

Wholesale changes urged after Shohag’s ban

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh’s football fraternity was rocked on Friday when FIFA’s adjudicatory chamber of the independent Ethics Committee sanctioned the general secretary of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), Abu Nayeem Shohag, imposing on him a two-year ban from all football-related activities for having used false and/or falsified documents to justify payments made by the BFF with FIFA funds.

Like the fans, the news came as a shock to former national footballers and organisers as well but they were not ready to point fingers only towards Shohag. Instead, they saw it as a collective failure of the governing body of football in the country, currently under the helm of Kazi Salahuddin.

Former Bangladesh captain Arif Hossain Moon, who claimed to have resigned from the post of the BFF’s executive committee in March this year for not being able to stop such irregularities, informed that Shohag was made a scapegoat as he just followed instructions from the top.

“Shohag just became a scapegoat because he did as he was instructed. I wouldn’t say it’s the board but rather two to four individuals who directed Shohag,” Moon said.

Moon also slammed Salahuddin, saying that the BFF boss has tarnished the image of the country’s football as an organiser.

“Kazi Salahuddin’s image as a footballer has been tarnished only due to his failure as an organiser. I, still to this moment, have the utmost respect for the former

BFF supplied evidences of approvals from FIFA for each of the transactions, however the Adjudicatory Chamber most illegally did not take into consideration such critical evidence and passed the decision communicated on 14 April 2023, which makes it apparent that the decision is not only erroneous and defective but also targetted and biased towards Bangladesh Football Federation – A statement from the law firm representing Shohag read.

footballer Kazi Salahuddin but I have absolute disgust for organiser Kazi Salahuddin.

“This man [Salahuddin] has deprived a generation of football only because of his ego, stubbornness, and attitude. He has ruined a generation. In every board meeting, some of us have taken the initiative to talk but there is no point because the constitution of the football federation is such that the president is all in all. What can you say there? We have tried a lot from the inside but we couldn’t change their mentality,” Moon added.

Such accusations of irregularities within BFF are nothing new. Late Badal Roy, another former footballer, and ex-BFF vice-president, had always remained vocal in questioning the financial irregularities of the federation in the past.

Another former captain and coach, Golam Sarwar Tipu, said that the time has come for a massive overhaul in Bangladesh football, and urged for a change in the entire BFF management in order to improve the standard of football in the country.

“Things won’t change just by replacing Shohag as those who are in control at the moment, they might appoint someone else and guide the person in a similar manner. But obviously, I would like to see some good changes. But what else can you expect from this management as they will only say they are sad. I don’t think things will change under this management,” said Tipu.

While another former national striker Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, who also was an executive committee member of BFF from 2008 to 2016, said that the incident will drag the country’s football through the mud.

Arsenal want to ‘finish the job’

REUTERS

Arsenal’s players must pull out all the stops and “finish the job” if they hope to fend off rivals Manchester City and win the club’s first Premier League title since 2004, manager Mikel Arteta said ahead of Sunday’s trip to West Ham United.

The leaders’ seven-match winning run in the league allowed them to maintain their lead over second-placed City, but a 2-2 draw at Liverpool last weekend has given their pursuers a chance to ratchet up the pressure on the Londoners.

Arsenal have a six-point lead over City, but Pep Guardiola’s side have a game in hand, and the two teams are due to meet at the Etihad Stadium later this month.

Sports data company Opta are now touting City as favourites to win the Premier League this season, and when asked about it, Arteta told reporters: “If you asked them at the start of the season, it was like this so nothing has changed.

“You need luck in the right moment. That is really important and how you think about it. There is another part in sport, it’s about inches. Those inches have to go your way.

“We are where we are. We are happy where we are. We have to finish the job. In order to do that, we need



that extra bit of everybody.”

Arsenal next face 14th-placed West Ham, who have inched away from the relegation zone with two victories in their last three league games.

The Hammers are managed by David Moyes, who coached Arteta at Everton.

“Very difficult game. We know we have been here a few times and we find a few tricky games,” Arteta said.

“I know David well and I know how he will prepare games. It will be a big derby for us.

“(I have) more than respect (for Moyes), it’s admiration. I loved playing

under him. I would go through a brick wall for him when he was my manager. Anyone would in that (Everton) squad.”

On Sunday, Arsenal will be without William Saliba, who suffered a back injury last month, but Arteta said the centre back is “progressing well”, adding that forward Eddie Nketiah is available for selection.

“Hopefully we will have him (Saliba) in the next weeks. Eddie is fully back now,” Arteta said.

“He (Saliba) is not far. We need to be cautious because of the injury but he is evolving well.”



‘I am clean, but I take responsibility’

The FIFA-imposed suspension of Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag due to financial irregularities and misuse of funds has been the talk of the town, with many pointing their fingers at the federation’s top brass for turning a blind eye for so long. BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who is serving his fourth consecutive term at the helm of Bangladesh football since 2008, spoke to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman after a short media brief. The excerpts of that conversation are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Following the BFF general secretary’s suspension by FIFA, everyone is raising fingers at you and asking why the right systems were not in place.

Kazi Salahuddin (KS): It is understandable for a second grader to cause this problem due to laziness and eccentricity. If I knew about their laziness, I would have never allowed it.

DS: FIFA even proved financial irregularities in repairing and installing water pipes at the BFF. What do you say about it?

KS: I am not doing business here. I don’t know how the tenders are floated and how the money is given away to the parties. It is their duty to buy everything. I did not even know that they bought a bus (for the women’s football team) because it was purchased by the purchase committee. The cheque is signed by any two of three and I sign after (Abdus Salam Mursheedy (chairman of the finance committee) signs it.

DS: Did you have an inkling that

your employees may be punished by FIFA?

KS: When they travelled to Zurich, I was a hundred per cent sure they were going to get punished.

DS: Do agree that the BFF’s internal and external audits were faulty?

KS: What I have heard is that FIFA are not talking about faults in the account, but rather faults in the system. They gave us Tk 10 and the account kept it intact. But they questioned the system. I agree that there might have been a fault in the system.

DS: How big of a blow is this for you going forward?

KS: It’s definitely a big blow. But I still believe there was no stealing. I don’t find any money at BFF. Then how can it be stolen. You never found any documents about me spending BFF money for trips abroad. I pay the hotel fare out of pocket when I travel to Zurich. I am the only (federation) president who gives money from his own pocket

to run the sport.

DS: Who should be blamed for financial irregularities and misuse of FIFA funds?

KS: I don’t want to blame anyone. I want to take the responsibility on my own shoulders because I don’t have any benefit or disadvantage to sit here. However, everybody in the BFF knows everything hundred per cent.

DS: What is the future of Bangladesh football?

KS: I actually don’t know. My mandate is up to 2024 and I think there will be no problems getting funds from FIFA, who are now happy with the BFF account because they went through it from 2016 to 2020. But it is true that we may face problems roping in sponsors for football events.

DS: What is the message for football loving people of the country?

KS: I am completely clean but I am taking all responsibility of this incident as the head of Bangladesh Football Federation.

Why Shohag was banned?: FIFA explains

Despite the heatwave, the whole nation celebrated the Bengali New Year on Friday with utmost zeal and the hope of a prosperous future but had ended up receiving a jolt by the FIFA in the evening.

Bangladesh football had long been heading down a slippery slope and the news – of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag receiving a two-year ban from all football related activities for having violated FIFA’s Code of Ethics – transmitted massive shockwaves across the football and sports fraternity in the country.

The allegations submitted by the Investigatory Chamber (IC) of the FIFA Ethics Committee showed that Abu Nayeem Shohag, in his position as General Secretary of the BFF, misused FIFA Forward funds and negligently allowed the use of forged or falsified documents to support the transactions BFF made with FIFA funds.

Alongside the ban, Shohag was also penalised 10,000 Swiss Franc. Alongside several questionable incidents, the FIFA’s 51-page report linked four major transactions.

● The first one involved the purchase of sport wearable goods in June 2000 – amounting to USD 30,0271 – for the residential camp in Dhaka and matches of the Bangladesh national football team. The BFF had received three quotations from Sports Link, Sports Corner and Robin Enterprise and Sports Link won the bid. However, IC deduced a number of problems with the quotations received by BFF in relation to the transaction and arrived at the conclusion that those



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“have not been made by different companies.”

● For instance, all three quotations had the same layout with the same format and located signature space, and all quotations misspelled “Outations”. Also, the owner of Sports Link appeared to be a former employer of Sports Corner.

● The other three transactions – comprising the purchase of 400 footballs in January 2020 (US\$ 13,9212), flight tickets in November 2019 (USD 19,9254), lawn mowers in February 2020 (USD 1,412,606) had similar issues like the aforementioned first transaction.

● The IC also analysed the reviews executed for the years 2016 to 2019 as well as the forensic audit conducted by BDO for the years 2017 to 2020 and noted that BFF had continuously failed to observe the requirements included in the FIFA Forward Regulations.

● BDO reported that significant cash withdrawals from FIFA Forward bank account – without relation to the Forward Programme – have been identified and that no documentation or explanation for the purposes of these cash withdrawals was received from the BFF.

● In the same line, the final report referred to BDO’s findings regarding a water pipeline transaction made by the BFF in 2019, which had questionable elements in the quotations from the bidders and the subsequent financial documents.