

Azarenka hits back at Wimbledon

REUTERS, Madrid

Belarus' Victoria Azarenka said the Wimbledon ban on players from Russia and her country makes no sense and the former world number one called on the tennis governing bodies to take action against the decision.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC), which hosts the grass court Grand Slam, took the decision in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the stand was swiftly condemned by the men's and women's tours. Read full story

The ATP and the WTA denounced the AELTC decision as "discriminatory", with Steve Simon, the women's tour chief, last week warning of "strong reactions". Read full story

"If you are asking me if I agree with Wimbledon or I see their reasoning after being on a personal call with them, I don't see their reasoning," Azarenka, told reporters in Madrid on



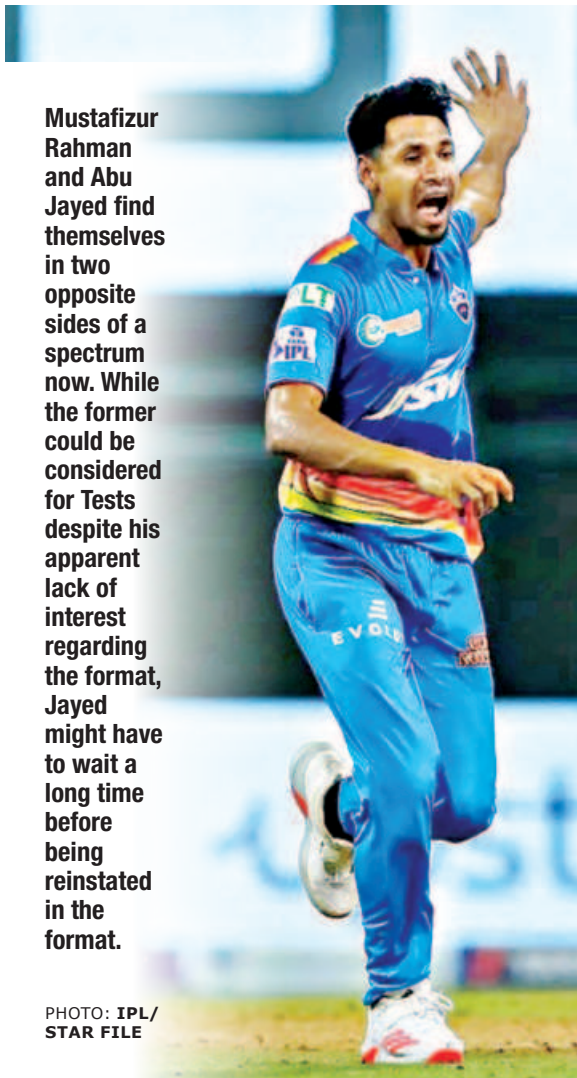
Thursday.

"It does not make sense and it does not connect to what they are saying."

The 32-year-old Azarenka, ranked 17th in the world, won her opening round at the WTA 1000 event in Madrid on Thursday but her fellow Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka's title defence ended with a 6-2, 3-6, 6-4 defeat to Amanda Anisimova.

Tennis governing bodies have banned Russia and Belarus from international team competitions following the invasion, but individual players from the two countries are allowed to continue competing as neutrals.

The 2022 Wimbledon championships will be the first time that players have been banned on the grounds of nationality since the immediate post-World War Two era, when German and Japanese players were excluded.



Mustafizur Rahman and Abu Jayed find themselves in two opposite sides of a spectrum now. While the former could be considered for Tests despite his apparent lack of interest regarding the format, Jayed might have to wait a long time before being reinstated in the format.

PHOTO: IPL/STAR FILE



Onus on BCB to establish the clarity of its vision

NABID YEASIN

A sort of contradictory scenario currently prevails in Bangladesh cricket. Interested cricketers, once considered as potential mainstays of a format, are being ignored from their preferred format while the ones who are reluctant to play are given the opposite treatment.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is not new to operating in such chaotic fashion, caused by their own apparent lack of vision. However, the existing modus operandi could not only hamper country's cricket but also drive a wedge between the players and the board itself.

The latest perplexing scenario has seen Bangladesh pacer Abu Jayed being shrugged off from the squad for the first Test against Sri Lanka next month. Once hailed as the main seamer for the Tigers in Tests, especially in away tours for his ability to exploit the overseas conditions, Jayed has been dropped 'without explanation' after being dragged only to warm the bench in New Zealand and South Africa tours, earlier this year.

Even the pacer wondered why someone like Shohidul Islam, yet to get his international cap, got the nod instead for a series in which Bangladesh are missing a few of their key frontline quicks due to injury.

While Jayed is left wondering what he

had done wrong, Mustafizur Rahman is probably scratching his head over trying to find a way out of the precarious situation the board president Nazmul Hassan has threatened to put him in.

After years of speculation surrounding Mustafizur's apparent reluctance to play Tests, the 26-year-old finally made his intentions clear to the board earlier. The left-arm pacer did not want to be included in the Test set up and understandably, BCB had kept him out of its central contract for the red-ball format.

Things, however, could get a bit tricky to fathom when trying to find logic behind the following statement of Hassan: "Mustafizur will have to play Sri Lanka Tests if BCB needs him." It is the 'have to play' part that creates confusion.

BCB did say that it formed the current central contract for all three formats only after seeking the players' plans and preferences regarding their choice of formats. Also, did BCB president Hassan not say over and over again to the media that 'if a player doesn't want to play any format or a series, he would be allowed to do so given the player informs the board of his intentions beforehand'?

Mustafizur, as it seems, had followed the protocol to a tee and yet, finds himself in more than a spot of bother now.

What Mustafizur wants is something

of a necessity for players around the globe currently. With the rising intensity of tours and series and the uprise of franchise cricket around the globe, it is only understandable that players would reserve themselves for certain formats or even series in order to maximise career's output.

That's how it has been for top teams around the world with cricket boards even finding ways to not only proceed without their premier players but also excel in tournaments and tours at times.

Shakib Al Hasan had opted to skip several series before but his methods and penchant for ill-timings had sparked massive uproars. Even Tamim Iqbal has let his feelings known about the T20 format. But for some reason, the Bangladesh ODI skipper is still having to wait out the 'six-month break' from the format that he had asked for back in January before finally announcing what the world is already aware of.

Maybe it is time for BCB to act on their words and actually give the players the freedom instead of just putting it on paper or saying it in front of the media. And by doing so, the current hectic international calendar could be managed while a player would be able to clear his mind, plan for a specific format and excel in the manner resembling Mustafizur in IPL currently.

Mosaddek called up for first SL Test

SPORTS REPORTER

Mosaddek Hossain has been called up to the Bangladesh Test side after over two years, ahead of the first of the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka which are part of the ICC World Test Championship.



The all-rounder, who played his last Test back in September 2019 against Afghanistan, will add extra balance to the side in the absence of injured Mehedi Hasan Miraz, according to chief selector Minhajul Abedin.

Earlier, the selectors named off-spinner Nayeem Hasan as replacement for Miraz after the all-rounder injured his little finger on right hand during a Dhaka Premier League game last week.

"Since Miraz offers variety of an all-rounder, we have included him as he can bowl handy off-spin alongside his batting abilities down the order. Nayeem is also there in the squad as a genuine off-spinner but since he is out of international cricket for a while, we have decided to include Mosaddek as an all-rounder option," Minhajul told The Daily Star.

Mosaddek had a good outing in the just-concluded DPL for Abahani, finishing as the third highest run-getter with 658 runs in 15 games at an average of 47. The 26-year-old also bagged 16 wickets at an economy of 4.53.



Salah, Kerr win football writers' awards

AFP, London

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah has been voted footballer of the year by sportswriters in England, while Chelsea's Australian striker Sam Kerr won the women's award.

Salah took 48 percent of the vote for the Football Writers' Association award, ahead of Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne and West Ham midfielder Declan Rice.

Salah, whose 30 goals this season have spearheaded Liverpool's bid for a quadruple of trophies, is in talks about a new contract, with the club increasingly hopeful the Egyptian international will stay at Anfield.

The 29-year-old wins the football writers' award for the second time.

Kerr, whose 18 goals have helped Chelsea top the Women's Super League table, claimed 40 percent of the vote with Arsenal forward Vivianne Miedema in second place and Lauren Hemp of Manchester City third.

Kings hit Uttar Baridhara for six

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings survived a first-half scare to hand a massive 6-0 thrashing to minnows Uttar Baridhara Club in the Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

SPORTS REPORTER

From the word go, charges of Oscar Bruzon played a patient build-up game with high-line defence against Baridhara, who adapted to counter on the break by exploiting huge spaces behind Kings backline. Baridhara's Egyptian forward-turn-midfielder Mostafa troubled Kings defenders by catapulting long balls to the striking duo of Jewel Mia and Rashed Hossain.

Baridhara, who suffered a single-goal defeat to Kings in their previous BPL meeting this season, looked vibrant in every defensive transition against the hot-favourites. Mostafa and Uzbek midfielder Yevgeniy Kochnev combined to intercept and foil several Kings' attacks, after which they countered well by penetrating through the left flank, but they could not keep the momentum once Kings drew first blood.

Although it was Uttar Baridhara who came close to taking the lead in the early minutes as Jewel ran diagonally from the left flank before latching a powerful shot, however off target, from the edge of D box. In the 15th minute, Jewels's shot struck the crossbar after the forward, availing a long pass, sent the ball over advancing goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico, much to the home side's relief.

Six minutes later, Kings new-signing Gambian forward Nuha Morang capitalised

on a missed pass from a Baridhara player and raced into the box but woodwork denied a goal again. However, Kings did not wait much to break the deadlock with Brazilian Miguel Figueira brilliantly placing a Yeasin Ararat square-pass home to score in a successive game. Miguel, unfortunately, suffered an injury soon and had to leave the ground to miss the flurry of goals that followed.

Robson Da Silva assisted Sohel Rana's maiden goal for Kings and made it 2-0 in the 30th minute before new-signing Nuha also opened his mark in his second game with a header off a Masuk Mia Jonny cross minutes before the interval.

After resumption, substitute Towhidul Alam Sabuj made it 4-0 with a long-range effort in the 87th minute while Baridhara's substitute defender Khokon Mia struck his own net while clearing a low cross in extra minute. Substitute forward Suman Reza then completed the rout with a placing shot, assisted by Robson again, to ensure Kings' 10th win in 13 matches.

Kings are five points ahead of second-placed Sheikh Jamal DC, who beat Muktiyoddha Sangsad yesterday at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj. Nigerian duo Musa Najera and Solomon King scored for Sheikh Jamal while Aboubacar Camara could only get the consolation goal for the bottom dwellers.



Bashundhara Kings' new Spanish recruit Nuha Marong scored his first goal as the defending champions thrashed Uttar Baridhara 6-0 in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED