

**The footballers can't do anything against the wishes of club management. If the players deny instructions from club management, they remain unpaid or are suspended. Club management should be brought to book instead of the players being made scapegoats.**

Mamunul Islam  
former national captain



## 'This is something beyond our control'

Match-fixing in Bangladesh's domestic football is nothing new, something that keeps rearing its ugly head almost every season. The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin shared his stance regarding the aforementioned conundrum during an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman**, the excerpts of which are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** As BFF president, how do you feel when you hear about match fixing allegations in the domestic circuit?

**Kazi Salahuddin (KS):** It's a very sad story for me. But remember, we took action against such things last year. Match fixing has been stopped in BPL [Bangladesh Premier League] but it resurfaced in BCL [Bangladesh Championship League]. You may write about match fixing allegations in newspapers but I need evidence to punish them. We have already formed a committee to investigate the matter.

**DS:** There are whispers that the match fixing allegation came against those clubs who hardly have any background but got permission to play the BCL directly. What will you say about it?

**KS:** What the idea we have is to allow the financially and technically strong teams into BCL because some of the clubs fail to provide money for the players' meals even. So, if the probe committee finds the accused guilty, then there is a big possibility of suspending BCL for two years. Then, we would start the league afresh through the AFC licensing process.

**DS:** There has been no evidence of referees and match commissioner mentioning anything in their match reports when it comes to a probable fixing incident. What do you say about it?

**KS:** I have sat with them [officials] five to six times. I told them that if you don't mention it to the reports, I can't punish anybody.

The reports must come from you. If you are afraid to report, then you don't need to officiate the match.

We have paid them Tk 8 crore till now. I think the BFF should stick to the process but to be honest, this is something beyond our control.

**DS:** There is also an allegation that BFF doesn't take any initiatives until the media make reports on match-fixing. What's your take on that?

**KS:** That is not right. We do many things behind the scenes. We sit with the referees, talk to the players, all of which remains undisclosed in the media. We may suspend referees but can't make it public due to the FIFA instructions. Besides, we are unable to punish anyone without evidence but the media has an advantage to write what they see.

**DS:** How can this match-fixing issue be solved?

**KS:** If I suspend seven and ban two, then two more pop up to commit the same crime; what can I do then? It is a continuous process. I never compromise on three things – racism, drugs and match-fixing but I must have the evidence before punishing anyone.

**DS:** How is match fixing, spot fixing and betting ruining the development of the country's football?

**KS:** It is a big obstacle. If such things happen in domestic football, then it is really difficult to develop the country's football. Actually, the BFF doesn't have any role in nationwide development, rather it has a role in organising the league, tournaments and providing the training facilities of the national football team. It is the role of every football federation in the world but in Bangladesh it doesn't quite match. That's why we have made academies for boys and girls as the clubs are unwilling to contribute to the development of the country's football. We can't get results until the clubs become professional.



## The changing landscape of match-fixing in football

**After just eight matches, Moni realised that the club's purpose was to stay merely afloat in the BCL while making money from colluding with other forces through various forms of match-fixing.**

ATIQUÉ ANAM

When former national team striker Saifur Rahman Moni resigned from the job of a Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) outfit two weeks ago, it was probably the first time in the country that a professional football coach had taken such a step in protest of what he believes was match-fixing by its officials and players.

The rookie coach, who had put his heart to the job of Azampur Club, didn't take long to realise that his ambition of becoming a coach of a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) club one day, for which he had already enrolled into an AFC A licence course, was not the ambition of the club.

After just eight matches, Moni realised that the club's purpose was to stay merely afloat in the BCL while making money from colluding with other forces through various forms of match-fixing.

It's not that Moni hadn't seen match-fixing in Bangladesh football before; in fact when he hung up his boots in 2008, things weren't much better. But with the professionalism that has been forced into the top two tiers over the past decade or so and the regulations put in place, there was certainly the expectation that things would be much cleaner now.

Unfortunately that didn't turn out to be the case. Match-fixing is as much prevalent today, if not more, as it was in yesteryears; the only differences are in the medium and modus operandi.

In old times, match-fixing used to be

pretty straight-forward: two clubs playing a specific match would decide on the outcome of the match beforehand and the club hierarchy would instruct their players to act in a specific manner. It was usually done to give a club an advantage in their title race or relegation battle and the reward would be in cash or kind.

Today the whole nature of the fixing game has changed, owing to the availability of live telecasts on television and live updates on football apps. Match-fixing has evolved into spot-fixing, online betting and other forms in a way that a single goal or a specific stat, which may or may not affect the final outcome of the game, can be subject to fixing worth lakhs of taka or dollars. There will obviously be agents on the pitch and perhaps in the dugout, but the masterminds could very well be operating from the confines of their homes in a far-off place, sometimes beyond borders.

The first case of spot-fixing and online betting involving a club in Bangladesh football was exposed last year in the BPL. It was a unique case for Bangladesh, with people from within the country and beyond joining hands and importing ideas, and using a delinquent club for making illegal money.

But once the red flag was raised by Asian football body, there was no saving Arambagh KS – the club found guilty – and a number of their players and officials. An exemplary punishment was meted out, which has seemingly forced the dark forces away from the BPL.

But those forces and the ideas are still very

much active in our football, namely in BCL and lower leagues where regulation is lax and monitoring is minimal.

The other factor that is contributing to the proliferation of match-fixing here is the lack of scrutiny these clubs receive before getting approval to play in the leagues.

On paper, a professional club needs to fulfil a few criteria, including having a solid financial base as well as owning proper training facilities, certified coaching staff and residential facilities for the players. However, some of the clubs currently playing in the BCL fare very poorly in regards to these criteria, especially in regards to financial condition. The purpose of these clubs is to work as vehicles for helping out other clubs or cater to the demands of spot fixers and online bettors.

According to media reports, there are at least five clubs out of the 12 operating in the BCL that are involved in some way or another with such suspicious activities.

Moni, in an interview with **The Daily Star**, termed this situation in the BCL as an epidemic. Now without a job, the aspiring coach may well have to wait for some time before he gets another job, but his personal sacrifice has already had a positive impact in the form of questions being asked and investigations demanded.

If the reaction from the authorities lead to something similar to the Arambagh episode, Moni's resignation would be worth it and he could certainly dream of soon returning to a dugout not stained by black money.

**Former national team striker-turned-coach Saifur Rahman Moni stepped down after the game in which his own side, Azampur FC, were allegedly involved in match-fixing in the Bangladesh Champions League (BCL). Moni revealed his brief BCL experience with **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman** during an interview. The excerpts are below:**

**The Daily Star (DS):** How was your maiden coaching experience long after retiring from football?

**Saifur Rahman Moni (SRM):** The experience was good but the environment and situation in Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) is really sick and dirty. I don't know about the situation in the Bangladesh Premier League but BCL is messy.

**DS:** You complained about your seventh and eighth matches but what about the first six?

**SRM:** Everything went in the right direction in the first six matches as I believe the boys fought hard in every match. However, I was doubtful about the seventh match [against Uttara FC] but everything was clear to me in the eighth match [against Farashganj SC], following which I resigned from the coaching role.

**DS:** Could you please elaborate on how the two matches went?

**SRM:** Actually, if you were present on the ground, you would also clearly understand that the match was being fixed. Why should I toil hard from 6:30am to 11:00am for the team if the outcome of the match is predetermined by outsiders rather than the performance on the ground?

What happened against Farashganj SC was really naked. You see, I always change the captaincy in every match and I appointed Faizullah as the captain in the match against Farashganj but the club president Saidur Rahman Manik opposed the move and reappointed Saddam as the captain. This incident surprised me as such a thing had never happened before. During the match, the club president stood at the dugout, in my place, and delivered the instructions to the players, saying 'Go! Go score goals'. And also, Farashganj did not field the players against whom I did my homework. Having considered everything, I understood that something was gravely wrong. When the game started, it became all too obvious that our opponents allowed our players to strike on goal.

**DS:** Who do you think is involved in the wrongdoings?

**SRM:** Match-fixing has been happening in our domestic competitions for a long time but that was only restricted to deciding



the title or avoiding relegation. However, this time around, many clubs are involved instead of a single team.

Sometimes players, club officials or coaches are also involved. In short, whoever is needed to fix matches, is being used. It all involves a big syndicate, I think, who are tough to expose publicly.

**DS:** Did you share your observations with the BFF?

**SRM:** Yes, I wrote to the Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary saying that I am doubtful of whether our club played

its seventh and eighth matches properly, so that I don't involve myself in any illegal activity.

**DS:** Why are these match fixing, spot fixing or betting taking place?

**SRM:** I think the main objective of committing such things is money. I don't know how much money is exchanged in each fixed match but it must be a large amount. We have heard that around four to five clubs are involved in match-fixing, which has turned into an epidemic here, I think.

**DS:** What is your take on the standard of BCL?

**SRM:** The players of BCL are

supposed to move into higher tier leagues such as BPL but how many players are moving there every season? The number is few. I want to share something else with you. At the beginning, when I asked our players questions concerning basic football terminologies, only one or two could answer. I reckon there is no production from BCL and match-fixing is also destroying the players further.

**DS:** Did BFF arrange any seminar on match-fixing issues before the start of BCL?

**SRM:** No, I did not see anything. However, the BFF did a good job of arranging a seminar, in presence of the players and referees, informing the updated rules of the game.

**DS:** Do you think it is possible to eliminate match-fixing at all?

**SRM:** Nothing is impossible. I think every stakeholder needs to be aware of match-fixing. I think the journalists hardly cover the BCL matches but once they had covered the Pioneer League matches. There are hardly any representatives from the federation present in BCL matches. If the monitoring was strengthened, then such things would not have happened so openly like now, I think.