

BCB to reveal new contracts by December 31

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal has requested Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to discount him from the 2024 central contracts.

The contracts are expected to be announced by December 31, informed BCB cricket operations committee chairman Jalal Yunus yesterday.

"Tamim has his own plan and he has requested not to include him now in the new central contracts," Jalal told reporters at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

He is supposed to meet with our board president [Nazmul Hassan Papon] after the national elections, and only after that his future plan will be finalised," the BCB official added.

Jalal further informed that the draft has already been prepared but, before making the announcement, they will seek the board president's approval.

BCB had previously named 21 cricketers for the 2023 contracts, out of which four players -- Liton Das, Shakib Al Hasan, Taskin Ahmed and Mehedi Hasan Miraz -- made the cut in all three formats.

This time, Najmul Hossain Shanto -- the Tigers' stand-in captain across all formats -- and pacer Shoriful Islam are expected to join the core group.

Interestingly, Mosaddek Hossain, who was named in the T20 format of the central contract, remained unfeatured for Bangladesh this year.



English referee Rebecca Welch shows a yellow card to Fulham defender Calvin Bassey (L) during their English Premier League match against Burnley at Craven Cottage in London on Saturday. The match was a historic one as Welch became the first female referee to officiate in a top-division football match in England.

PHOTO: AFP

England rope in Pollard for T20 WC

REUTERS

England have appointed former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard as an assistant coach for the Twenty20 World Cup next year, the country's cricket board (ECB) announced on Sunday.

Pollard helped the West Indies win the World Cup in 2012 while the 36-year-old, who made a name for himself as a T20 specialist, won five Indian Premier League titles with the Mumbai Indians between 2013 and 2020.

The 2024 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the United States in June.

"Pollard will join the England men's team specifically for the T20 World Cup as an assistant coach and to provide expertise of local conditions," the ECB said in a statement.

"Pollard was a part of West Indies' 2012 men's T20 World Cup success and has vast experience in the format having played more than 600 matches."

England are the defending world champions in the format.

The ODI bubble bursts in 2023

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

A year of disappointment ended on a positive note for Bangladesh with a dominant win in New Zealand, but it did little to make up for what has been an abysmal year for the Tigers in their favourite format -- the ODIs.

The Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side defeated the Kiwis by nine wickets on Saturday, ending Bangladesh's 18-match losing streak in ODIs against the hosts in New Zealand.

But this historic win came after a series of disappointments in ODIs for the Tigers in 2023, making it their worst ever year in the format.

2023 has been Bangladesh's busiest ever year in ODIs. They have played 32 matches as part of six bilateral series -- four at home and two away-- and taken part in the Asia Cup in August-September and the ICC World Cup in October-November.

On paper, the year held a lot of promise for the Tigers, but as it



that while Bangladesh played with their best available XI at all times in the Super League, desperate to win, the other teams were often playing without their best players.

With the advent of Twenty20 franchise cricket, ODIs have been losing relevance in most top cricketing countries, with many players opting out of bilateral series.

The boards have also become more cautious about managing the workload of their best cricketers, often resting them in ODI engagements to keep them fresh for Tests and ICC events.

Because of this, top teams like Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and India often fielded understrength teams in bilateral series, which also gave them a chance to test new players and increase their players' pool.

But Bangladesh continued with their approach of always playing with the best available players even after the World Cup qualification had been ensured and this tendency hurt them in the World Cup, where they had to take untested players.

However, even after this tactical gaffe Bangladesh should've done better in at least the home ODIs.

But other than the England series, which they lost 1-2, the home series against Afghanistan and New Zealand happened when the whole Tamim Iqbal episode was taking place, which evidently didn't help the team's case.

Whatever the reason, the dismal 2023 has put a serious dent in the generalised belief that Bangladesh are a top ODI side and signal a need for change in direction.

progressed, the sense of optimism withered away.

The Tigers won only 11 ODIs this year, which comes down to one win in roughly three matches.

They lost four out of their six bilateral series, losing to England and Afghanistan at home and a couple of times to New Zealand in both home and away.

Their only two series wins came against the Irish -- the first in March in Bangladesh and the second two months later in Ireland.

The Asia Cup held in Sri Lanka and

Pakistan also went poorly for the Tigers, where they lost three out of five games, but it was nothing compared to the disappointment in the World Cup.

Bangladesh had their worst outing in two decades in the event, losing seven out of nine games, including a defeat to the Netherlands.

The abysmal performance from a team that had finished third in the ODI Super League and had won a series against the Proteas in South Africa and against India at home the previous year seemed hard to believe.

But what those stats don't show is

Bangladesh have played 32 ODIs in 2023, their highest ever in a calendar year, winning 11 matches -- the fifth highest for the Tigers in a year. Bangladesh's most successful year in ODIs in terms of wins came in 2006 when the Habibul Bashar-led team won 18 out of 28 matches.

'Unusual' wage demands weaken WFL

SPORTS REPORTER

The inclusion of Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) teams has long been expected to make the country's Women's Football League (WFL) competitive.

However, the footballers' self-claimed wages forced the lone BPL team, Bashundhara Kings, to stay away from applying for club license for the women's league's upcoming fourth edition.

The absence of the Kings from the WFL means that the top-flight women's league is predicted to be even weaker, with many top players likely to remain inactive after the current year saw no women's league.

A maximum of ten teams, who submitted club licensing documents by the deadline of December 14, are anticipated to construct their own squads with their own resources. But it has not yet been determined how many teams will receive the licence.

First Instant Body (FIB), an AFC-prescribed body composed of members

outside the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), is anticipated to hand over club licensing by January 10 before the league begins in early February.

Although Kings officials remained silent about their participation in the upcoming league, it has been learned that top women footballers demanded



three to four times the remuneration they received from Kings in the league's previous edition, which was held in a single-leg format rather than the promised double-leg system.

"The players demanded unusual remuneration from us," said a Kings official requesting anonymity.

"A player who received Tk 4 lakh, made her demand Tk 15 lakh, while a player, who had received Tk 5 lakh,

claimed Tk 20 lakh for the one-and-half month league, valuing themselves more than the male footballers who make contracts for 10 months for domestic and international competitions. So, we did not apply for the club licensing," he added.

After winning the SAFF Women's Championship, top woman footballers boycotted national team training for a few days, demanding a higher salary, more international matches, and domestic league regulation, and the BFF eventually complied to some extent.

Women's football might have garnered substantial attention from the spectators but not from the clubs, who usually provide fuel for footballers. It thus appears that those footballers have seemingly stepped into their own trap without examining the reality.

It was further learned that BFF's preferential treatment towards another team -- run by a BFF vice-president -- has also played a role behind Kings' absence.

50-over BCL begins with run-fest

SPORTS REPORTER

Entertaining batting display was on offer as the 50-over edition of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) got underway yesterday.

At the Ground 2 of Sheikh Kamal International Stadium in Cox's Bazar, centuries from Abdullah Al Mamun and Pritom Kumar enabled North Zone to seal a comfortable six-wicket victory over South Zone.

Chasing a challenging 306, Pritom and Abdullah stitched a decisive 182-run partnership for the third wicket. North reached the target with nine balls and six wickets in the bank.

Pritom top scored with 108 off 112 balls, striking eight fours and two sixes, while Abdullah struck his maiden List A ton, out after hitting six fours and five sixes for his ton off 115 deliveries.

Earlier, South amassed 305 for five in 50 overs after asked to bat, riding on three fifties from Ashikur Rahman Shibli -- the highest run-getter of the recently concluded ACC U-19 Asia Cup -- Marshal Ayub and Mosaddek Hossain.

Mosaddek remained not out after scoring a team-high 69 off 44 balls while Sohag Gazi's 19-ball 31 cameo steered South in piling up 93 runs in the last eight overs.

Meanwhile, at Ground 1 of the same venue, Central Zone registered a 23-run win (via DLS) over East Zone.

Chasing a revised target of 281 in 47 overs after rain interrupted proceedings, East eventually ended up on 257 for nine in 47 overs.



India players applaud the spectators after winning the women's Test match against Australia at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Saturday. India's women's cricket team cruised to their first-ever win against Australia in Test cricket, beating the visitors by eight wickets in a one-off match.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's lack of express pace 'surprising'

ICC

After being challenged in the initial stages of the opening Test in Perth, Australia took charge and cruised to a massive 360-run win against Pakistan. Along with Nathan Lyon, Australia's pace attack showed top form. The fast bowlers, who clocked in the vicinity of 140s, picked 13 wickets.

This was in stark contrast to the Pakistan pacers, who clocked at substantially lower numbers. While Shaheen Afridi struggled on the wicket, the two debutants impressed with the zip they got around the wicket. Khurram Shahzad picked five, while Aamer Jamal picked seven wickets.

Australia's Mitchell Starc said that his team was surprised at Pakistan's lack of pace, though he added that pace wasn't the "be-all and end-all" to fast bowling.

"I think everyone was slightly surprised at the lower pace of the Pakistan bowlers when you're generally used to some guys getting in the 150s," Starc said. "I don't think that pace is the be-all and end-all but it certainly plays a part and can help."

Starc cited Boland as an example of a player who didn't need pace to be effective. However, he added that Boland was a useful addition to an attack that already possessed good pace options.

"Case in point, you look at Scotty Boland who can bowl good wheels, but he's not at your top end of pace bowlers. But he generates a lot of sideways movement here in Melbourne, obviously being his home ground."

"He's done it for a long time and we saw that obviously against England [during the Ashes in 2021, where Boland picked 6/7 in his debut Test], where every ball he bowled could have been a wicket."

A similar sentiment was shared by former Pakistan fast bowler Waqar Younis recently on ESPN's show Around the Wicket.

"I'm seeing medium and slow medium pacers. I'm seeing allrounders," Waqar said. "There's no real pace. People used to come to watch Pakistani pace bowlers running in hard, and bowling 150 clicks."

"That's my worry at the domestic level as well. I can understand there are a few injuries, but in the past, you saw a battery of fast bowlers in reserve that Pakistan could bring on. But unfortunately, that is not there."

Pakistan's bowling attack has depleted considerably after the opening match, first with pacer Khurram Shahzad ruled out due to a stress fracture. Later, Noman Ali too had to leave the squad after being diagnosed with acute appendicitis. Abrar Ahmed too will miss the second Test at MCG due to foot discomfort.

