

Bashar shocked by ban

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

After the last three days' chaos, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) finally cleared their position against the rebel cricketers as the game's governing body in the country came up with a ten-year ban for them.

BCB president Maj Gen Sina Ibn Jamali, appearing in front of the press for the first time after seven cricketers tendered their resignation letter to join the country's cricket, to declare the board's stance after a two-hour emergency meeting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium's offices in Mirpur yesterday.

"It is really unexpected. The ten-year suspension is too harsh. I can't believe it," said a 'shell-shocked' former national skipper Habibul Bashar in his instant reaction over phone.

"Hopefully we (the rebel crick-

eters) will meet tomorrow (Thursday) to decide our next course of action. We may try to meet with the board officials to explain everything," said Bashar.

Bashar along with three other "Dhaka Warriors" colleagues Shahriar Nafees, Alok Kapali and Dhiman Ghosh returned home yesterday after attending the official launch in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The most successful Bangladesh skipper said that it would be painful for him to be branded as a banned cricketer.

"I think the people in this country will not misunderstand us because we didn't commit any crime, rather we just want to play cricket," said Bashar.

"It would be an unbearable pain for me to be cast as a banned cricketer after playing for my country for so many years," added the country's highest Test run-getter.

"I don't understand why people call us rebel cricketers. There were

reasons for me to take such a decision. "I didn't consider only money because I know how big it is to represent the national team," he said.

The board has taken the decision after the rebel cricketers didn't respond to their appeal to meet them on Tuesday.

"We were not available at that time but now we can meet them. We are also available for national selection in any time and ICL authority also assured us that they will release us for any kind of national duty," he said adding that they got exceptional respect from the ICL authority.

BCB however hardly had any intention to think more with the cricketers who already signed with the ICL rather they were trying to take the initiative to make sure that there will be no such damages in the future.

The board yesterday met with some former national captains and cricketers to take their opin-

ions regarding the issue.

"I said that what has happened, has happened. Now we should think about with the future. We have to have a complete action to prevent someone to take part in this kind of tournament," said former skipper Roquibul Hasan.

"You can't stop someone to go if he has been offered huge money. There is now ICL and you never know another big-spending tournament might take place anywhere in the world. So we have to look at our whole system," he said.

On the other hand, another former national skipper Aminul Islam believed that there is no difference between ten years ban and a life ban for a cricketer.

"BCB has the right to take such a decision against their employees. But still I am optimistic that they (the players) can understand their mistakes and beg mercy to the board. And definitely board will consider their appeal," said Aminul.

Academy stay in command

SPORTS REPORTER

GP-BCB National Cricket Academy took command on day two of the second four-day against Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) Development XI at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Resuming the day on 33 for none, the visitors scored 310-8 in 94 overs in their first innings in reply of the hosts' 252.

Skipper Nayeem Islam led from the front with an unbeaten 73 while Imrul Kayes hit 67 and Arafat Sunny struck 63.

Nayeem was at the crease with Ziaur Rahman (13) when stumps were pulled for the day.

Mendis captured three wickets for 61 runs and Masmulla bagged two scalps.



Did U Know?

The word "paralympic" comes from the Latin word "para" which means "with" and "lympic" refers to the Olympic Games.



What to WATCH
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DAY'S EVENT
Citycell B. League
Arambagh v Mohammedan (3:30pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



TALK TURKEY



Luca Toni
(Bayern Munich's Italian striker)
"My goal is for us to get as far as possible. My dream is to win the Champions League. I'm really looking forward to the atmosphere. I'll do everything in my power to score."

BCCI distances itself

Cricket

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

As the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL) announced the signing of 13 leading cricketers from Bangladesh at a glitzy function here on Tuesday, the Indian cricket board sought to distance itself from the development saying it was an internal matter of the neighbouring country.

"It does not concern with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). It is an internal matter of Bangladesh Cricket Board," said BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla late on Tuesday night.

"It's for them to study the situation and to act accordingly," he added.

Earlier in the evening, former Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar, Alok Kapali, Shahriar Nafees and Dhiman Ghosh were paraded by ICL as members of its Dhaka Warriors team in the Twenty20 league in the presence of former

India captain Kapil Dev. The ICL also announced names Forhad Reza, Monjurul Islam, Mahbubul Karim, Golam Mabud, Mohammad Rafique, Mohammad Sharif, Mosharraf Hossain and Tapash Baisya.

Asked what impact their defection to ICL will have on cricket back home, Bashar, for one, said it would leave a vacuum no doubt for some time but there were enough talent to fill the void.

Bashar, who spoke on behalf of the three other Bangladeshi cricketers who were present, however appeared to send contradictory signals. While he said they joined ICL after applying for retirement from Bangladesh cricket, he also said 'we are still ready to play for Bangladesh if the cricket board allows'.

Bashar refuted the charge that they were 'anti-national' by playing for ICL.

"We are ready to serve the country whenever we are called to join the national side," he said.

Nafees, Kapali and Dhiman said

they did not join the ICL out of any sense of hurt but not being invited by Indian Cricket Board-sponsored and ICC-approved Indian Premier League (IPL).

"We are professionals and we want to play and earn our livelihood," said Nafees.

Dhiman said both IPL and ICL tournaments are big hits in Bangladesh and 'we just want to delight the fans back home and make them proud by our performance'.

Kapil expressed the hope that Bangladesh cricket would remain fine without the players who joined ICL but added 'if it affect their cricket don't blame us for that'.

The former India captain said ICL has no problem of these Bangladeshi cricketers return home and play for their country as it was ICC and BCCI which 'boycotted' ICL.

Kapil pointed out that last year ICL put together 'Lahore Badshah' team comprising rebel Pakistani cricketers and this year it is the 'Dhaka Warriors'.



Indian Cricket League chairman Kapil Dev (C) talks to rebel Bangladeshi cricketers (L-R) Alok Kapali, Shahriar Nafees, Dhiman Ghosh and Habibul Bashar during a press conference to announce the launch of ICL's Season 2 and induction of the tournament's ninth team Dhaka Warriors in New Delhi on Tuesday.

VOX POP: Readers speak out on player exodus

It is really tragic that the players showed extreme bad performance in the last couple of series. Players including the management tried to show excuses, gaps and holes for the poor performance but in my opinion the best coach, management in the world would not help the players if they do not want to learn and mend their mistakes and truly play the game with their heart and soul.

Even though the players have made their own decision I truly believe that it did come to a big shock for many fans and views of Bangladesh cricket. As (John) Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country", I really think that they have without a doubt not only fulfill their duty for the country but also stranded their colleagues, friends, fans and Bangladesh.

The players represent our country at international level. They have tarnished our image numerous times yet we stand by them. We hope and pray for them. Leaving the Bangladesh team has blown a big

hole in our belief that they never played for the love of the game.

-Omio Chowdhury
Fredericksburg, Virginia

There is one undeniable force that affects most of human race. At times the magnitude of this force can be so large that it can even lead someone to betray his own country. We like to call it the power of money.

From the latest report from some national dailies it is almost confirmed that Dhiman Ghosh and Habibul Bashar have deserted Bangladesh cricket once and for all.

ICL: Inside its the official website, they mentions about the discovery, diligence and display strategy that the group has employed to unearth new talent and help India become the number 1 ranked cricket nation in this world. How does the young stars of Bangladesh cricket factor into this 3D strategy? Unfortunately no one has an answer.

BCCI: It did not play any role directly but their strategy did cost Bangladesh some of the most

promising cricketers this country has managed to produce. To ensure maximum value, the market must be allowed to be governed by itself. The monopoly strategy employed by BCCI has not only cost the consumers of cricketers, it is now also causing enormous pain to an entirely different demographic group.

BCB: It is undoubtedly the richest sports body inside Bangladesh and yet accused of severe lack of professionalism. The selection policy has always been flawed and the lack of care for out of form players is absolutely unacceptable.

Rebels: Our country is also our mother. We do not desert our mother for the love of money. The decision to stop playing for the country that spent so much money on these cricketers is absolutely unacceptable.

It is a shame that our country will suffer since a fate. We have come a long way since those dark days prior to Dav Whitmore era. We do not want to encounter such fate again and thus it is high time that ICC steps up and saves Bangladesh



Bangladesh Cricket Board president Major General Sina Ibn Jamali (3rd from L) briefs the press about the board's decision on the rebel players while (L-R) Shafiqur Rahman, Gazi Ashraf Hossain, Ahmed Sajjadul Alam, MA Momen and Shakil Kasem look on at the board's headquarters at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Rakib named BSWA's best

UNB, Dhaka

Grandmaster Abdullah Al Rakib was named the best sportsman of the year when

Bangladesh Sports Writers Association (BSWA) yesterday announced its sports awards for 2007.

Rakib will receive the SA Mohsin Trophy and is among seven sportsmen, organisers, associations and sponsors for the awards considering their contribution in the field of

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Div II football

SPORTS REPORTER

Police Athletic Club beat Kadamtala Sangsad 2-0 in the Second Division Football League at the Kamalapur Stadium yesterday.

Barua and Amirul struck one goal each to give Police a comfortable victory.

In the day's other match at the Army Stadium in Banani, East End Club edged past Kawan Bazar by a solitary goal scored by Ismail as early as the 6th minute.

In today's matches, Prantik face Sadharan Bima while T&T Club take on Gazircho.

Brothers survive in a draw

SPORTS REPORTER



A topsy-turvy first round of the Citycell B. League ended yesterday with Brothers Union, another

Dhaka giants, failing to make most of their home match when they drew 1-1 with Chittagong Mohammedan.

Defending champions Abahani and last year's third Mukti Juddha ended up losers, runners-up Mohammedan managed to salvage one point as four of the last year's top five -- Sheikh Russel being the only exception -- got off to poor starts in the eventful opening round.

Three teams are level on three points but Khulna Abahani lead the table by virtue of better goal difference over Sheikh Russel and Rahmatganj.

Brothers, however, not only dropped points but also lost their impressive fullback Atiqur Rahman Mishu who was sent off seven minutes from time a rather lacklustre fifth game of the league at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Booked early into the first half,

the leftback who was in attacking mood throughout the game, dived inside the rival penalty area under pressure from two Mohammedan defenders. He claimed for a penalty but referee Tayeb Hasan, who was very close to the scene, immedi-

ately showed the Brothers back a second yellow card to ensure the marching order.

The decision was not only protested by the Oranges but also Mishu, who left the ground after

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Michael Oniya, the Nigerian striker who scored Brothers Union's equaliser against Chittagong Mohammedan in yesterday's B. League, skips a sliding tackle by the port city side's centre-back Shawkat at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Chelsea cruise, Roma suffer

AFP, Paris



English clubs ran the rule over their French counterparts on Tuesday as Liverpool and Chelsea beat

Marseille and Bordeaux respectively in the opening round of Champions League group stages.

A Steven Gerrard double - taking his total to 99 for the club - saw Liverpool to a 2-1 win over Marseille in France while Chelsea ran out easy 4-0 winners over Bordeaux.

Chelsea's former boss Jose Mourinho also got off to a winning start as Inter Milan beat Panathinaikos 2-0 in Athens but there was no such fate for Inter's Serie A rivals AS Roma who went down 2-1 at home to Champions League debutants Cluj - for whom Juan Cuervo notched a double.

The two Spanish sides in action also claimed all three points, Barcelona giving coach Pep Guardiola a first competitive win - 3-1 over Sporting Lisbon - while Atletico Madrid made a triumphant return to the top European club competition after a 11 year absence beating PSV Eindhoven 3-0.

Gerrard, not for the first time, brought Liverpool back into a match scoring with a sublime effort four minutes after Marseille had taken the lead, and then adding a penalty before half-time.

Marseille, though, could feel hard done by not to have at least got a point from the encounter but a mixture of poor finishing and good goalkeeping by Pepe Reina allowed Liverpool to hold out.

"We played well in the first half but then they pinned us back in the second half," admitted Gerrard.

"We stopped playing in the second-half and we will have to have a look at that and see what the

reason was."

Liverpool coach Rafa Benitez echoed fellow perfectionist Gerrard's own admission afterwards that "he played well - but he could have played better."

Benitez added: "The key was to score a third goal and finish them off but we couldn't and we were under a bit of pressure at the end."

Marseille coach Eric Gerets was downcast.

"I am very disappointed and a bit angry with the result, given the chances we created - more than five. We could have pulled it off," said the Belgian, a competition winner as a player with group rivals PSV Eindhoven 20 years ago.

Goals from Frank Lampard, Joe Cole, Florent Malouda and Nicolas Anelka ensured Chelsea made a winning return to European action at Stamford Bridge just four months after their heart-breaking Champions League final defeat to Manchester United.

But the road to May's Rome final is certain to feature many tougher tests than this and coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was determined to keep his team's feet on the ground.

"We know that we made many mistakes in the second half," he said. "We tried to attack without the ball and with no good combinations between the players."

"When you play in the Champions League and are winning 2-0 at half time you need to work the ball and control the game. You don't need to win 5-0, it is still the same three points."

Bordeaux boss Laurent Blanc added: "We were up against a superior team but we showed them too much respect. We weren't aggressive enough. The scoreline says it all."

The scoreline said it all too for AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti as he contemplated one of the more humiliating results during his tenure.

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