

A suspension reduced and a cancerous culture

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There are so many incidents happening in tandem around Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) that sometimes issues get swept under the rug without coming into notice.

There is an ongoing investigation into BCB's financial mishaps by Anti-Corruption Commission of the government while suggestions of match-fixing plague the ongoing Dhaka Premier League and the recently concluded Bangladesh Premier League. While investigation committees have been formed to look into these issues, the incident regarding reduction of Towhid Hridoy's two-match DPL suspension or the resignation of match referee Enamul Haque Moni, who was the convener of the technical committee that was supposed to deal with Hridoy's suspension, have not set the alarm bells ringing. But they should.

There has been no clear-cut answer forthcoming on how Mohammedan captain Hridoy was allowed to play after serving a one-match ban when the technical committee of DPL did not authorise the request, a job that should be solely their undertaking. This is happening because the murky club cricket culture is eating away at

The original bylaws of the DPL stated that there would be two-match suspension for 4-7 accumulated Demerit Points. However, the clause was changed overnight to one-match suspension for 4-7 accumulated demerit points following Hridoy's suspension.

Bangladesh cricket is still at play. The balance of power may have shifted from one to another but the same processes remain.

What happened is a travesty. CCDM had formed a technical committee comprising Moni, Selim Sahed and Abhi Abdullah Al Noman. Hridoy sent in the letter requesting reduction of suspension to the technical committee, a request which members of the technical committee did not want to entertain. Moni himself told The Daily Star that he resigned because of conflict of interest as he is a match referee and cannot hold the technical committee role since he would be passing judgement from two different places. But according to sources, Moni resigned following developments related to reduction of suspension.

In fact, a law change had been effected and the sanction table had been revised. Moni had earlier said he had nothing to do with Hridoy's suspension being reduced. What could have effected such a change in how sanctions are adjudicated in such a short space of time, especially when the convener of technical committee resigned?

Sources say that a certain club created enormous pressure on CCDM to allow Hridoy to play after just one-match suspension. The CCDM then embroiled the umpires' committee into this controversy as it was on behalf of the umpires' committee that an official had signed the memo of sanction table revision, which shows how demerit points will equate to match suspensions from now on. The technical committee did not issue that change and CCDM had to coerce the umpires' committee to validate the procedure despite leaving many holes in the fabric.

According to insiders, BCB directors Nazmul Abedeen Fahim and Ilekhbar Ahmed Mithu were reluctant to reduce the ban but the pressure created by the club had the last say.

When Mithu, the umpires' committee chairman, was asked by this newspaper how Hridoy's ban was reduced or how such sanction change can come into place, he refused to comment.

Hridoy's altercation with umpires resulting from what he believed were wrong decisions against his team shows signs of an already rotten culture. But the way the sentence was reduced adds further layers of lack of integrity to the mix.

One BCB director, on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star: 'Jei lau shei kodui ache' (it is as it used to be before). That appears to be the prevailing culture of Bangladesh cricket.



Bangladesh all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz holds up the ball, gesturing his five-wicket haul against Zimbabwe on Day 2 of the first Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. The off-spinner picked the last four wickets to finish with figures of 5-52 as the visitors were skittled out for 273. In reply, the Tigers' second innings reached 57-1 at stumps, with opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Mominul Haque steady the ship with an unbroken 44-run stand. The hosts now trail by 25 runs.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Miraz marks a milestone amid shifting expectations

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN FROM SYLHET

Bangladesh all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz knows all too well how much harder international cricket becomes with experience. The more matches one plays, the more the game evolves -- and the more opponents adapt.

Miraz burst onto the scene in 2016, debuting in a two-match home Test series against England. Aged just 19, he made an instant impact, grabbing 19 wickets and notching up three five-wicket hauls in his first four innings.

By 2018, the off-spinner had already taken seven five-fors in just 18 Tests, becoming the fastest Bangladeshi to reach 50

I think we have a great opportunity to win the game. We are still 20-30 runs ahead. Our bowlers will have a rest tonight (Monday); they will come back tomorrow fighting hard. You don't know what might happen. There's a lot of time left in this Test. We will give our best tomorrow.

Zimbabwe batter Brian Bennet

Test wickets. He repeated similar feats while getting to 100 and 150 wickets. But his journey to 200 is proving tougher -- fellow spinner Taijul Islam reached the mark in 85



innings, whereas Miraz has already bowled in 90.

As time went on, the wickets didn't come as easily. Opposing teams started to study him more closely, identifying his weaknesses through video analysis. What was once routine -- taking five wickets in an innings -- proved to be increasingly rare.

Over the past six years, Miraz has managed the feat only four times in 32 matches. The latest came in Sylhet yesterday, where his 5-52 helped Bangladesh bundle out Zimbabwe for 273 in their first innings.

"When someone debuts in international cricket, people have no idea about him. But once he plays many matches in one or two years, people start to get to know about him," Miraz told reporters yesterday after the end of the second day's play.

"There is video footage from where people identify [player's] weaknesses... If you don't improve, it's difficult to survive here because world-class players play here."

"Zimbabwe are not giving us space to score runs easily, while we are also not taking wickets easily," opined the 27-year-old, whose previous five-for at home came in 2022, although his last one overall was in Rawalpindi against Pakistan last year.

In recent years, Miraz has also stepped up with the bat, evolving into a dependable lower order contributor. In 2024, he scored 614 runs in 10 Tests -- the highest for Bangladesh in red-ball cricket -- while also leading the wicket charts with 31 scalps.

With Shakib Al Hasan no longer a regular feature in the Test side, many see Miraz as the natural successor. And he's embracing dual responsibility.

"In the last two to three years, I focused on my batting and have done well. I think I must keep balancing both," he said, further recalling how he started out purely as a bowler and batted down at number eight for much of his career.

Despite trailing by 25 runs at stumps on day two, Miraz remains confident about Bangladesh's position in the Test.

"I still think the match is in our control. They may have got a lead of 82 runs, and we are now 25 runs behind. As we have just lost one wicket and we have good batters, if we can give them a good total, it will be a challenge for them on day four," he concluded.

Can Kings break final hoodoo against Abahani?

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings and record 22-time champions Abahani will look to add another feather to their crowns when they square off in the Federation Cup final at the Rofique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh today.

Three-time champions Kings are keen to take the trophy to home to salvage their season, especially after having their hopes of retaining the league title all but extinguished.

Abahani, meanwhile, have maintained an all-win record coming into the final under the guidance of Maruf Haque and they will certainly look to add a record-extending 23rd Federation Cup title to their cabinet, having won the title two seasons ago.

Since the emergence of Bashundhara Kings as the most dominant power in top-tier football in 2018, the battle between these two sides has always been a mouth-watering one. Kings have won 12 of the 18 meetings between the two sides in domestic competitions.



Abahani, however, have won both encounters against Kings this season -- once in the Premier League and the other in the Federation Cup. The Sky Blues have also proved to be Kings' nemesis when it comes to tournament finals -- winning the 2018 Federation Cup final and the 2021 Independence Cup final.

Kings Romanian coach Valeriu Tita is confident this team can come on top against Abahani in the third time of asking.

"Tomorrow in my opinion, [it] will be a difficult match for both teams. I hope that this time the victory belongs to us, to save the season by winning the trophy," Tita said. "I want that my players to demonstrate that it was not by chance that we reached the final, and I am sure that they will give everything for this trophy."

Abahani coach Maruf, too, was optimistic, though, they will miss the services of suspended centre-back Asaduzzaman Bablu.

"We are hopeful about becoming champions even though Kings, the defending champions, are a good side and it is not possible to beat them with prior announcement," Maruf said. "Still, I am optimistic because we beat them twice this season and the inclusion of two foreign players has strengthened our squad."

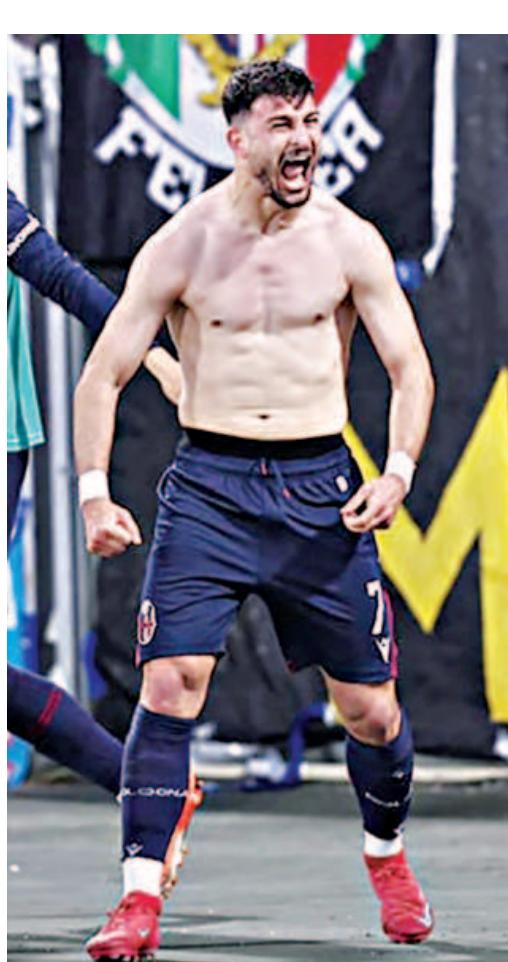
The match will kick off at 2:45 pm.

How Pope Francis used football to spread unity



Pope Francis, a lifelong football fan who passed away yesterday at the age of 88, viewed the beautiful game as more than sport -- a means to promote peace, unity, and social responsibility. From hosting interfaith matches to urging players to prioritise the collective over self-interest, the pontiff used football to reach hearts across faiths and frontiers.

Read full story on The Daily Star website



A couple of sensational strikes had considerable impact on the leaderboards of LaLiga and Serie A yesterday. Midfielder Fede Valverde, who now has six goals in LaLiga for Real Madrid, scored his first from inside the box, driving a right-footed volley deep into stoppage-time at home against Athletic Bilbao to give Los Blancos a narrow 1-0 win to keep the deficit to four points with league-leaders Barcelona. Meanwhile, Bologna winger Riccardo Orsolini produced a moment of magic as his stunning last-gasp goal from a bicycle kick gave Bologna a 1-0 home win against Inter, who lead the standings but are now level on points with second-placed Napoli.



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