

# BCB springs surprise with new selection panel

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) held the ninth board meeting of the incumbent board yesterday where changes made in captaincy and the selection panel were the biggest highlights.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon, who attended his first meeting since becoming minister of youth and sports, came to the press conference after the meeting that lasted close for four hours.

Shakib Al Hasan's ongoing eye issue saw him relieved of captaincy in all three formats as Najmul Hossain Shanto was named the new skipper in all formats for this year.

But the biggest surprise from the meeting was the wholesale changes in the selection panel with former national team captain Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu being appointed as chief selector.

Lipu, who served the board under various capacities in the past, replaced Minhajul Abedin while Hannan Sarkar was added to the selection panel to replace Habibul Bashar. Abdur Razzak is the only member of the previous selection panel to



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BCB president  
Nazmul Hassan Papon

be retained.

Minhajul has been in the selection panel since 2011 and was appointed as the chief selector in 2016. Bashar was previously part of the women's selection panel and got added to the men's panel in 2016.

The current selection committee will stay in office till the end of February, after which the new panel will take charge.

Lipu's appointment is a big surprise considering he was not a director under

this current board. BCB president said that the selection panel's tenure under Lipu will be for the usual period of two years.

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the reporters yesterday during the press conference.

Lipu, who is a veteran in the cricketing circuit, has never served as a selector and the current panel's makeup is also a surprise given the age difference between him and the other two selectors.

Meanwhile, the BCB president said that Shakib's eye issue has created uncertainty regarding his availability for Bangladesh's upcoming Sri Lanka series.

The BCB also disclosed the fresh list of players under central contract with 21 making the cut.

Taskin Ahmed, who recently sought to skip Tests, has been dropped from the red-ball contract while Mahmudullah Riyad was only kept in the ODI contract.

Pacer Ebadot Hossain, who is still recovering from an ACL injury, has been left out of the central contract completely alongside Mosaddek Hossain and Afif Hossain.

Veteran opener Tamim Iqbal was also not offered a contract.

The special committee to investigate the World Cup debacle, finally placed their report to the board yesterday.

## OUTCOMES OF BOARD MEETING

- Najmul Hossain Shanto made captain in all three formats
- Changes to selection panel with Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu made new chief selector and Hannan Sarkar also drafted in the panel alongside Abdur Razzak.
- Twenty-one players' central contract finalised. Five cricketers -- Liton Das, Shakib Al Hasan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Najmul Hossain and Shoriful Islam -- have been given central contracts in all three formats. Six players have been handed Test contracts while Mushfiqur Rahim will carry on in Tests and ODIs. Three players -- Nasum Ahmed, Sheikh Mahedi and Nurul Hasan -- have been kept in T20I contracts. Towhid Hridoy and Tanzim Shakib has been added to one-day central contract list while Tamim Iqbal has been left out. Afif Hossain has been dropped while spinner Nayeem Hassan included in Testcontract.
- Central contract of 85 first-class cricketers finalised.
- Although salaries and matchfees did not increase but performers will get higher monetary gains under these central contracts.

## Siddikur's Oman tour in limbo over visa issue

STAR SPORTS REPORT

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman is in a quandary over his participation in the International Series in Oman due to non-issuance of his visa for the gulf nation.

The two-time Asian Tour winner, who is currently in Malaysia to participate in the season-opening IRS Prima Malaysian Open from February 15, expressed his frustration regarding the visa issue over a phone call with The Daily Star.

Siddikur has, through the Asian Tour, twice applied for the Oman visa in Dhaka, but received no response from the embassy, he informed. The two-million-dollar International Series in Oman will kick off on February 22.

"This is really frustrating for me," Siddikur said. "I have my tickets booked for February 18. If I don't get the visa, I will lose 4000 dollars, which is not a small amount. And furthermore I will miss the opportunity to participate in an important event."

It may be mentioned that Oman suspended issuance of new visas for Bangladeshis across all categories in late October.

Siddikur, however, said this is not the first time that he has faced such issues. He had his hotel bookings and air tickets confirmed for a tournament in Qatar last year, but eventually was declined visa into the kingdom.

"I have been facing visa issues all my golfing career. The latest issue is very frustrating for me as a tournament participation entails a lot of preparation -- physical, mental and financial. I am not a regular citizen as I represent the country all over the world," Siddikur said, urging authorities in Bangladesh to take steps so that he can participate in the International Series in Oman.

## Cancer survivor Haller leads 'Zombies' to glory

SPORTS REPORTER

The final of the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) yesterday had entered the 81st minute, with the score line reading 1-1 and hosts Ivory Coast, who had come back from the brink multiple times in the competition, conjuring up an attack against opponents Nigeria.

The sea of orange inside the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium held their collective breaths as Simon Adingra burst through the left flank and made his way into the box.

He swung in the ball with his left foot, which went right between two Nigerian defenders, and was met with the outstretched right foot of an Ivorian player, who used the studs of his boot to direct the ball to the goal as 60,000 Ivorians went wild.

This goal won Ivory Coast their third AFCON title, capping off an incredible come-from-behind triumph for the hosts and an even greater comeback story for Haller, a man who was in a fight for his life just 18 months ago.

Haller's journey from being diagnosed with testicular cancer in July of 2022 to scoring the match-winning goal in Ivory Coast's triumph has been nothing short of a fairytale.

The forward, who plays for German club Borussia Dortmund, had to undergo two surgeries and endure multiple chemotherapy sessions to rid his body of cancerous cells.

He returned to training in last year's January and netted his first goal for Dortmund against SC Freiburg on February 4, which was coincidentally



the World Cancer Day.

The 29-year-old was looking in good goal-scoring form heading into the AFCON but an ankle injury in December nearly derailed his plans.

But Ivory Coast included their star forward in the squad even though he couldn't take part in the group phase.

Ivory Coast had nearly been knocked out of the tournament in the group-stage after a 4-0 drubbing against Equatorial Guinea in their final match.

But the hosts benefitted from the change in the tournament format this year and made it to the knock-out phase as the fourth best third-placed side in the tournament.

The defeat to Equatorial Guinea resulted in their coach Jean-Louis Gasset getting sacked as his deputy Emere Fae took over the reins.

Haller finally played his first match in the tournament in the Round of 16

against Senegal as a substitute, which they won on penalties.

He played as a substitute in the quarterfinal against Mali as well, where they came from behind to win 2-1.

Haller got his first start in the tournament in the semifinal against Congo, where he scored the winner.

In the final, Ivory Coast conceded first but once again ounced back with Franck Kessie qualifying in the 62nd minute to set up the stage for Haller to land the final blow.

For much of the tournament, the Ivory Coast team was called the team of 'Zombies' as like the mythical undead beasts, this team couldn't get killed off. This never-say-die attitude perhaps stemmed from Haller, who overcame a life-threatening situation to return to the field and scripted one of the greatest comeback stories this game has ever seen.

## Argentina KO Brazil out of Paris

REUTERS

Argentina secured their ticket to this year's Olympic Games by beating Brazil 1-0 on Sunday in the final four of the South American qualifying tournament, leaving the 2020 champions out of the tournament in Paris.

Javier Mascherano's side required a win against their bitter rivals following draws with Venezuela and Paraguay in the round-robin qualifying stage for the 2024 Games, with only the top two teams securing berths in Paris.

Argentina's Under-23 team finished with five points, one ahead of Paraguay, who were facing Venezuela later on Sunday. Brazil finished with three points.

Luciano Gondou's header in the 77th minute was enough to give the victory to Argentina, gold medalists at the 2004 and 2008 Games.

Brazil, medal winners at the last four Olympics, have not missed the Games since 2004.



## Tricky trip for powerhouses in UCL knockouts

AGENCIES

Manchester City and Real Madrid will both be in action when the UEFA Champions League knockout stages begin tonight, and it is the last two winners of European football's greatest prize who appear the strongest contenders to go all the way this season.

City, chasing to repeat their remarkable treble triumph of last year, head to Denmark for last 16's first-leg clash against FC Copenhagen on a run of 10 straight wins in all competitions.

The return of two of their prized assets in marksman Erling Haaland and playmaker Kevin de Bruyne following injury lay-offs allows the blue half of Manchester to characteristically gain traction to peak at the business end of the season.

On the other hand, Copenhagen are into the knockout phase of Europe's elite club competition for just the second time, and first since 2011. They held City at home in last season's group stage and beat Manchester United 4-3 earlier this season at their Parken Stadium.

Given the players at disposal, Guardiola's team will surely be far too strong over two legs, and Madrid should also have too much for RB Leipzig, who they face in Germany first.

Los Blancos have been handed a blow after Jude Bellingham injured his ankle during Saturday's big win over Girona.

Bellingham was predictably left out of their squad for the first leg. But with Madrid's wealth of firepower in attack, Leipzig will brace themselves for an insurmountable task against the best in the business.

## Kelvin Kiptum: Eternal marathon star

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan runner Kelvin Kiptum, who died aged 24 in a car crash on Sunday, blazed to athletics stardom when he seized the marathon world record in Chicago last October.

Born in the Rift Valley, the heartland of Kenyan distance running, Kiptum was barely a teenager when he began following elite athletes training in the high-altitude region.

He burst onto the marathon scene in 2022 with a stunning debut in the 26.2-mile (42.195-km) distance in Valencia where he clocked 2hr 01min 53sec.

World Athletics called it the "fastest debut marathon in history".

Less than a year later and racing only his third marathon, Kiptum shattered the world record in Chicago, becoming the first man to run under two hours and one minute in a record-eligible race.

After flying through the course, the 23-year-old began waving and blowing kisses at spectators before crossing the finish line.

"A world record was not in my mind today," he said afterwards. "I knew one day one time I'd be a world-record holder."

His time of 2:00:35 shaved 34 seconds off fellow Kenyan star Eliud Kipchoge's previous record.



The two compatriots were anticipated to run together for the first time this summer at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Known for maintaining a gruelling training schedule that sometimes surpassed 300 kilometres (190 miles) a week, Kiptum had only recently announced he was hoping to smash the mythic two-hour mark in Rotterdam in April.

Seemingly destined for superstardom, Kiptum -- a married father of two -- trained near his home village in Chepkorio.

Initially self-taught, he was later coached by Rwandan athlete Gervais Hakizimana, who also died in Sunday

night's crash.

Hakizimana met a young Kiptum while doing training sessions near his home.

At just 13 years old, Kiptum entered his first half marathon in Eldoret in 2013, placing 10th. Five years later he won the race.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, Hakizimana and Kiptum kept busy with a rigorous routine.

Kiptum trained so obsessively that his coach began to fear he would cut his career short.

While preparing for the London marathon, Hakizimana revealed that Kiptum had spent three weeks logging more than 300 kilometres a week.

