

Salahuddin’s quiet exit

SPORTS REPORTER

Kazi Salahuddin’s reign as the longest-serving president of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will officially come to an end on October 26, the four-time BFF president announced in an impromptu press briefing yesterday.

The poster boy of post-independence Bangladesh football will depart after navigating through four tricky terms, leaving a legacy of corruption, mismanagement, flawed elections and failure to make good on lofty goals.

When the BFF media wing issued a message that Salahuddin would be speaking to the media at his office in a little over an hour’s time, there was little doubt regarding the forthcoming announcement, considering the speculations over his position for the past few days.

Appearing at the office and in front of media for the first time since the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, the 70-year-old wasted little time over preambles before cutting straight to the chase: “I was with you for four terms. I consider myself very lucky to have had this opportunity in my life. I have decided not to contest in the upcoming elections which are due on October 26. It is my final decision.”

A close friend of Sheikh Kamal, the eldest son of Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman and brother of now-deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Salahuddin had expressed his desire for seeking a fifth term as president of the country’s second-most affluent sporting body on its October 26 elections, even a week after Hasina’s ouster.

“I am not resigning; instead, I will contest the election again because I will not leave football in the face of any threats,” Salahuddin had told The Daily Star on August 12.

However, Salahuddin was getting increasingly isolated as time went by. His long-term

resign.

Salahuddin was feeling the heat, and there was no alleged state-mechanism to bail him out this time, hence he had to leave the pitch without a fight, even though he successfully avoided the fate of having to resign.

While he will likely have a quiet exit a month-and-a-half later, leaving the chair to someone else to run the football show, Salahuddin’s legacy in Bangladesh football will certainly be a topic of discussion for a long time.

His quiet exit is a stark contrast to the euphoria and excitement that had been generated a decade-and-a-half ago when a much younger

men’s team would play in the FIFA 2022 World Cup has been a fodder for memes over the years as the team has failed to even reach the final of the SAFF Championship, arguably the lowest rung of world football, ever since.

The men’s team’s standing in the FIFA rankings has plummeted to the late 190s while the women’s team have failed to make much of an impact outside the SAFF region.

Although there have been successes at age-level, for both men and women, and the top-tier leagues have been held regularly, football at grassroots level has dried up, creating a top-heavy structure in the country’s football.



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aided Abdus Salam Murshedy, a former Awami League MP and a long-serving BFF senior vice-president, had resigned soon after the change of government while two out of the four vice-presidents – Kazi Nabil Ahmed and Mahiuddin Ahmed, both leaders of Awami League – have been missing since August 5.

Former footballers, a section of fans as well as political leaders, led by former national team captain Aminul Haque, were piling on the pressure for him to

and astronomically more popular Salahuddin took office as an elected president.

One of the best footballers the country has ever produced, Salahuddin came to power when Bangladesh football was stagnating due to lack of proper planning and mismanagement.

The former captain and later a coach of the national team, Salahuddin made lofty promises to the people of the country, often very detached from reality.

His declaration that the Bangladesh

The sponsors, who had come in droves when Salahuddin assumed responsibility, have mostly turned their backs while the spectators have largely deserted the stands, signifying the departure of domestic football from the collective conscience.

The most damaging part was perhaps the unearthing of massive corruption inside the football headquarters, something that may not have implicated Salahuddin personally yet has damaged the reputation of Bangladesh in world football.

Striving to ‘conquer the summit’

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh squad is set to leave for India today to play a two-match Test series. The Tigers will be buoyed by their monumental maiden Test series win against Pakistan earlier this month, which led to the players receiving a winning bonus of Tk 3.20 crore from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday.

Expectations for the Tigers have risen significantly, with people hoping for a repeat of similar performances on Indian soil, which has traditionally been a challenging venue, particularly in the longer format.

These expectations are not unfounded, given their performance over the past 17 months, during which they have won five of their eight Tests, including a home Test win over New Zealand and two away Test victories at Pakistan.

Bangladesh are touring India for a full series comprising two Tests and three T20Is for the first time since 2019. In their last two Test tours, they suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of the Asian giants.

Although Bangladesh made their Test

debut in 2000, playing India, it took 17 years for them to visit the neighbouring nation for their first away Test against India.

Mushfiqur Rahim, who led the side in the one-off Test series, scored a brilliant hundred, but it was in vain as Bangladesh eventually lost the match by 208 runs in Hyderabad during



their first visit in 2017.

In 2019, Bangladesh struggled to put up any resistance in both Tests in Indore and Kolkata, losing on the third day and suffering innings defeats on both occasions.

The Tigers have a poor home record against India as well, having lost eight out of ten Tests, with rain playing a significant role in the two drawn matches.

However, with the positive results they are

bringing into the series and the form of the players, former captain and selector Habibul Bashar remains hopeful for a better show this time, banking on a much-improved team from the 2019 version.

“In the last five to seven Tests, Bangladesh have performed exceptionally well. Whether at home or away, such performances are significant. This is the big difference in Bangladesh at this moment,” Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

The last time India lost a home Test series was in 2012, when they were defeated 1-2 by England in a four-match series. Since then, they have won a record 17 successive Test series on home soil and have only lost four Tests out of 51 matches at home.

Bashar, also the current women’s wing head, reckons the Tigers “shouldn’t aim for just a respectable result”.

“It’s difficult to climb Everest. People die while climbing Everest. But still, people go there to conquer the summit... I believe we are in a position to conquer the ultimate goal and not just show intent,” he concluded.

The first Test will begin in Chennai on September 19, while Kanpur will host the second Test from September 27.

DOMESTIC FOOTBALL

Pre-season limited to 5 weeks

SPORTS REPORTER

The participating clubs in the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) have been given nearly a five-week period for pre-season preparation instead of the six weeks that most clubs sought, the decision taken by the board (BFF) following a first meeting regarding the 2024-25 season yesterday.

The Challenge Cup is set to be named in honour of the martyrs of July-August’s mass uprising.

Clubs to receive a percentage of sponsor’s money.

137 more local players registered than previous season.

Consequently, the season is set to commence on October 11 with the one-off Challenge Cup match at Bashundhara Kings Arena, and it will be followed by the beginning of the Federation Cup and BPL on October 15 and 18, respectively.

Imrul Hasan, the BFF Professional League Management Committee Chairman and BFF vice-president, mentioned they have dropped two tournaments from the calendar due to the altered situation in the country.

“The changed scenario led us to backtrack from our previous promises to hold the Super Cup and Independence Cup [this year],” he said following the meeting at the BFF House, adding that only three venues – in Dhaka (Kings Arena), Cumilla and Mymensingh – have been finalised, while remaining venues will be confirmed after discussions with district collectors and the National Sports Council (NSC).

The president of Bashundhara Kings further informed: “Though the meeting did not discuss the matter, there was an unofficial decision to name the Challenge Cup after legendary footballers in each edition. This time, however, we will name the Challenge Cup after July’s martyrs.”

SHORT CORNER

Faruque speaks to media in a no media event

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed said he was thrilled by Bangladesh’s current pace attack in an impromptu press conference after the winning bonus handing over ceremony for the national team at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel today, going against the board’s own directive that there would be no media interaction at the event.

Red-soil pitch awaits Tigers in Chennai?

Come September 19, Bangladesh could be greeted on a red-soil pitch in their first of the two-Test series against hosts India in Chennai, according to reports from The Indian Express – an English-language Indian daily. Red-soil pitches usually offer a lot of bounce, with spinners always staying in the game as well.

Guardiola convinced rivals eager for Man City sanctions

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has no doubts that other Premier League clubs are keen for the English champions to be punished for 115 alleged breaches of rules relating to financial regulations. A long-awaited hearing into charges brought by the Premier League in February 2023 is finally set to get underway on Monday.

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CATALAN DERBY

Toppers Barca seek payback at Girona

AFP, Barcelona

Hansi Flick’s Barcelona face Girona today (8:15 pm, Bangladesh time) in a Catalan derby aiming to secure a fifth win from five La Liga matches at the start of the season.

Last season the Catalan giants were upset twice by their upstart minnow neighbours, who thumped Xavi Hernandez’s side 4-2 home and away in the spotlight.

Girona, in their fourth ever season in La Liga, ultimately finished third, behind second-place Barca, but for much of the season the Blaugrana could only watch as the tiny club battled Real Madrid for top spot.

Although Girona’s title bid eventually collapsed, their second triumph over Barca secured them Champions League football and delivered Madrid’s record-extending 36th league crown.

A lot has changed since then, with Flick’s arrival in place of Xavi seeming to revitalise Barcelona’s squad.

Led by teenage star Lamine Yamal,

new arrival Dani Olmo and veteran striker Robert Lewandowski they have won their opening four matches and are the only team in La Liga with a 100 percent record.

Girona, on the other hand, have lost star names including Artem Dovbyk



and Savinho and coach Michel Sanchez is still fitting together his replacement puzzle pieces.

After a 3-0 thumping by Atletico, Girona responded with 4-0 and 2-0 wins

over Osasuna and Sevilla respectively, indicating they are on the right track once more.

Flick has a long injury list to manage but is expecting to have playmaker Olmo available despite suffering a blow against Serbia while playing for Euro 2024 winners Spain.

Morale is high at the club because of their fine start, including a 7-0 demolition of Valladolid before the international break, and Gavi’s partial return to training on Thursday after a long injury lay-off provided further good news.

“We work much harder than before,” Barca midfielder Pedri told Mundo Deportivo.

“The team doesn’t dip after the 70th or 80th minute, it maintains the same fitness levels.”

Many expected champions Real Madrid to defend their crown with ease after signing Kylian Mbappe this summer but if Barcelona can avenge last year’s double defeat at Montilivi, it would be a statement victory.



Substitute Callum Hudson-Odoi [R] celebrates after his superb second-half goal helped Nottingham Forest beat Liverpool 1-0 at Anfield yesterday, achieving the biggest surprise win of the English Premier League season so far. The defeat ends Liverpool’s winning streak and they now occupy second place with nine points in four matches as leaders Manchester City overcame a spirited Brentford 2-1 at the Etihad yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS