

## Neutral body to aid BPL fixing probe

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official yesterday said that the board has decided to form an independent inquiry body to support the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) investigations regarding the alleged match and spot-fixing issues in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

"The committee will work based on the ACU reports... We are taking it very seriously. As the issues have escalated to such a level, we have no other option but to control the damage honestly," BCB director and media committee chairman Iftakhar Rahman Mithu told The Daily Star, after a meeting with four other BCB directors, including BCB boss Faruque Ahmed, at the BCB office yesterday.

The decision to form the independent committee came after BCB faced significant backlash following several media reports from The Daily Star and others, which stated that the ACU had identified eight matches as suspicious for spot-fixing and match-fixing, based on anonymous tips and media reports.

Additionally, the ACU is monitoring 10 players and four franchises for suspicious activities in the BPL's 11th edition.

The inquiry panel will consist of retired judges, barristers, and former cricketers with no connections with the cricket board, Iftakhar informed.

"There's already been so much controversy and talk regarding the issues. So, what we've actually done is make the independent committee neutral, giving it the opportunity to observe the situation and provide a verdict."

"We are trying to announce it (inquiry body) within the two days... Our point is, whatever has happened, enough is enough. Otherwise, we can't save bangladesh cricket, let alone BPL," he added.

In a press release yesterday, BCB stated that it "maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption in any form" and is "in the process of establishing an independent inquiry body to further support the ACU in its investigations."

Iftakhar claimed that the committee would be similar to the BPL anti-corruption tribunal formed in 2014, which dealt with match-fixing allegations during the 2013 BPL and subsequently provided a verdict on the ACU's investigations and other players and team officials -- notably handing former Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful an eight-year ban (three years suspended).

Meanwhile, that anti-corruption tribunal also criticised the ICC's Anti-Corruption and Security Unit for allowing a tainted game to go ahead to gather evidence and also called the ACU's investigations "flawed and incomplete," according to several media reports.

## PLAYOFFS LINE-UP

**QUALIFIER 1:**  
Fortune Barishal vs  
Chittagong Kings

**ELIMINATOR:**  
Rangpur Riders vs Khulna  
Tigers



Chittagong Kings opener Parvez Emon plays a shot during his 41-ball 75 that helped his side set up a 24-run win over Fortune Barishal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The win saw Chittagong climb to second on the standings at the expense of Rangpur Riders, meaning they will face league-leaders Barishal in Qualifier 1 on Monday. Meanwhile, Rangpur will take on fourth-placed Khulna Tigers in the Eliminator earlier on the same day.

PHOTO: STAR

## No Guardiola rift, says Arteta as Arsenal host City

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta insists there is no rift with his old friend Pep Guardiola ahead of the Gunners' latest high-stakes battle against Manchester City on Sunday. Guardiola's players accused Arsenal of



In a heated finale, John Stones scored a stoppage-time equaliser for City, whose striker Erling Haaland celebrated by throwing the ball at Arsenal defender Gabriel Magalhaes.

Arteta, who worked as Guardiola's assistant before taking charge of Arsenal in 2019, responded to City's aggression by hinting the Premier League champions were no angels.

"I have been there before, I was there for four years. I have all the information. So I know. Believe me," he said at the time.

Guardiola was believed to have been frustrated with Arteta, saying he should "be more clear" about what he was insinuating.

With second-placed Arsenal and fourth-placed City meeting in a crunch encounter in north London this weekend, there could be more strain on Arteta's relationship with Guardiola.

But Arteta is adamant he is still on good terms with his fellow Spaniard.

"I was there for four years, so I know how competitive they are. They win and win again. That is what I meant," he said Friday of the terse exchanges in September.

"If there was a problem, we wouldn't have been talking on the phone and

messaging each other. If not, it wouldn't happen."

City have pipped Arsenal to the Premier League title for the past two seasons, adding to the intensity of the rivalry.

But just an hour before Arteta faced the media on Friday, Guardiola had played down talk of a feud between the pair, describing their relationship as "exceptional".

Arteta echoed Guardiola's desire to bury the hatchet, saying of the rivalry: "Normal. Two teams trying to win."

"I don't take anything personally that happens on the pitch. It's been that way since I was a player. It is full of emotions. We just move on."

Arsenal cannot afford to slip up against City as they try to close the gap on leaders Liverpool, who are six points ahead of them with a game in hand.

Although Arsenal are unbeaten in six games in all competitions, injuries to Gabriel Jesus and Bukayo Saka have threatened to derail their bid for a first title since 2004.

Arteta is keen to sign a new striker before Monday's transfer deadline, but he would not be drawn on reports that Arsenal have made a bid for Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins.

"I'm very confident with the work the club is doing and exploring every opportunity that can have an impact on the team," he said.

"I don't want to give any assurances. It doesn't only depend on us, the possibilities are affected by three parties."

Arsenal are the only side in the Premier League to have not lost a home game in the Premier League this season.

Having won 12 consecutive league games against Arsenal between 2017 and 2023, Manchester City are now winless in their last three against them (two draws, one loss).

City have lost just one of their last 40 Premier League matches played from January until the end of the campaign, losing 1-0 to Brentford on the final day of 2022-23.

using "dark arts" during a fractious 2-2 draw between the Premier League title rivals in September.

City midfielder Rodri suffered a serious knee injury in the clash, while Arsenal played over half the game with 10 men following Leandro Trossard's dismissal in a separate incident.

## BUTLER 'not interested' about rebel players

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team coach Peter Butler is apparently adamant about continuing his training camp with junior players even as Bangladesh Football Federation continues its effort to bring back the boycotting senior players to training.

Butler conducted his first training session yesterday with 13 footballers -- mostly juniors -- at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as 18 senior players declined to join the training.

Afeida Khandaker, Shaheda Akhtar Ripa, Kohati Kisku, Munki Khatun, Sapna Rani, Surma Akter, Irene Parvin, Akalima Khatun, Surovi Akanda Prity, Zainab Begum, Arpita Bishwas, Halima Khatun and Yearzan Begum were the ones who attended the training session, which involved aerobics. Later in the day, the same players participated in a gym session at the BFF House, with assistant coaches Mahbubur Rahman Litu and Mahmuda Akter Ananaya overseeing the session.



Butler, who returned to Bangladesh last week following a two-year extension of contract, told reporters in the evening that he was fine with continuing with the junior players.

"I don't have any idea about this. I have no interest (about rebel players) either. I am doing my job professionally. I will

continue the training with those who attended today," said Butler, who will conduct another training session at the BNS this morning.

The BFF has called up under-20 players from Bangladesh Army and BKSP to join the camp today. Butler, whose rift with the senior players was first brought into public domain by the seniors during last year's triumphant SAFF Women's Championship campaign, said he was looking forward to working with the juniors.

"The under 20 players are joining the camp. I'm hopeful they will serve the country in the future," added Butler.

However, the BFF high-ups were continuing their effort to bring the senior players back to training after having formed a seven-member special committee headed by senior vice-president Imrul Hasan, which sat for a meeting last night.

Mahfuza Akter Kiron, the chairman of BFF's women's wing, told reporters that they are working to convince the senior players to join training.

"We are working to bring back the girls. We definitely want the girls to be in camp, training and playing. This is what we want. Beyond that, there is nothing we want. We are working on it continuously and trying to convince them," Kiron said. The BFF executive member, who previously held a stricter attitude towards this issue, said she spoke to the players and remains hopeful of a resolution.

"They are adults, aren't they? They have the authority to take any decision. We can't say anything in regard to that. We brought them here as children. I tried to convince them. I told them, don't do this. It is not good for anyone; not good for the country," Kiron added.



Neymar greets 20,000 passionate Santos fans as Brazil's all-time top scorer marks his triumphant return to his boyhood club in a grand unveiling at Urbano Caldeira Stadium in Sao Paulo on Friday night. After an unremarkable 18-month spell at Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia, the 32-year-old signed a six-month deal with Santos, reclaiming the iconic No. 10 jersey once worn by Pele at the club where it all began for the former Barcelona and PSG forward at just 17 in 2009.

PHOTO: AFP

## Five events in next football season

SPORTS REPORTER

The 2025-26 football season will feature five tournaments -- the highest in the history of the country, informed BFF's Professional Football League Committee chairman Imrul Hasan following a meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

"There will be five tournaments next season. The season will start with the Challenge Cup, and end with the Independence Cup, which will be held with only local players. The other events are the Bangladesh Premier League, Federation Cup and Super Cup," Hasan told reporters following the meeting.

Hasan, also the senior vice-president of the federation, also said that final of the Federation Cup will be held in Mymensingh on April 22.

"We have decided that the final will be held on April 22 in Mymensingh. Qualifier 1 and 2 will be held on April 8 and Qualifier 3 will be held on April 15," Hasan said, adding that the upcoming Bangladesh Championship League will feature 11 teams.

Brighten the mountains and seas, celebrate the New Year together, and embark on a path of cultural exchange.

HDFC SinPower Limited brings together its Chinese and Bangladeshi employees to celebrate the Chinese New Year.



On January 29, 2025, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, HDFC SinPower Limited hold a grand cultural event with the theme of "Lighting the Mountains and Seas, Bringing 'New Year Together'". The venue was filled with a strong Chinese New Year flavor and a warm festive atmosphere. This event not only invited Ms. Yang Hui, Director of the Confucius Institute of Dhaka University, and all faculty and staff, but also representatives of HDFC shareholders, Chinese and Bangladeshi employees and their families, as well as community management personnel, gathered together to participate in this New Year's celebration.

The event venue was thoughtfully decorated with dazzling red couplets, intricate Chinese knots, and auspicious festive Chinese characters. Lanterns glowed warmly, reflecting the rich essence of traditional Chinese culture and enhancing the joyful atmosphere. Chinese and Bangladeshi employees of HDFC, along with representatives from the Confucius Institute of Dhaka University and community managers, came together to celebrate this vibrant and heartwarming New Year gathering.

During the event, Chairman Zhou Jinsun took the stage to deliver a heartfelt New Year's speech. He reflected on the company's dedication and remarkable accomplishments in the Bangladesh project over the past year, expressed deep gratitude to all employees for their hard work, and extended his sincere New Year wishes. Immediately following his speech, the much-anticipated annual Outstanding Employee Award ceremony was held. The Chairman of HDFC, the Director of the Confucius Institute, and shareholder representatives presented honorary certificates and prizes to the award-winning employees. This not only served as high recognition of their outstanding contributions over the past year but also motivated all employees to keep striving forward and achieve even greater success in the year ahead.

The event featured a series of captivating performances, each more exciting than the last. The celebration kicked off with a breathtaking lion dance performed by the teachers and students of the Confucius Institute at Dhaka University. Chairman Zhou Jinsun and Director Yang Hui performed the ceremonial "eye-dotting" ritual, bringing the lion to life and instantly electrifying the atmosphere. The venue erupted with thunderous applause.

Following this, a mesmerizing Guzheng performance, as fluid and melodious as flowing water, enchanted the audience. A soulful solo of "As You Wish" filled the air with deep and gentle emotions. The wind pipe and whistle performances introduced an exotic flair, while the martial arts display was both powerful and dynamic. A vibrant dance performance infused the stage with energy, and through a joint performance in Bengali and Chinese songs, employees from both cultures came together in perfect harmony, receiving rounds of cheers and applause from the crowd.

Throughout the event, interactive games and lucky draws kept the excitement alive, pushing the festive atmosphere to new heights with rounds of laughter and cheers echoing across the venue. Meanwhile, the bustling food district was a highlight in itself, where exquisite Chinese delicacies met the rich flavors of local Bangladeshi cuisine. As guests indulged in the diverse dishes, they also experienced the magic of cultural fusion through food.

This event not only provided Chinese employees working abroad with a sense of home but also served as a bridge for deeper cultural exchange between China and Bangladesh. It united everyone in a shared vision for progress and collaboration. As the celebration came to a joyful conclusion, it left unforgettable memories for all participants and set a hopeful tone for the new year ahead.

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