them making their sole careers in first class cricket in all the**

TEN Test level playing nations. The stipend will be paid by the ICC, through their own Boards.

*US\$ 10,000 per annum to be paid to 100 players of each country of affiliate and associate status. Players deemed of sufficient skills to encourage cricket as a professional career within leagues set up in these countries.

*Pay an ICC future star scholarship stipend of \$2000 a year to 10,000 under 20 selected players deemed first class level in all categories of ICC affiliation worldwide, as long as they play for an officially designated league registered by their National Cricket Boards.

***Pay a sum of US\$ 50 million per annum to 16 of the Associated Member countries regarded by ICC vote as serious Cricketing nations, for cricket development and coaching purposes. This is to ensure a larger future World Cup auspice of 32 countries.**

*Pay a stipend of US\$ 40,000 to each of 2,000 cricket playing schools around the world, playing in an officially designated National cricket authority, to improve their facilities and pay their Cricket coaches an individual stipend of US\$ 3,000 to be added to their salaries per annum. The selection conditions and criteria will be set by the ICC. For example, on gaining a licentiate coaching certificate approved by the World governing body.

*US\$ 100 million for the staging of the various World Cups of Cricket to the relevant countries that will do this.

* The rest of the anticipated \$6 billion reserve is to be used for ICC world administration purposes. New Competitions. A schools' World Cup. A World Cricket League planned for 2017. In other words, the promotion and extension of all Cricket relevant operations, achievement rewards and International liaison with the relevant Governments and their

organisations, to ensure and facilitate fair and best practice.

The ICC of course will have their own take on the disposal of funds, if they see merit in adopting my idea of an international passport for Cricket. This will depend on the vision and fraternal goodwill of those in national and international charge of the administration of the game as a world sport - in other words the Chairman of National Cricket Boards, their CEOs and other officials. Those hundreds of millions of fans who love and cherish cricket as a still noble and gentlemanly sport will demand nothing less. Whilst 'money might be the root of all evil' as they say, a huge infusion of funds cleverly and unselfishly and fairly used and deployed can lead to the total and dramatic regeneration of the game and provide a new and imaginative vision for Cricket in the 21st century and beyond.

A VISION THAT WILL NOT BE JUST TINKERING TO MAINTAIN THE PRESENT STATUS QUO

The challenge is on for the present ICC cartel to go boldly forward as none previously have done. Will the present President and ICC members be the hallmark visionaries that will transform Cricket for a spectacular future, at a single stroke. A future it deserves as the finest team game in the world. It's over to you gentlemen and ladies.

THE PROPOSAL'S CONCLUSIONS

The huge intake of funds through a successfully advertised and deployed sales mechanism for the 'World Cricket Passport' can be expected to do the following:

Make Cricket, at a stroke, one of the richest world games, as it ought to be, with the means of its survival inherently in its own hands.

Bring in the poorest cricket fans around the world to fill all stadiums

around the world with 'bums on seats'. No more huge swathes of vacant seats implying a dying fan base. No more \$100 seats (for whatever reason) and the World Cup fiasco of watching empty stadiums, implying a dead and dying world sport to anyone who watched it on TV.

Ensure that the poorest of the poor will have an opportunity for a close and abiding view of all the best the sport can offer on the field, and will never again be excluded, for lack of funds, from watching the game where it is actually played. It will give the game back to the fans where it belongs.

Provide the means of promoting cricket in the mind's eye of the young, as a worthwhile career, where excellence in it will allow million dollar remuneration for the best, and worthy incomes for those on the way there. No more wasted talent going into other professions for lack of fiscal returns. Cricket would retain the best talents for the sport.

Save the game in all the countries with inherently less fiscal power, where the game has provided legendary names, like the West Indian Islands, because the lack of money will no longer induce the young to take up other presently more lucrative sports.

Promote many other countries now not playing cricket as a prominent sport to take up the game. Many more 'Irelands' are bound to evolve making the game excitingly competitive worldwide.

Encourage the young to get a close up perspective of the game, through a view from the boundary line and not just on television broadcasts, thereby providing a close-up insight of what is really involved in the finer points of the sport. Their admired stars will

literally be at their feet. A few paces beyond the boundary line.

Taking out much of the incentive for corruption, at a stroke, as no other mechanism will do. A game awash with worthy fiscal returns for actually playing the game is far less likely to allow an inherent excuse for greed and nefarious practices on the part of its players.

Equalise the haves with the have-nots, so that no country or group of countries will have a fiscal advantage in providing facilities for its practice. The game will then reflect a fairer contour of any nation's in-house talent, making the training base through facilities provided for all future talent, an even and just format. Enough money to provide a remuneration that will attract talented experienced local coaches, at every level of the game in every country, thereby providing the highest possible standard of cricket world-wide.

Enough money for well-paid local and international Board administrators and administrative staff with good management experience and qualifications and not necessarily just cricket experience alone. Good cricketers or politicians don't necessarily make good Board administrators or executive managers, as cricket has seen to its cost.

You the cricket fans out there are crucial in this quest. Whether you play the game currently or not, and you can appreciate its art and artisanship and you want to see your nation's talent for it adequately reflected and provided for. If you believe in these proposals, or not - shout for Cricket from the roof tops. I certainly will do that through every journalistic means at my disposal.

There is a justified fear all over the world of Cricket that it is slowly dying.

To alter a great adage slightly – ‘It only requires good people to do nothing, for world cricket to slowly do the same.’

Bang the drum, the bat and the ball worldwide, so that the cricketing talent of your own nation is maximally reflected in the world game. Bang it till the doors of your local Cricket Administrations open and through them the sleepy hollow the ICC sometimes seems, wakes up to the fact that you and your interests are the final and most important platform on which the game is set. As such they are there to serve you.

Variety is the key. Each nation has its own cricket signature. Each signature has its own exciting value. Its own stride. Cricket must never be allowed to drift into a sameness that debilitates and bores its international tour de force through the strangling of its magnificent nuances. It will truly be ‘match over’ if this happens.

NIGEL KERNER

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PS. To the Sports Editor:

I first put this idea through in an internet article for **Cricinfo** (6th June 2001) and they ran an internet poll for their on line readers on its merits. 72% approved it as a good idea.

Nigel Kerner, Cricinfo:

<http://www.espnricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/102853.html>

I tried Grey and Mani when they were the main incumbents on the ICC throne. Despite the promise of replies to my behest I received none. Later enquiries established that though the

covering letters were received they could not find the proposals in their office. Copies were sent. Still no reply. One sure place due for revamping! Disillusioned, I gave them up as a lost cause. New blood with a bit more erudition is there now I am told. So here I go again.

After 15 years and running up and down filing cabinets and now the Halcyon sky scrapers of Dubai, they were still looking for it when I sent them this upgraded proposal that hit their desks recently, with the Cricinfo affirmation to endorse it. I understand from a spy through the key-hole, it made them jump a bit.