

Bangladesh miss out on hockey's Asia Cup spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have failed to qualify for the Asia Cup hockey tournament for the first time following a 5-4 defeat against Oman in the semifinals of the AHF Cup – a second-tier continental competition which serves as a qualifying platform in Jakarta, Indonesia on Friday.

The men in red and green, who came into the semifinals with an all-win record in the group stage despite often not being very convincing, paid the price for a poor defensive display against the high-pressing and speedy Omani forwards.

The four-time defending champions Bangladesh had taken a 2-1 lead in the second quarter after conceding an eighth-minute lead but three goals in the span of five minutes all but sent Mamunur Rashid's charges out of the contest.

While Bangladesh will miss out on the 12th edition of the Asia Cup, Oman and Chinese Taipei will be there as the last two teams and will also fight for the AHF Cup title.

» **April 12:** Mohammedan skipper Towhid Hridoy was suspended for one game after a heated exchange with on-field umpires Tanvir Ahmed and Sharuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat during a Dhaka Premier League fixture against Abahani in Mirpur. Hridoy exacerbated the situation after the match by telling the media, "He [Saikat] is an international umpire and we respect him. But we are also international players."

» **April 13:** Following Hridoy's comments to the media, he was handed three more demerit points, making it seven in total. The match referee then handed him a two-match ban along with a fine of Tk 80,000.

» **April 17:** Hridoy didn't play in Mohammedan's first DPL Super League game against Legends of Rupganj. Mohammedan lost by nine wickets.

» **April 20:** Hridoy was named in Mohammedan's playing XI against Agrani Bank Cricket Club in their second Super League match at BKSP-3. When both BCB and CCDM were asked about the ban reduction, none could offer a clear answer. Mohammedan officials claimed that they appealed for reduction of the ban and the CCDM responded by reducing the ban. Technical committee member Enamul Haque Moni said he was unsure how the suspension was reduced and also resigned from his position.

» **April 22:** Saikat threatened to quit domestic umpiring over alleged inconsistencies in the handling of Hridoy's ban.

» **April 23:** BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim was appointed as convener of the technical committee in place of Moni.

» **April 24:** Fahim said in the media that Hridoy will be suspended for his team's upcoming DPL match against Gazi Group.

» **April 25:** Several national team and domestic cricketers led by Tamim Iqbal gathered at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in the morning. After a meeting among themselves, they met BCB president Faruque Ahmed. Later, BCB deferred the suspension to next season.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Bagha Sharif (L) tries to outmuscle Rashed Boli in the final of the 116th edition of Abdul Jabbarer Boli Khela, a traditional wrestling event, at the Laldighi Maidan in Chattogram on Friday. Sharif, from Homna in Cumilla, won the 45-minute fight to retain the title of the traditional wrestling event, beating the same man he had beaten to claim his maiden title last year.

BCB's failure highlighted in Hridoy saga

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The circus surrounding the way the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) handled the suspension episode of Mohammedan captain Towhid Hridoy gathered further wind on Friday.

In the end, according to a BCB press release on Friday, the enforcement of Hridoy's suspension was deferred over a 12-month period as the DPL technical Committee nullified the memo from the umpire's committee which had revised the sanction table whereby seven demerit points equate to one match suspension.

This reversal happened following protests from cricketers, only a day after Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis' (CCDM) technical committee convener and BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim had informed the media that Hridoy was set to be suspended for Mohammedan's crucial Dhaka Premier League (DPL) Super League match against Gazi Group in Mirpur today.

On Friday morning, cricketers arrived at the Mirpur Academy Ground premises, and following talks between themselves, the players met with BCB president Faruque Ahmed. Hridoy's suspension, which was handed down due to his altercation with on-field umpires in a DPL game against Abahani earlier this month, was the biggest issue in that meeting, alongside other issues that Tamim Iqbal later mentioned in his press

brief. Cricketers claimed to have felt disrespected by the way Hridoy's suspension was reduced and then reinstated. However, disrespect of umpires was not mentioned in the press brief.

"After he [Hridoy] played two matches, we heard yesterday [Thursday] that he has been suspended again. I don't know which rule was followed in this case. We



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

were concerned. It's very funny. How can you suspend a guy again after he had already served his suspension and was allowed to play two games by the BCB? How can you suspend him again?" Tamim said.

Tamim was right when he said what had already transpired in Hridoy's suspension saga, even before yesterday, had been "funny". And to make it even funnier, the latest episode saw Hridoy's suspension deferred to next season.

Hridoy had been handed four demerit points and suspended for a match for an altercation with the

umpires during the match against Abahani. Later, the technical committee handed him another three demerit points for the comments he made in the media afterwards. Since it was a level 2 offence under the BCB Code of Conduct, he was to be suspended for two matches. But this is where the toxic culture of club cricket came into play as several departments were pressured into reducing Hridoy's suspension.

This led to the resignation of the then technical committee convener Enamul Haque Moni. Bangladesh's only umpire in the ICC Elite Panel, Sharuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat, also made an ultimatum to quit domestic cricket over the way the issue was handled.

It is apparent that the umpiring committee or relevant structures of CCDM were not able to work according to their decorum.

While Mohammedan had initially stated that they received a letter from CCDM which confirmed that Hridoy's suspension was reduced, later they claimed the suspension was deferred.

However, CCDM chairman Mohammad Salahuddin later revealed they had sent no such letter either about the sentence being reduced or being deferred to next season.

It is clear that no proper process was followed in this entire saga. As it seems, the Hridoy fiasco ultimately happened because the BCB allowed it to happen.

Mohammedan face Abahani in high-stakes clash today

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Mohammedan Sporting Club can take a massive step today in their bid to claim a first-ever professional league title when they play archrivals Abahani in the 12th round game of the Bangladesh Premier League in Cumilla on Saturday.

A win for the Black and Whites will see them forge a seven-point lead over the six-time professional league winners, with only six round of matches remaining after this fixture.

Mohammedan, who lost the one-off Challenge Cup against Bashundhara Kings at the start of the season and failed to qualify for the playoff rounds of the Federation Cup, will be eager to bring home their first-ever Bangladesh Premier League trophy.

Abahani, meanwhile, are locked in a battle with Bashundhara Kings in the postponed Federation Cup final which will be completed next Tuesday. A win for the Sky Blues, meanwhile, would definitely turn the BPL into a two-horse racing, with only one point separating the two sides.

The two sides met each other twice this season – Mohammedan winning the first meeting on December 14 last year in the first leg of the league, thanks to a decisive goal from Soleymane Diabate. Abahani had a quick revenge, winning their Federation Cup group stage fixture on January 7 by the same margin, this time Mohammad Ibrahim was the goalscorer. Both those matches were held in Cumilla.

Meanwhile Bangladesh Police moved into fourth position on the 10-team table following a 1-0 win over Dhaka Wanderers Club in Mymensingh, with Jakhongir Qurbanboyev scoring the all-important goal in the 84th minute. The win took Police to 19 points from 12 matches, one ahead of Rahmatganj, while Wanderers remained in ninth position with only four points.

In the other match of the day at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, 10-man Fortis FC were held to a 1-1 draw by Fakirpool Young Men's Club.

Ojukwu David gave Fortis, who are now in sixth position with 18 points, a 33rd-minute lead before they were reduced to 10 men following a straight red card to Sarowar Jahan in the second half. Ben Ibrahim Ouattara equalised for Fakirpool in the 65th minute to snatch a point.



PHOTO: BCB

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz speak with each other as Bangladesh and Zimbabwe teams head inside the team hotel in Chattogram on Friday for the second and final Test. Having suffered a three-wicket defeat in the first Test in Sylhet last week, Bangladesh will hope to bounce back at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium, with the match slated to begin on Monday.

COPA DEL REY

Clasico final offers Real Madrid redemption

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's European failure this season stung, in particular for striker Kylian Mbappe and coach Carlo Ancelotti, but a Copa del Rey final victory over Barcelona on Saturday would rapidly ease the pain.

Los Blancos crashed out of the Champions League 5-1 on aggregate against Arsenal earlier in April, while their arch rivals Barca progressed to the semifinals for the first time since 2019.

The Catalans are dreaming of a potential quadruple, and Madrid may take as much satisfaction in ending that possibility by lifting the Copa del Rey themselves.

Barcelona's thrilling attacking football has also powered them to first place in LaLiga, four points ahead of defending champions Madrid, with five matches remaining.

When he appeared on big screens at the Santiago Bernabeu last weekend, some fans whistled him -- although at Madrid, the occasional barracking is a rite of passage for the biggest stars. Even their all-time top goalscorer, Cristiano Ronaldo, suffered a similar fate.

If Ancelotti can find the formula to throw off Barcelona's rhythm, it would



This will be the 37th meeting between Barcelona and Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey; Barca currently lead the head-to-head 16 to 13 (eight draws).

Barcelona are the competition's most decorated side, lifting the trophy 31 times, while Madrid rank third with 20 wins.



prove doubly useful as the teams meet again on May 11 in a huge clash in the title race.

Despite netting 33 goals this season across all competitions, Madrid's top scorer, to some, Mbappe has become the face of a disappointing and potentially disastrous season.

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Real coach Ancelotti is widely expected

to be sacked at the end of the season, even though he has one more year on his deal, but ending his time at Madrid with one, or possibly two more trophies would be a fitting conclusion to a largely successful second spell.

Mbappe's recent ankle injury may offer the coach a reason to start the match without the French forward and keep him as a dynamic option for the second half.

However, Mbappe struck both of Madrid's goals in the January defeat in Saudi Arabia and, despite the recent whistles, has been the team's best player in 2025 -- not deploying him from the off may be too risky.

Female athletes ecstatic after 'unique' Qatar visit

SPORTS REPORTER

The four female athletes who accompanied Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus during his visit in Qatar returned home yesterday and expressed gratitude for the unique honour they received and shared their amazement at the state-of-the-art sports facility in the gulf nation.

The Chief Adviser recently made a four-day visit to Qatar to attend The Earthna Summit 2025 with a group of delegates. Four female athletes – footballers Afeda Khandakar and Shaheda Akter Ripa and cricketers Sumaiya Akter and Sharmin Sultana – were invited by the Qatar Foundation and accompanied him in the visit.

"We are very happy to be a part of the Chief Adviser's team and it has been a big achievement for all four of us from the sports arena because we represented the entire Bangladeshi sporting fraternity in Qatar," said Bangladeshi women's football team captain Afeda at the official press conference at the Foreign Service Academy in Doha.

This was the first time Bangladeshi athletes accompanied the head of the state in an official visit to another country.

"It was the first time that we travelled with the head of the government in Qatar as his companions and we are happy to be a part of it," cricketer

Sharmi said. "We had a unique experience there as we met with CEO of Qatar Foundation Sheikha Hind [bint Hamad Al Thani] and spoke about different things with her and visited some places like Education Stadium, Lusail Stadium, Aspiration Academy and indoor facilities which are very different to Bangladesh."

The four players also visited a Paris Saint Germain (PSG) academy in Qatar where two footballers played some 10 minutes with the academy players and visited Al Thumama Stadium which hosted the World Cup quarterfinal match between Portugal and Morocco.

Footballer Ripa said that they had a detailed discussion on what types of facilities they need with the chief of Qatar Foundation who also promised them to provide as much as possible.

"We hardly have any facilities for injury-recovery in Bangladesh but Qatar has world class facilities where players like Naymar, [Cristiano] Ronaldo came for treatment. She [Sheikha Hind] told us that she would try to provide such facilities."

Terming the visit of four female athletes with the Chief Adviser as a new start, deputy press secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder said, "Though Qatar hasn't specifically promised anything but they told us that they would build a dormitory and a gymnasium for female athletes and provide injury rehabilitation facility."