



PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh Cricket Board president AHM Mustafa Kamal (2nd from R) addresses a press conference after an emergency board meeting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

BCB's tough stance

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal came down heavily on Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) and two national players Mohammad Ashraf and Shakib Al Hasan who raised their voices in favour of the campaign boycotting the National Cricket League (NCL).

After an emergency board meeting yesterday, which was called to discuss the crisis over the country's lone first-class competition, the BCB boss informed the press that they have decided to defer the competition which will now start from January 13 instead of today but in the same changed format and asperannounced match fees.

In a major change, the BCB has also decided to shift the responsibility to the respective divisional authorities to run the team. "Now the league will start from January 13 and in same format and budget and the teams will be delivered by the divisional authorities and we will fix the terms and conditions with the divisional sports authorities very soon," said Kamal. BCB president was not ready to recog-

nise the CWAB as a party to mediate between the players and the board and he also issued a warning against the players by saying that they will take a tough stance to restore the discipline.

BCB took the decision after the first-class cricketers turned down the appeal to join the camp as they threatened to boycott the competition if the board doesn't increase their match fees as well as reinstate the previous format and they have also demanded to defer the competition by four/five days.

Without mentioning CWAB's name, BCB president said: "We can't bow to this kind of organisation. My door is always open but we can't talk with any bargaining agent. Cricket board can't recognise this kind of organisation and BCB has the sole authority to look after the interest of the players. And I want to make it clear that national interest is first to us."

"The recent activities of some quarters tarnished our image internationally and we can't accept it. There are some politics behind the recent happenings but we must say there is no scope to play with the country's image," he added.

He also said that they will take action against two national players who

breached the code of conduct by raising their voices against the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

"We will first talk with them to know about their version and then definitely take action. Discipline is very important for any organisation and there is no scope to consider how big a player is before taking any decision in this regard."

"We were a little bit flexible in the past as we also showed against the ICL-returnees but from now on we will not show any mercy in discipline issue," said the BCB boss.

BCB senior vice-president Mahbul Anam and tournament committee chairman Gazi Ashraf explained the reasons behind the change of the format and defended the current match fees.

"Our focus is to ensure the quality of the game not quantity," said Anam.

CWAB president and former national skipper Naimur Rahman in his reaction to the board tough stance said that they would sit with the players today and after that set the next course of action.

"It's unfortunate the way board reacted over the issue. We will sit with the players tomorrow and then let you know what would be our next course of action," said Naimur.

Arsenal, MU both win

INTERNET, undated



Arsenal won 4-1 at Portsmouth and Manchester United beat Wigan Athletic 5-0 to close in on Chelsea at the top of the table. Arsenal are four points behind the leaders with a game in hand after a stroll against Portsmouth, who are reportedly facing a winding-up order and remain four points adrift at the bottom.

"It was a very competitive game," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. "We were a bit lucky on the first goal, but the team looked really like a team who was ready for it."

"Everybody tells us to buy strikers, but we score goals, so somewhere we have balance. Our movement and our team play creates things for us."

Abou Diaby had already been denied by a fine reflex block from Pompey keeper

Asmir Begovic when Arsenal went ahead after 28 minutes.

The goal was fortuitous, Eduardo's free-kick deflecting in off Younes Kaboul - with Hermann Hreidarsson oddly static on the line - but Portsmouth could hardly say it was undeserved on the balance of play.

Samir Nasri added a second - his first since March - three minutes before half-time after Eduardo and Aaron Ramsey had created space in the box.

It was Ramsey who scored the third - Arsenal's 50th of the Premier League season - cutting in onto his left foot and driving past Begovic from 20 yards.

With 17 minutes remaining Nadir Belhadj pulled one back with a deflected shot after a one-two with Anthony Vanden Borre.

Any thought of a fightback was extinguished eight minutes later as Alex Song headed in Nasri's cross.

"We played well, we passed the ball, and we created a lot of opportunities,"

said Ramsey.

"Our confidence is very high at the moment. We go into every game thinking we can win. We'll see where that takes us come the end of the season."

United had it just as easy at home to Wigan. Wayne Rooney put them ahead after 28 minutes, Luis Valencia teeing up Rafael to cross low for the forward.

Dimitar Berbatov laid on a second three minutes later, cutting the ball back for Michael Carrick to score.

Rafael made it three on the stroke of half-time, creating space for himself in the box after being picked out by Darren Fletcher's pass.

Berbatov made it four on 50 minutes, capitalizing after Hendry Thomas had stumbled over Valencia's cross.

Rooney headed against the bar, but the fifth arrived with quarter of an hour remaining, Rooney finding Valencia, who looped the ball over Mike Pollitt.

Johnson tears ligament

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool defender Glen Johnson suffered medial ligament damage in his knee during Tuesday's match at Aston Villa, the Premier League club revealed on Wednesday.

Scans showed that the England right-back, who moved to Anfield from Portsmouth for 18 million pounds (20.1 million euros) in pre-season, tore a ligament in his right knee late in the 1-0 win and will be sidelined for several weeks.

A club spokesman said: "A scan has revealed a tear in the medial ligament in Glen's right knee. The player will see a specialist tomorrow (Thursday), after which we should be able to more accurately determine the length of his rehabilitation period."

'Kaka is indispensable'

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's Brazilian midfielder Kaka, sidelined since the end of November with a hernia, is "indispensable" for the success of the Spanish giants, his teammate Cristiano Ronaldo said in an interview published Wednesday.

Real have won all four of their matches in Kaka's absence, leading some in the Spanish media to suggest that Real play better without the 65-million-euro (93.5-million-dollar) summer signing from AC Milan.

"One can say whatever one wants, but for me Kaka is a phenomenon, I hope he will return quickly, he is indispensable for Real's success," Ronaldo told Spanish sports daily Marca.

Kaka, the winner in 2007 of the Golden Ball, awarded to the European Footballer of the Year by France Football magazine, returned to training earlier this week.

The 27-year-old could be called up to the

squad to face Osasuna in the league on Sunday in Pamplona.

Real went into the Christmas break two points behind leaders and champions Barcelona in the Primera Liga.

Meanwhile, rival sports daily AS reported that Ronaldo, who joined Real in June on a six-year deal worth 94 million euros, making him the world's most expensive player, has already become the most profitable player in the history of the Spanish club.

Portugal's Ronaldo, 24, has replaced England's David Beckham, 34, as the world's top football advertising icon, generating up to 80 million euros in advertising revenues each year, it said citing sector specialists.

In October Italian fashion designer Armani announced that Ronaldo would model his underwear and jeans in a new worldwide advertising campaign that will start early next year. Beckham posed for Armani adverts last year.

Ronaldo has already appeared bare-chested in adverts for Pepe Jeans, as well as in campaigns for Nike, Coca-cola, the video game FIFA Street 2 and Indonesian energy drink Extra Joss.



Manchester United forward Wayne Rooney (C) shoots past Wigan midfielder Hendry Thomas (L) and defender Emerson Boyce during their Premier League match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Wednesday

PHOTO: AFP

SA move back

Cricket

AFP, Cape Town

South Africa captain Graeme Smith said after his team's crushing innings defeat in the second Test against England in Durban on Wednesday that his side had failed to "go to the next level" after a glorious 2008.

His concerns are reflected in the year-end statistics.

In the 2008 calendar year, South Africa won three Tests in England and Australia, as well as sharing a series in India, winning at home against the West Indies and beating Bangladesh away and at home.

They won 11 out of 15 Tests, with just two defeats and two draws.

In 2009, starting with the "dead rubber" third Test of the series in Australia, they have been much less active in Test cricket, playing only six Tests, with just one win, four defeats and one draw.

Most of the South African players who starred in 2008 have gone backwards in statisti-

cal terms, although AB de Villiers has been a shining exception, scoring 572 runs in the calendar year at an average of 57.20.

The fast bowling attack, which was a key factor in 2008, together with a settled top six batting order and safe catching behind the wicket, has been particularly poor.

Dale Steyn took 22 wickets in five matches at an average of 32.86 but Morne Morkel's 15 wickets came at a costly 40.66 each, while Makhaya Ntini could manage only 13 wickets in six Tests at a high average of 57.00 apiece.

The fast bowlers were outshone by left-arm spinner Paul Harris, who took 26 wickets at 33.15.

South Africa named a squad of 14 for the second and third Tests against England and selection convenor Mike Procter said the team for the third Test starting in Cape Town on Sunday would come from those players.

Ntini looks like the most likely player to be axed.

He is the only black African in the squad, which could be a factor in race-conscious South Africa but Cricket SA chief executive Gerald Majola has told the team management they must pick their final eleven on cricket considerations only.

Toni loaned to Roma

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni is being lent to Serie A club AS Roma for the rest of the season, the German giants said Thursday.

"Luca Toni asked the board of Bayern Munich in personal talks to lend him to AS Roma until the end of the season for personal reasons," Bayern said in a statement.

"He wants to realise his biggest aim, playing for Italy in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, with regular appearances in Serie A."

The 32-year-old's move comes as little surprise, with the Italian saying publicly on numerous occasions that he wanted to leave Bayern following a breakdown in relations with Bayern's Dutch trainer Louis van Gaal.

Signed from Italian side Fiorentina in 2007, Toni was the Bundesliga's top scorer in his first season, with 24 goals in 31 league games on the way to Bayern winning the German title.

But since van Gaal's arrival on July 1, he has made just four league appearances, and has failed to score all season.

He stormed out of Bayern's 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 in the Bundesliga on November 7 after the coach replaced him at half-time and the Italian was later fined for his conduct and apologised.

Ribery going nowhere

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's president denied on Thursday press reports that the German giants' French international Franck Ribery was going to move to Real Madrid in a 55-million-euro deal next summer.

"There are no offers at the moment, no options and no talks at all either about him or with him," Uli Hoeness told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily.

German specialist website ran.de had reported on Wednesday that the 26-year-old winger's move was hampered out in August between Bayern and the Spanish club at the time of Dutch star Arjen

Robben's transfer to Munich. Bayern did not pay Real the agreed 25-million-euro price tag for the Dutch winger, instead sitting on the cash in anticipation of the Ribery deal, said ran.de, which is owned by German private broadcaster Sat.1.

But Hoeness, club manager at Bayern for 30 years who replaced Germany legend Franz Beckenbauer as president in November, said this was wide of the mark.

"There is no deal with Real. We paid for Robben quite normally."

He also said that the club wanted Ribery to stay once his contract expires in 2011: "That is our first option. Only if we see no chance of this will we start talking to other clubs."

Ribery, who has been out of

action through injury for over two months, has made no secret in the past of his desire to join Real.

"I would really like to win the Champions League, but our team doesn't have the necessary firepower right now," the winger told the Bild daily recently.

"At the moment, we can't compete with Barcelona, Real Madrid, Arsenal and Inter."

Other recent reports have linked him with a move to Chelsea.

NOTICE

Due to unavoidable circumstances, we could not print the CROSSWORD today. We regret any inconvenience.

--Sports Editor