

## NZC decision shines a ray of hope

SPORTS REPORTER

Many probably did not notice, but the news was a huge step towards gender equality in sport, specifically in cricket, when New Zealand Cricket (NZC) and the players' association signed a five year deal on Tuesday that will see male and female cricketers receive equal pay.

The agreement will see women at both international and domestic level receive the same match fee as men across all formats and competitions.

It was a step that broke the mould in women's cricket as NZC became the first board in international cricket to implement equal pay for males and females.

However, considering the current context of Bangladesh cricket, equal pay remains a distant reality despite a considerable improvement in narrowing the pay gap between men and women players in the national team.

The top centrally contracted male cricketers like Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim receive a monthly salary of over Tk 4,00,000 while the lowest monthly salary is over 2,00,000.

Although there has been a significant improvement in their package, an A-grade Bangladesh national women's cricketer like Rumana Ahmed, Salma Khatun or Nigar Sultana receive a monthly salary of over Tk 70,000 per month. Meanwhile, females in the lower grades get around Tk 50,000 as monthly salary after the Bangladesh Cricket Board increased the salary up to 33 per cent in an attempt to encourage female cricketers.

In terms of match fees, male players reportedly earn Tk 6,00,000 (approximately USD 7,000) per Test, BDT 3,00,000 (approximately USD 3,500) per ODI, and BDT 2,00,000 (approximately USD 2,350) for each T20I. On the other hand, women cricketers earn USD 300 and USD 150 for ODIs and T20Is respectively.



"It wouldn't be right to compare (New Zealand Cricket's initiative) because it wouldn't match in many contexts. We are trying to improve when it comes to discrimination between male and female cricketers and we have plans," BCB's women's wing chairman and director Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel told The Daily Star. "But you also need to accept reality. What I can say is that it has changed a lot if you look at what it was in the past."

Despite the attempts to enhance women cricketers' pay in Bangladesh cricket, the picture in the rural and grassroots level remains disappointing. Many female cricketers don't even know what a match fee is. But there is a ray of hope, in that cricket can change the lives of these girls.

"Many girls who love this game and take it as a passion don't know what a match fee is. They only know that they have come from the village to Dhaka to play cricket and they dream of representing the Bangladesh team like Janhara, Salma and others."

"However if we compare women's with men's, I believe that girls have shown great potential. If we can encourage our girls to play more cricket in rural areas, it will help us stop child marriage and parents will show more interest in allowing their girls to play this game," said former female cricketer Mishi Chowdhury.



Jonny Bairstow and Joe Root (inset) hit hundreds as England continued their resurgence with a record fourth-innings chase to beat India by seven wickets in the Covid-delayed fifth Test at Edgbaston yesterday.

PHOTO:REUTERS

## School chess returns with a new hope

ANISUR RAHMAN

Since the emergence of Enamul Hossain Razib as the country's fifth and last Grandmaster in 2008, no Bangladeshi chess player has won a single GM norm.

The sorry state of the game has apparently prompted Bangladesh Chess Federation (BCF) to revive school chess tournament, which had produced talented players such as former national women's champion Sharmin Sultan Shirin, WTM Shamima Akter Liza, IM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagor and IM Mohammad Fahad Rahman.

Standard Chartered Bank played a key role in the rise of talented players since 1999 to 2012 except for two years from 2009 to 2010, but the bank withdrew its sponsorship due to the organisers' failure in organising the final round in Dhaka in 2013.

The broken pipeline is now set to be revived through Marks Active School Chess Championship, a championship which will be held on home-and-away format. The inauguration of the championship was held at a hotel in Dhaka on Monday and the games will start on July 23 in 16 districts.

"We held the school tournament



twice in last six years with students only from Dhaka schools. However, our president IGP Benazir Ahmed has roped in Abul Khair Group to sponsor school chess across the country for the next five years," BCF general secretary Syed Shahabuddin Ahmed Shamim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Unlike previous occasions, this

time the participating schools are given importance with eight to 10 educational institutes competing on home-and-away format in each of 64 districts before the district champions move into divisional level and eight divisional champions play in the final round in Dhaka.

Some 20,000 students from 3500 schools across the country

are expected to be involved and the players will be given a week-long training before the kick-off at district level.

"We don't want to chase a sixth, seventh or eighth Grand Master, instead we want to produce at least 100 potential players, who will have rating between 2200 to 2400 and will have the ability to fight for GM norms, through this championship," said the BCF general secretary.

GM Razib has termed BCF's initiative and different format of the championship as an encouraging one.

"As schools will compete as teams, I think the new format will increase interest in schools, who earlier didn't show much interest in individual participants (students)," Razib said, adding that objective of the home-and-away format is to inspire schools to create chess clubs and a chess culture in every school across the country.

"We should set our target to spread chess across the country instead of targeting to get a sixth Grand Master. If we can do it through the school chess championship, we will get different kinds of talented players who will later be FM, IM and then GM will come automatically which is happening in India now," opined Razib.

## Will Riyad meet Mominul's fate?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Following the T20 World Cup debacle in the UAE last year, there were talks in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) hierarchy about finding a new direction for the T20I team.

However, with two key series against Pakistan and Afghanistan so soon after that debacle, the BCB did not want to mess up the balance of the side and create further chaos.

But the series against Pakistan and Afghanistan saw similar performances when BCB did not want to rock the boat by relieving Mahmudullah Riyad of the captaincy even after insipid performances from the team. It was hoped that four months' break following the

Afghanistan series would see the skipper set a much more defined outline for the side but after the first two T20Is in the Caribbean, the team's tactical processes still appear half-cooked.

To make matters worse, Riyad's form with the bat did not inspire confidence in the side.

Coming in at number five, Riyad's role is to give the team the momentum in the end overs by stepping on the power-hitting paddle. There have been many occasions in the past where Riyad has turned saviour by putting his skill-hitting ability to use.

That brings BCB to the current situation where the captain himself has not been amongst the runs. When he has wanted to accelerate in recent outings, it has only led to his dismissal, much in the same way he fell in the two T20Is in Dominica against West Indies.

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## 'Healthy' Nadal eyes Wimbledon semis

AFP, London

Rafael Nadal has shrugged off fresh concerns over his fitness as he targets a place in the Wimbledon semi-finals on Wednesday.

The 36-year-old Spaniard played his last 16 clash at the All England Club on Monday against Botic van de Zandschulp with strapping across his abdomen.

Only last month, he won a 14th French Open with his troublesome left foot anaesthetised before undergoing career-saving treatment.

Nadal refused to discuss whether or not his latest physical concern is a worry.

"I'm a little bit tired to talk about my body, all the issues that I am having. I prefer to not talk about that now," said Nadal. "All respect for the rest of the opponents. For the moment I am healthy enough to keep going and fight for the things that I want."

Nadal is halfway to the first calendar Grand Slam by a man since Rod Laver in 1969.

After needing four sets in each of the first two rounds to progress, Nadal has since looked impressive, sweeping past Lorenzo Sonego and Van de Zandschulp to make the quarter-finals for an eighth time.

On Wednesday, he will seek to reach the semi-finals, also for the eighth time, when he faces in-form Taylor Fritz.

The American is in the last-eight of a Slam for the first time and has yet to drop a set. The 24-year-old defeated Nadal in the Indian Wells Masters final earlier this year when the Spaniard was suffering from a cracked rib.