



While the national cricket team have started collective training in Mirpur and other athletes are expected to begin training soon in Dhaka, sport still finds itself at a standstill outside the capital. At the Shaheed Abdur Rob Serniabat Stadium in Barishal, the length of the grass perfectly reflects the level of neglect.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/TITU DAS

Sporting well drying up in inactive Barishal

SUSHANTA GHOSH

Cynics say that to the authorities concerned sports development means making more infrastructure in the country, regardless of whether existing ones are properly used or not.

It hardly matters if there are any sports activities taking place at the existing venues; we just need more stadiums. They also say sports in Bangladesh means sports "in Dhaka". The cynical view, unfortunately, is not far from reality as Barishal - once a rich sporting centre of the country -- has now become a city without any sports activities.

And the forlorn state of the Shaheed Abdur Rob Serniabat Stadium mirrors the poor state of sports affairs in Bangladesh's south-central city.

"There are no leagues, no tournaments and a lack of facilities and patronage, hence the current sordid picture is to be expected. In the 1970s

and 80s there were a lot of competitions between schools, clubs and all those are just memories now. There was a time when sports events were the talk of the town. Many grew up here and went on to serve the nation," Shubhankar Chakraborty, a member of Barishal's oldest club 'Nabajagoron Club', told The Daily Star.

Almost everyone blamed lack of local competitions behind the sorry state of sports in Barishal and they also said the sports body elections have not been held for the last 17 years.

Some organisers said that the 25,000-capacity Shaheed Abdur Rob Serniabat Stadium, which was established in 1963 on 29 acres of land as the Barishal Stadium and renovated in 2006 at a cost of around Tk 23 crore, has been idle due to lack of activities.

"There has been no cricket league since 2018. The first division cricket league was held in 2018 and the second

division league in 2013-14. How can you make good players and encourage boys to play the game?" asked cricket coach Tasrikul Islam.

"See, there is tall grass and you cannot practice. There are almost 500 cricket players in the first division, second division and level one but they have no practice facilities. Players are demoralised as there are no competitions," said coach Ibrahim Khalil.

"New players are hungry to play. [Bangladesh batsman] Fazle Mahmud Rabbi caught everyone's attention from this field first through the 'Jubo Sanga'. He later became a national player and [national pacer] Kamrul Islam Rabbi also came up from this very field. Besides, there are also a few other players who benefited from playing local leagues, but now no sports activities take place here," Rakib Hawlader, a 19-year-old first-division cricketer, said.

"We are just losing interest," Limon, another cricket player, added.

"The leagues are suspended for the last six-seven years. The under-19 match against Sri Lanka in 2019 was the first international match in this cricket stadium. The main reason for the stagnation is not playing leagues, weak infrastructure, lack of patronisation and no elected committee," said cricket coach Ejaj Al Mahmoud Sujan.

Once there was huge enthusiasm as different clubs like Nabajagoron club, Four H Club, Nazrul Library, Kirtankhola Academy, Bhutto Smriti Sangsad, Bround Compound Sabuj Academy, Jordan Social Welfare Council, Arunodaya Club, etc. were very active, but everything has died down.

"Floodlights were installed in the stadium in 2008 but there was no use for it," coach Mahamudul Haider Tamim said.

Mahabub Morshed Shamim, additional general secretary, district sports association, said although there is some practice of cricket held here, that has not been the case for other sports for a long time.

Nuru Hossain Nuru, the secretary of the district sports association, passed away a year and a half ago, and from then it was not possible to organise any tournaments from then.

No election has been held here for at least 17 years, he added.

SM Ajjar Rahman, deputy commissioner, Barishal, and president of the district sports association, said no game was being played because of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, if the coronavirus situation improves, he said they would try to introduce the leagues. Although there is no elected committee here, they are taking care of the region's sports on an ad hoc basis, he added.

JOYTU SHEIKH HASINA
ONLINE CHESS

Tournament from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

To mark the 74th birth anniversary of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the South Asian Chess Council (SACC) will hold an international online chess tournament this month with the participation of 74 players including a few Grandmasters from Asia and Europe.

The tournament, which will take place from September 24 to 26, has been named as Joytu Sheikh Hasina International Online Chess and will be sponsored by Canadian University of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Chess Federation (BCF) will supervise the tournament with assistance from Golden Chess Club (GCC).

BCF general secretary Syed Shahab Uddin Shamim disclosed the details at a press conference at a hotel in the capital where chairman of Canadian University and BCF vice-president Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat was also present.

"We have already invited five GMs from India, two each from Indonesia and Philippines, one each from Iran, Russia, Singapore and Vietnam," Shamim said, adding that three Bangladeshi GMs -- Ziaur Rahman, Reefat Bin Sattar and Enamul Hossain Razib -- have given their consent to participate in 6000-dollar tournament.

Champion, runner-up and third-place finisher will receive 1200, 800 and 500 US dollars respectively.

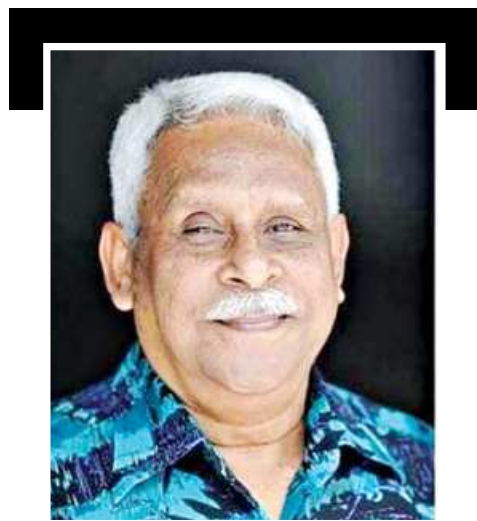
Departure of a doyen

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

AKM Nowsheruzzaman, a beacon in the country's football history, passed away on Monday night following complications from Covid-19, but he will forever remain in the hearts of those who were lucky enough to see his enthralling football.

He was a natural athlete, with that unique all-round ability to do well in any sport. He would go on to play cricket for Mohammedan, but football was always closest to his heart. It was the combined love for the game and his country that saw him represent Bangladesh as a member of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team in 1971 -- a team that played a role in creating international awareness and raising funds by playing exhibition football matches in India during the War of Independence.

When travelling down the memory lane of the golden days of football, people recall with fondness the spectacle of watching Nowsheruzzaman's instinct as a striker. He came from a footballing family, with all five brothers featuring in the Dhaka League. A student of Dhaka University, Nowsheruzzaman transmitted joy among his fans as well as his peers. "He began his career at Fire Service and I had the opportunity to watch him closely, having played with him in different teams. He was very talented and very lively. His whole family was very jovial. He was very intelligent and would read the game, how to position himself very well," Golam Sarwar Tipu, former



captain and coach of Bangladesh national football team, reminisced.

"But the biggest thing is that he was an immensely good person. He was very amicable and he would talk at the top of his lungs and enjoy himself," Tipu added.

Nowsheruzzaman was the first footballer to score for Bangladesh abroad during Swadhin Bangla Football Team's India tour. The striker became the top-scorer in the league in 1975. That season Mohammedan went on to win

the league and he scored two hattricks. He showed his talent in cricket too, primarily as an opening batsman. After independence, Mohammedan became champions for the first time, with Nowsheruzzaman playing a notable innings with the bat. "He carried the bat through the innings on a few occasions," his cousin Sayeed Uz Zaman, a sports journalist, recalled. "Although he was a natural athlete, his focus was on football and cricket. We, the family members, are all very proud of him."

Nowsheruzzaman is one legendary name in the country's sports fraternity but he always held a regret that the Swadhin Bangla Football Team never got the recognition it deserved.

"During the liberation war, the Swadhin Bangla Football team raised a lot of money for the refugees. In Nadia (West Bengal), they demanded the flag of Bangladesh be raised or else they wouldn't take the field in what was the first match of the Swadhin Bangla team. He regretted the fact that the team was never recognised, that there was no national award for the team," Abdul Gaffar, who played for Dhaka Abahani, Dhaka Mohammedan and Dhaka Wanderers, said.

Separate namaz-e-janazas were held at his residence in Moghbazar and at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with former national footballers in attendance. His last janaza was held at Badarpur, Chandpur before he was laid to rest with a guard of honour.



Simona Halep and Novak Djokovic pose with the trophies following their victories in the finals of the Italian Open in Rome on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fans fume as title winners split by 10 euros

REUTERS

Organisers of the Italian Open and the tennis Tours came under fire on social media after it emerged that Rome men's champion Novak Djokovic was paid 10 euros more than women's winner Simona Halep.

Djokovic, who beat Argentine Diego Schwartzman 7-5, 6-3 for a record 36th ATP Masters 1000 crown, received 205,200 euros for his triumph while Halep won 10 euros less for sealing the WTA Premier 5 title after Karolina Pliskova retired from the final with injury.

But even as tennis' Grand Slams pushed

MOST ATP MASTERS SINGLES TITLES

- NOVAK DJOKOVIC (SRB) — 36
- RAFAEL NADAL (ESP) — 35
- ROGER FEDERER (SUI) — 28

for parity in prize money, fans vented their ire that Halep's prize frustratingly fell short.

"People who made a pay gap in cents are misogynists. Period," one said on Twitter.

"I almost feel like - if they so badly need those 10 euros to feel better about their manhood - hell's bells give it to 'em," another said.



Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored the opening goal with a towering header before adding a second from the spot as AC Milan beat Bologna 2-0 in their opening Serie A fixture at the San Siro on Monday. About a thousand lucky fans were allowed inside the stadium to witness the superb performance from the Swede, who claimed afterwards: "If I was 20, I would have scored four tonight. But I'm 39, no, 38... so I only got two."

PHOTO: TWITTER

Shooters relieved by BSSF reshuffle

SPORTS REPORTER

Around 20 shooters appeared to be in joyous mood at the Gulshan Shooting Complex yesterday, but it was not because they had returned home after achieving something big. They had arrived to welcome the newly-appointed ad-hoc committee of the Bangladesh Shooting Sport Federation (BSSF).

The National Sports Council on Sunday put an end to a drawn out stalemate between two BSSF higher-ups by appointing an ad-hoc committee headed by Major General Ataul Hakim Sarwar Hasan and the shooters looked happier than anyone else.

"What can I tell you? Look at the faces of the shooters and you will get your answer," two-time Commonwealth Games silver medallist Abdullah Hel Baki told the reporters at the shooting range.

"We always feel pressure mentally or the pressure comes on us automatically when officials involve themselves in chaos. We



are now relieved and set to start training afresh. However, the big disadvantage is that we have been out of action for a long period due to the pandemic and we don't have our rifles, although the newly-appointed committee promised to solve the issue immediately," said Baki. "Our rifle is our heart. No one can provide remuneration for shooting, but we do it because of love for the sport. And it is big blow for us if you keep our beloved rifles away from us. Everything will be fine when we get back permission to use our rifles."

"I know that there is a problem with the weapons, which are not being used, and we hope shooters can get back their guns immediately and start training properly," said BSSF president Ataul Hakim Sarwar Hasan after the first executive committee meeting.

Following a dispute between the former BSSF president and BSSF secretary general, shooters were forced to appear before the directorate of Custom intelligence and Investigation in July for evading taxes on their arms. They were

instructed not to use their arms.

"Today, I said repeatedly that team spirit and team building is a big thing and we need unity. Everyone has to look after institutional interests instead of individual interests. There may be different opinions but everyone has to accept the collective decision taken by the committee and they also have to own the decision and implement it," said Hasan, who is looking to enhance shooting's image.

"Bangladesh's shooting is a mark of pride in the country's sport because shooting has brought the most laurels from overseas among all sport so far. We hope we will be able to improve standards in the coming days as well as bring more laurel from abroad," Hasan hoped, adding that they would do everything including hiring foreign coaches to prepare shooters for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.

He also promised to hold the elections as soon as possible while continuing activities of the shooting federation.