

Riyad opts out of central contracts



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh star Mahmudullah Riyad had requested Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to remove his name from the central contract list announced yesterday, raising questions over whether the veteran batting all-rounder will be seen in

BCB sources informed that the 39-year-old had asked not to be considered for the central contract list after February. The board announced the list of 22 players yesterday, with a footnote noting his request. Although the contracts run from January to December, BCB has honoured his decision.

Mushfiqur Rahim had been placed in category 'A' of the list, but after his retirement from ODIs, he will be placed in category 'B'.

Meanwhile, Taskin Ahmed has been awarded the 'A+' category with a salary of Tk 10 lakh. Pacer Nahid Rana and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain have been named in the central

BCB CENTRAL CONTRACT (JAN 1 - DEC 31, 2025)

Grade	A+	A	B	C	D
Salary (per month)	BDT 10,00,000	BDT 8,00,000	BDT 6,00,000	BDT 4,00,000	BDT 2,00,000
PLAYERS' NAMES	Taskin Ahmed	Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Liton Das	Mominul, Taijul, Mustafizur, Hridoy, Hasan Mahmud, Nahid Rana	Shadman, Soumya, Jaker Ali, Tanzid Tamim, Shariful, Rishad, Tanzim Sakib, Mahedi Hasan	Nasum Ahmed, Khaled Ahmed

international cricket again.

Mahmudullah, who announced his retirement from T20Is during the India series last year and had already stepped aside from Tests back in 2021, remains the only representative from the 'Big Five' to still remain in the ODIs after Mushfiqur Rahim retired from the 50-over format this month.

The media release also stated that Mahmudullah, placed in category 'B', will no longer be part of the central contracts from March.

"When the central contracts were proposed to the board, the players knew about the developments, and that's when the player discussed with the board," a BCB source claimed.

contracts for the first time, alongside Hasan Murad, Shadman Islam, and Jaker Ali Anik.

Players who only feature in red-ball cricket have been prioritised in the latest central contracts, with Mominul Haque and Taijul Islam in category 'B', with a specified monthly salary of Tk six lakh.

Slot demands more from Liverpool's week of 'finals'



- PSG have lost on their two previous visits to Anfield (in 1997 and 2018).
- Salah has played more games against PSG without scoring than against any other opponent in the Champions League (three).
- Liverpool had just two shots, collectively worth 0.27 expected goals (xG) in the first leg in Paris; it was their fewest goal attempts on record in a knockout game in this competition.
- In the first leg, Salah failed to attempt a shot for just the second time as a Liverpool player in the Champions League, following a blank against Real Madrid in March 2023.
- Liverpool have won all four of their Champions League at home this season, meaning Slot could become the first manager to win each of his first five home matches in charge of an English side in this competition.
- Liverpool are on a run of progressing in 14 Champions League ties when winning the first leg and have never been knocked out in a European tie in which they won the first leg away from home.

AGENCIES

Liverpool boss Arne Slot described PSG's visit as the second of "three finals" in a week, but has warned much more is needed from the Premier League leaders to progress to the Champions League quarterfinals.

The Reds somehow escaped the Parc des Princes with a 1-0 lead, courtesy of Harvey Elliot's 87th-minute-winner last week, despite being battered by the French champions, who came up against an inspired Alisson Becker in the Liverpool goal.

The Brazilian number one said his nine-game display was the "performance of his life".

Never before have Liverpool won the first leg of a European tie away and let the lead slip at Anfield.

Luis Enrique remained upbeat his side are "going to do it" despite suffering a first defeat in 23 games.

Enrique's men thumped top-flight rivals Rennes 4-1 on Saturday, righting their attacking wrongs from the first leg as Bradley Barcola and Goncalo Ramos netted before the dazzling Ousmane Dembele netted his 19th and 20th Ligue 1 goals of the season in added time.

Adding to Slot's concern was the lethargic first 45 minutes from his side against rock-bottom Southampton in Saturday's 3-1 win that forced the Dutchman into three half-time substitutions.

The League Cup final against Newcastle is also around the corner on Sunday with Slot very much on track for a treble in his first season in charge.

"The first of three finals," he said of the victory over Southampton. "I do hope the next two finals we will play a bit better than the first one."

"When I look at the game against PSG, we need to go one step up in terms of intensity. But if I compare it with the game today (Saturday), we need to go three, four, five, six or seven steps up in terms of intensity if we want to have any chance of reaching the next round."

Meanwhile, Barcelona will honour the life of their late team doctor Carles Minarro Garcia by giving everything to try to win return leg against Benfica, manager Hans Flick said during a press conference on Monday.

Following a hard-fought 1-0 win last week at Benfica after a red card for defender Pau Cubarsi early in the game, Flick said he was confident Barca could keep the momentum going and advance.

They are on a 16-game unbeaten run across all competitions and in contention for three major titles as they lead LaLiga and have reached the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Ahead of the all-German affair, Bayer Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso said his side would need a 'big miracle' to overturn a significant deficit as they went 3-0 down away at Bayern Munich last week.

"After this game we'll need a bit more time so we can recover -- in football we've seen big miracles quite often and we almost need one," he said on Wednesday.

"It's football, it's not my first time (against the odds), and there's another game at home."

SA Games prep set to start after Eid

SPORTS REPORTER

With Pakistan having announced a new schedule for South Asian Games from January 23 to 31 next year, Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is planning to start preparation camp for athletes in April, subject to release of government fund.

The 14th edition of the Games is likely to feature 28 disciplines, and Bangladesh is planning to participate in 25 of those disciplines following a nine-month residential camp. The BOA

has made a draft plan to start the camp with nearly 850 athletes as well as 150 coaches and officials and chalked up a budget worth Tk 35 crore for the camp and for appointing foreign coaches.

Before the SA Games, Bangladesh will take part in Asian Youth Games in October and Islamic Solidarity Games in November while it also has a plan to hold the Bangladesh Games in October.

"We need a big budget to prepare athletes for the three

international meets. We think the athletes will be able to take part in both Islamic Solidarity Games and SA Games with the same preparation but we need separate preparation for the Asian Youth Games as only athletes aged below 17 are eligible in the youth games," BOA's training committee secretary and treasurer AK Sarkar told The Daily Star yesterday.

It has been learnt that BOA made a draft budget of Tk 40 crore for preparation of the three events.

Asked whether they would start the training depending on receiving fund from the government, BOA secretary general Syed Shahed Reza said they will take action after consulting with BOA president Waker-Uz-Zaman.

BOA decided to increase meal budget to Tk 650 per day from Tk 600 per day given for the 2019 SA Games and set Tk 400 as pocket money per day, plus costs of transport and accommodation for the athletes and coaches.

India's consistency undisturbed, but was playing field fair?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Dubai

The ninth edition of the ICC Champions Trophy concluded in Dubai on Sunday, with India securing their second global title in nine months, reaffirming their status as a white-ball powerhouse. Yet, the tournament was mired in controversy, from its hybrid hosting model -- necessitated by India's refusal to travel to Pakistan -- to allegations of scheduling bias in their favour.

Pakistan were the official hosts, but remained only on paper. This reporter visited Rawalpindi and Lahore -- two of the three designated venues (the third being Karachi) -- only to find that Pakistan's campaign was effectively over after defeats to New Zealand at home and India in UAE. The disappointment among fans was evident, yet they continued to turn up in strong numbers.

While security and hospitality were impeccable, Pakistan had little say in key tournament decisions. The absence of a single Pakistani official on the post-final podium further reinforced their lack of influence, drawing criticism from Pakistan legends like Wasim Akram and Shoaib Akhtar.

ICCS'S BALANCING ACT
In the 2023 World Cup, India travelled 9,767 km -- the most of any team -- before falling short in the final against Australia. Perhaps in response, they ensured minimal travel in the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup, playing most of their group-stage matches in New York before moving to the Caribbean for the remainder.

This time, in the Champions Trophy, they played every match in Dubai, eliminating travel fatigue and allowing their squad to remain fresh. By contrast, runners up New Zealand covered 7,048 km between Pakistan and the UAE.

Over the last three ICC events, India have lost just one match -- the 2023 ODI World Cup final -- leading many to argue that they hardly needed what some have termed an "unfair advantage" of

advantages."

Beyond the travel disparity,

India also benefited from familiarity with Dubai's conditions and pitches, allowing them to fine-tune their squad selection and strategies. In contrast, other teams had to accommodate diverse playing conditions across Pakistan and the UAE, complicating their team compositions. India's well-laid plans were evident in their performances throughout the

with the world's wealthiest cricket board.

"That looks like the ICC putting finances ahead of fairness," said Brookes, whose book *An Island's Eleven*, a history of Sri Lankan cricket, won the Wisden Book of the Year award in 2023. "Some people will naturally think that the governing body is bending over backwards to accommodate India."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ODIS?

For over a decade, India have been a fixture in ICC knockout stages, often stumbling at the final hurdle. Last year, they ended an 11-year trophy drought with the T20 World Cup, and now they've added another 50-over title to their collection.

India captain Rohit Sharma said during the post-final press conference, "Whatever ICC tournament comes in front of you, you obviously want to win them all."

"One-day World Cup is One-Day World Cup. Because that's the only World Cup we've grown up watching. We didn't have the World Test Championships or many Champions Trophy... But this [holding the Champions Trophy] is no less. Ask me how much of an effort it takes to win this."

India's victory, though impressive, does little to alter the bigger picture that ODI cricket is on the wane. The much-anticipated tournament was meant to be a grand occasion had served as little more than an ICC fundraiser. The tournament revealed a stark lack of competition, and with interest in the seven-hour format dwindling, the future of 50-over cricket hangs in the balance.



playing exclusively in Dubai.

"I feel sorry for India's cricketers," award-winning cricket writer Nicholas Brookes told Reuters. "They are an outstanding team -- in my mind, streets ahead of their competition regardless of conditions, and one of the greatest white-ball sides the game has seen."

"This tournament should have been their victory lap, but their brilliance has been somewhat overshadowed by constant questions about unfair

tournament.

Allowing India to remain in Dubai not only deprived Pakistan of the honour of hosting the final but also disrupted the knockout schedule. South Africa, for instance, endured an 18-hour round trip to Dubai, anticipating a semifinal against India, before flying back to Pakistan to face New Zealand.

The entire affair portrayed the ICC, under the leadership of former BCCI secretary Jay Shah, as lacking strength in dealing