

U19 WC in focus as girls depart

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 Women's cricket team are set to depart for Sri Lanka tomorrow to play four T20s against the hosts to ramp up preparations for the upcoming U-19 World Cup, starting on January 18 in Malaysia.

The four-match series against Sri Lanka will begin on January 3 and run till January 9 after which the Bangladesh team will travel to Malaysia on January 11.

Pitted in Group D, Bangladesh will take on Australia, Nepal and Scotland in the group stage.

"Our first target is to play our game whether the opponent is Australia or someone else. We believe that it will be difficult against Australia. But they will be scared, at least, of being in the same group as Bangladesh. It's not just past memories which give me that feeling. We played the Asia Cup in Malaysia, the World Cup hosts. Since we have played there, we will get some advantage," Bangladesh skipper Sumaiya Akter said.

Barishal face Rangpur in high-voltage fixture

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League T20 returns today after a day's break with two matches, the highlight of which is a high-voltage night-game between table-toppers Rangpur Riders and reigning champions Fortune Barishal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. The match will get underway at 6:30pm.

On paper, Barishal are the strongest team in the tournament with most of the top national cricketers alongside a healthy foreign collection and they already have shown their pedigree with a 198-run chase against Durbar Rajshahi in the tournament opener on Monday.

Meanwhile, Rangpur, coming off their Global Super League triumph in Guyana, notched back-to-back wins in the opening two days and are currently sitting on top of the points table with four.

In both Rangpur matches, their middle-order did the rescue act and helped post decent totals on the board before their bowlers came up with exceptional performances to seal victories.

Barishal had a training session in Mirpur yesterday while Rangpur opted for rest.

Meanwhile, in the day's first game scheduled to kick off at 1:30pm, Durbar Rajshahi and Dhaka Capitals – both newcomers – will face off in an attempt to open their account after having lost their respective opening games.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Under-19 Women's Cricket team captain Sumaiya Akter takes a selfie with her side at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday after a photo session ahead of their departure for the ICC U-19 Women's World Cup, starting on January 18 in Malaysia. The girls in red and green will travel to Sri Lanka first for four T20s to ramp up preparations for the mega event.

No black and white in BPL, only grey areas

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

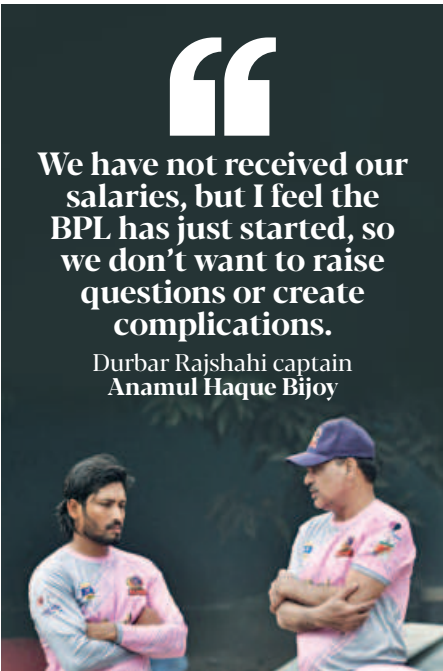
The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) returned under seemingly auspicious circumstances, with a youth festival lending a vibrant touch to the event. Yet beneath the surface glamour lies a troubling reality as the tournament began without fulfilling basic requirements, most notably players' payments.

This glaring oversight raises questions about the tournament's organisational structure, or lack thereof.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed – appointed expressly through the National Sports Council (NSC) quota to steady the ship after previous board members had fled the scene following the political shift since August 5 – has had to spend most of his effort and time in holding this edition's BPL since taking the BCB hot seat.

While the effort is laudable, there has been no indication that a proper structure for the BPL committee has been implemented, or at least initiated. In this case, despite the new-look board getting less than six months to prepare for the much-awaited tournament, it has little excuse for not forming a well-functioning committee to manage the BPL's complexities by now.

On Monday, the BPL's 11th edition rolled onto the turf amidst hustle and bustle and high-scoring games, but the structural integrity of the tournament remained vague. In fact, a lot of hotchpotch scenarios arose, with no bank guarantee money falling into BCB coffers from the franchises – a fundamental requirement



to safeguard player payments in case the franchises fail to do so.

As the matches began, criticism intensified when it emerged that no players had received payments from the franchises. According to tournament bylaws, franchises are required to clear 50 per cent of player payments before the competition starts, another 25 per cent at the halfway point, and the final instalment at its conclusion.

After quite a bit of dawdling, the BCB president remarked yesterday that they

are communicating with the franchises so that players receive their payments. It revealed the helplessness of an ineffective process, specifically in trying to bring the tournament up and running in a hurry.

"If you ask me to answer in black and white why this didn't happen (franchises didn't pay guarantee money), I won't be able to provide a clear answer. You have to see the overall situation from everyone's perspective over the last four months," Faruque told reporters yesterday.

Considering the perspective of current Bangladesh, what could be the market strategy, how the franchises would go about their financial strategy, and a need for stability and continuation of franchises were key details that needed to be sorted out.

It appears that old goods are being sold in new packaging. The professionalism needed in a well-functioning tournament is missing, as evidenced by the mishap with player payments. It mimics the ventures of the past board, where one man was taking on multifaceted endeavours and finding himself with too much on his plate.

For instance, Faruque has personally engaged with franchise owners to foster a sense of partnership.

"I have spoken directly with the franchise as board president so that they feel that we are partners. They are also spending money for Bangladesh cricket," he said.

The BCB president appears to be happy simply to get the show running, but a one-man show, as the past board has shown, usually fails to meet even the most basic requirements.



PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Kylian Mbappe goes up against full-back Fran Garcia in Real Madrid's first training session of the year at Real Madrid City yesterday. Real will begin LaLiga's action in 2025 on Friday with a visit to Valencia for a game that was postponed last October due to deadly floods in the region.

Barca seek new licence for Olmo, Victor

REUTERS

Barcelona applied for new players' licences for Dani Olmo and Pau Victor with the Spanish FA (RFEF) on Tuesday, while the club denied claims of requesting any delay from governing bodies for their registrations.

Barcelona lost a second appeal to register the players for the remainder of the season on Monday, with the club unable to meet LaLiga's wage cap.

"Barcelona informs that it has applied for a new license for the players Daniel Olmo and Pau Victor to the RFEF," the Catalan club said.

Barcelona signed Olmo in August for around 55 million euros but the attacking midfielder was registered for only the first half of the season.

The club managed to register Olmo and forward Victor after long-term injuries kept first-team players out of the squad for months, allowing them to allocate a portion of their wages.

While Olmo and Victor will be free agents after the deadline, Barcelona could meet the economic requirements to sign them before the transfer market closes in February.

However, according to the RFEF rules, a player cannot be signed by the same club twice in the same season.

Handover of BNS delayed by another six months

ANISUR RAHMAN

The handover of the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has been extended by another six months following a decision by the planning commission on Tuesday.

The country's premier multi-purpose sports venue, which started undergoing renovation worth Tk 98.35 crore in September 2021, was initially supposed to be completed by December 2023. The deadline, however, was extended in two phases to December 2024 due to delay in approval of revised budget, which raised the cost by Tk 60 crore.

Former sports minister Nazmul Hassan Papon in early 2023 and later last year Youth and Sports Adviser Asif vowed to complete project within the timeline of December 2024.

"The planning commission yesterday [Tuesday] approved the extension of the project by six months. Hopefully, we can complete everything by this time unless any unavoidable circumstances arise," National

Sports Council's (NSC) acting planning and development director Mahbub Morshed Sohel told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked why they could not meet the deadline for a second time, Sohel said that there were various reasons behind it which they



explained to the sports ministry and planning commission.

The NSC official also informed that they had a few meetings with the BFF officials, who want to host the Asian Cup Qualifiers match against Hong Kong [scheduled for October 9] at the BNS.

BFF general secretary Emran Hossain Tushar, however, said

that they have requested NSC to hand over the ground, the dressing rooms and the media box by next month.

"We have sent a letter to the NSC today [Wednesday], requesting them to hand over the venue, dressing room and media centre by January as we are planning to stage matches of Bangladesh Championship League there since a new artificial turf is being installed at the Kamalapur venue," Emran said. "We also want international football to return to BNS through two international friendly matches of the women's team in the latter part of February."

Emran also informed that they need a match commissioner's room at BNS for hosting international matches. The NSC officials told them that by February they would be able to install floodlights, the bulbs for which are expected to reach the venue within a few days.

"We have two major tasks left. One is installing shed on the western gallery and the other is floodlights. The media centre is almost ready while all chairs for the galleries and the VIP boxes have been procured already," Sohel said.

Australia's final push for ending decade-long wait

AGENCIES

On Friday, the Pat Cummins-led Australia will begin their final push for reclaiming the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after a decade in the fifth and last Test against India in Sydney.

Fresh from their 184-run win in the fourth Test at the MCG on Monday to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, Australia will only aim for a victory as it would also help them secure a spot in the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) final.

With South Africa having ensured a maiden spot in the WTC final with a thrilling victory over Pakistan in Centurion, and Australia having overcome India in Melbourne, the equations for Australia have become clear – they need just one win from their upcoming three matches, including a two-match series away to Sri Lanka at Galle later this month, to guarantee a WTC final spot.

"[It would be a] reward for 24 months of really solid cricket, [It is] a group that is extremely experienced, [with] skilful Australian legends amongst it, who are continuing to surprise us with how good they are. But we can't look too far ahead," said Australia's wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey ahead of the fifth Test.

In 13 Tests against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Australia have a strong record with five wins, seven draws and just one loss.

Since losing to England in 2011, Australia are unbeaten in this format at the venue, with seven wins and six draws.



A draw in Sydney would be enough for Australia to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, a prize that has eluded them since they last won at home in 2014/15. However, it would only keep them ahead of India in the race to the WTC final, but leave the door open for Sri Lanka to sneak through.

Carey, however, stated that Australia's focus was simple: to secure a win.

"We know it's a really quality outfit in India, who have shown they are well and truly capable of bouncing back. So for this group, it's head down, another opportunity to win a Test match, and if we are able to secure the trophy, it would be fantastic."

Carey also mentioned that pacer Mitchell Starc, who showed signs of discomfort during the Melbourne Test, will be "fine and push through" to play the final Test against India.