

'Retirement call should come from seniors' end'

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president **Faruque Ahmed** attended Champions Trophy semifinal between South Africa and New Zealand in Lahore yesterday. During New Zealand's innings, he spoke to travelling Bangladeshi journalists, including **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan**, on diplomatic ties with cricket boards and BCB's stance on senior players after Bangladesh's group-stage exit. Here are excerpts from the interview:

DS: Could you tell us more about your trip to Pakistan following Dubai visit?

Faruque Ahmed (FA): The invitation came from the ICC. I feel it's an opportunity not only to watch the games but also to develop cricketing ties. Apart from that, I'm also looking to secure a few tours in between. I have previously mentioned a white-ball series against Pakistan outside the FTP schedule. I also came here to confirm that series. [In Dubai] my main focus was on strengthening ties with subcontinental teams.

DS: You came to Pakistan at a time when a fresh Bangladesh Premier League-related controversy involving Chittagong Kings brand ambassador Shahid Afridi has emerged.

FA: Actually, the board doesn't have a three-party deal. We only have contracts with franchises and players. It is entirely the franchise's decision whom they bring



PHOTO: ICC

Calling it a day the Australian way

ASHFAQ UL-ALAM

"I considered maybe giving up ODI cricket after this summer and try and get a bit more Test cricket in over the next 12 months. But a moment came and just gave complete clarity in my mind, and I just knew the time was right," said Adam Gilchrist after the Adelaide Test against India in 2008, explaining how he had decided to retire from international cricket while playing the match.

The moment of clarity Gilchrist was talking about came on Day 1, when India's VVS Laxman gave a regulation catch to Gilchrist, but he could not react in time and grassed the chance.

One dropped catch, and Gilchrist immediately knew his time with the baggy green was up.

"I reckon before the ball hit the ground, I turned around at [Matthew] Hayden and said, 'Mate, I'm done, I'm out,'" Gilchrist described his immediate realisation in an interview in 2021.

Yesterday, another modern-day Australian great called time on his ODI career a day after he top-scored for his side but could not deliver what was expected off of him.

With Australia batting first in the

first semifinal of the ICC Champions Trophy against India, Steve Smith came to the crease in the third over after opener Cooper Connolly got out for a nine-ball duck.

Smith absorbed the pressure from the Indian pacers, kept the scoreboard ticking against a skilled spin attack, and brought up his 35th ODI half-century along the way.

But when it was time to press on the accelerator, Smith missed a full toss from Mohammad Shami and was bowled for 73 off 96 balls.

"I missed a full toss. It wasn't ideal," Smith said after the match, specifying that as the turning point of the match.

And, within 24 hours, Smith announced he is done with the one-day format.

"It has been a great ride and I have loved every minute of it... Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup, so, it feels like the right time to make way," Smith was quoted in a Cricket Australia press release.

Now, whether his mode of dismissal played a role in his decision to retire is something only Smith himself can clarify.

But Smith's sudden decision to move on from the format is

very much in line with the cricket culture in Australia, where players prefer stepping aside at the right time rather than waiting to be told to move on.

For Bangladesh fans who often see their heroes turn villains over the course of their careers, it won't be hard to notice the stark cultural difference that exists between the two nations.

Smith's ODI average in the format had dipped to 35.32 since 2023, but the cricketer who finished on 5800 ODI runs with an average of 43.27, he was still an important figure in the Australian line-up for his ability to buckle down in tough situations.

Smith could've strived to join the likes of Ricky Ponting, Glenn McGrath and Gilchrist by winning a third ODI World Cup in 2027, but didn't, as clinging on to a place in the side by virtue of past achievements and blocking the way for new stars to emerge is just not the Australian way.

Such examples are rare in most cricketing countries and is impossible to find at a place like Bangladesh, where, for out of touch senior players, that moment of clarity never arrives.

SHORT CORNER

No CT final deals one last blow to hosts Pakistan

Pakistan cricket fans and former players seethed Wednesday after the host country's already disappointing Champions Trophy suffered one last blow: no final. "I am disgusted, neither our team is in the final nor is the final in Pakistan," said Moed Ali Khan, a private car driver outside Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium to watch the second semifinal between South Africa and New Zealand.

The Bangladesh connection of PCB museum curator

It was a bustling day at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium. Security personnel, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials, and staff were all in a rush, finalising preparations for the crucial semifinal clash between New Zealand and South Africa. Despite the heightened security, a small group of Bangladeshi journalists, including this reporter, got an opportunity to visit the iconic PCB Museum, where they were introduced to Yahya Ghaznavi, the museum's curator. What followed was an unexpected yet deeply personal revelation. Upon learning that we were from Bangladesh, Yahya warmly shared, "I was in Cumilla during the 1971 war."

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LeBron breaks 50k scoring barrier

AFP, Los Angeles

LeBron James became the first player in NBA history to score 50,000 career points on Tuesday, extending his lead as the league's all-time record scorer by reaching a milestone tally that may never be surpassed.

The Los Angeles Lakers superstar went into the game against the New Orleans Pelicans with 49,999 regular and postseason points after a 17-point performance in Sunday's win over the Los Angeles Clippers.

It did not take long for the 40-year-old NBA icon to get the solitary point needed to reach the 50,000-point barrier.



James, who is in dazzling form in the 22nd season of a glittering career, gathered a pass from Luka Doncic and unfurled a sublime 25-foot three-pointer to move to 50,002 points with the Crypto.com Arena crowd roaring their acclaim.

James finished with 34 points, eight rebounds and six assists as the Lakers went on to win 136-115 -- their seventh straight victory.

"I'm not going to sugar-coat it -- it's a hell of a lot of points," James said.

"I'm super blessed to be able to put up that many points in my career in the best league and players in the world," James had passed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's previous all-time regular-season scoring record of 38,387 points in 2023 -- itself a record that had stood for 39 years.



as a brand ambassador. However, when a renowned player like Shahid Afridi makes such comments about the franchise, the blame often falls on the entire nation.

If players' payments are not made properly, the board can take a stance. However, in such cases, the board cannot do much beyond pushing the franchise or being more cautious about them in the future.

DS: Is there any chance BCB will discuss with Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad their final call on international retirement?

FA: Until now, we haven't had any discussions with them. But I feel the decision should come from their end. We won't play ODIs until May-June, so we have time to discuss the matter.

DS: You are planning too many series, but the players are not getting breathing space, which affects their performances in big tournaments. This was evident in the Champions Trophy, where they played just days after the BPL.

FA: It's a valid point, but the FTP and other commitments are extremely hectic. I don't know how the players manage it. I was thinking that if we could separate white-ball and red-ball squads, it might help players adjust better.

But as you said, ICC events are the platform where teams showcase their progress over the years. These events draw the most attention, and people talk about them, so performing well in them is crucial. Let's be honest -- our last three ICC events didn't go well. That's a fact. We need to try and do better.

SOUTH ASIAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

No Imranur in 14-member Bangladesh team

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) picked 14 athletes while leaving out England-based sprinter Imranur Rahman for preparation for the South Asian Senior Athletics Championships, which are scheduled to take place in Ranchi, Jharkhand from May 3-5.

Bangladeshi athletes will compete in six men's events -- 100m sprint, 400m sprint, 400m hurdles, 110m hurdles, long jump and high jump, and three women's events -- 100m sprint, high jump and long jump.

Out of the 14 selected athletes, 11 won gold medals in their respective events in the just-concluded 48th National Athletics Championships while three of them won silver and bronze medals in 100m men's and women's sprint events.

"We have picked those who performed well in the national championships and their timings were close to the 2019 SA Games ones," BAF general secretary Shah Alam told *The Daily Star*.

Asked why they did not consider Imranur, the country's fastest sprinter, Alam said: "We will call him for trial when we start preparation for the South Asian

Games. If he can pass the trial, he will represent Bangladesh again."

The five-time fastest sprinter Imranur skipped the national championships in a bid to avoid picking up injury following a surgery but he has been in training in England. He even claimed that he would be available for selection for next international competitions.

The selected athletes will train at the Army Stadium in Banani from March 6 to May 1, with Bangladesh Army Sports Control Board providing track, gymnasium and training kits while the athletes will stay at the stadium's BOA dormitory.

BAF joint secretary Mohammad Kitab Ali will act as coordinator while Farid Khan Chowdhury, Abdullah Hel Kafi and Fouzia Huda Jui have been nominated as coaches for the residential camp.

Squad: M Ismail, M Rakibul Hasan, M Jubail Islam (100m), Jahir Rayhan (400m) Mahfuzur Rahman (High Jump), Naimul Hossain Roni (400m hurdles) and Md Masud Rana (110m hurdles), Md Tanvir Faisal (110m hurdles) and Md Al Amin (Marathon). Shirin Akter and Sumaiya Dewan (100m women's sprint), Mst Ritu Akhtar (high jump) and (Sonia Akter (long jump).



'No more than a small advantage for Real'

AGENCIES

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was pleased with his side's resilience as they earned a 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid at the Bernabeu in the hard-fought first leg of their Champions League Round of 16 tie on Tuesday.

Ancelotti, however, is seeing the game as it is, saying that they now hold just a slender advantage and nothing more.

Real Madrid became the first team to win 300 matches in the European Cup/UEFA Champions League.

Real Madrid have won their last five Champions League knockout round games, while they're unbeaten in 10 consecutive such matches in the competition for the first time.

than that as there is a lot to play in the second leg.

Brahim Diaz scored the second-half winner after Atletico forward Julian Alvarez had cancelled out Rodrygo's

opener.

Vinicius Jr and Kylian Mbappe both missed good chances that could have given Real a bigger margin for the second leg but Ancelotti was not in the mood to lament missed opportunities.

He preferred to stick with the positive which is a win against what he considers one of Europe's best teams this season, and said his players will need even more effort to make the most of their narrow advantage to advance in their title defence.

"These are evenly matched games. It's a Round of 16 in the



Champions League as it could be a final or a semifinal. Atletico are a top team in Europe, and you can't think about finishing the tie in the first leg," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"We've gained a small advantage that gives us confidence for the second leg, but that's it. It was a difficult match ... as usual. It always is against Atleti."

"In the first half, we lost too many balls, we had unnecessary mistakes that almost cost us, they levelled the game with Julian Alvarez. But in the second half we were better. We

were able to take advantage and we did it."

Atletico Madrid manager Diego Simeone, meanwhile, was disappointed that his side failed to capitalise on the control they had for long periods of the game.

"We should have taken better advantage when we had control of the game," Simeone said.

The Argentine said he was confident that the atmosphere at their home ground would give Atletico "a stimulus" and that while his team go into the second leg behind, it could have been much worse had Real taken a late chance on Tuesday.

Real's Kylian Mbappe failed to find Vinicius Jr with a pass in the final moments of the match that could have led to another goal.

"Maybe the hope of that no goal opens the door for what's to come," he said.

The winners of the tie will most certainly meet Arsenal, who are in a virtually unassailable position to reach the quarterfinals after a 7-1 victory at PSV Eindhoven in Tuesday's first leg.

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