

Imrul skips NTC meeting as BFF waits on Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

National Teams Committee (NTC) deputy chairman and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) senior vice president Imrul Hassan, who is also president of Bashundhara Kings, was the only absentee from an emergency NTC meeting with BFF president and NTC chairman Tabith Awal yesterday.

The meeting was held regarding Bashundhara Kings' refusal to release 10 players for the national team's ongoing preparation camp for the September friendlies against Nepal in Kathmandu.

"It would have been better for us to make a decision, but neither the Bashundhara Kings president nor their manager picked up phone calls despite repeated efforts," BFF media committee chairman Amirul Islam Babu said today, having failed to communicate with Kings officials in the last two days.

Apart from Tabith, four other NTC members -- Babu, Satyajit Das Rupu, Iqbal Hossain, and Imtiaz Hamid Sabuz -- physically attended the meeting, while another member, Shahadat Hossain, joined virtually. BFF yesterday decided to send another letter to Kings, requesting them to release players "for the sake of national team." Hoping for positive feedback from Kings, the federation also announced it would hold another meeting in three to four days.

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera has been training with only 12 players in the ongoing camp and Babu said they have no plans to stop the it or cancel friendlies against Nepal on September 6 and 9.



Bangladesh players have been sharpening their skills ahead of the three-match T20I series against the Netherlands at home later this month and the upcoming Asia Cup in September. Head coach Phil Simmons, alongside senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, was seen having a conversation with all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz during the Tigers' practice session at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. The T20I series against the Netherlands will be held from August 30 to September 3, while the Asia Cup is scheduled for September 9-28 in the UAE.

PHOTO: STAR

No Babar, Rizwan in Pak's Asia Cup squad

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan left out Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan from the T20 squad named Sunday for the Asia Cup and a warm-up tri-series beginning this month against Afghanistan and the UAE.

Azam and Rizwan have been star performers in the shortest format in the past, but have not played since December, which head coach Mike Hesson put down to other players performing well.

"Babar has been asked to improve in certain areas, like taking on spin, and his strike rate, and he is working hard on these things," said Hesson. "The players we have are performing well and having a positive impact."

Since Hesson took over as head coach in May, Pakistan have played three T20 series -- winning 3-0 at home but losing 2-1 away to Bangladesh. They then beat the West Indies 2-1 in the United States.

"Our focus is to win the tri-series and the Asia Cup, and the aim is to peak from these pinnacle events," said Hesson.

All-rounder Salman Agha will lead the side, which also includes star pacer Shaheen Afridi, who returned to the T20 side in the series against West Indies. Fakhar Zaman also returns after being injured for the ODI series in the West Indies, which Pakistan lost 2-1.

The tri-series, which starts on August 29, and the Asia Cup from September 9 will both take place in the UAE.

Women's team continue WC prep against age-level boys

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh women's team players are set to compete in a tri-series -- a preparatory tournament ahead of the ICC Women's World Cup -- starting today at the BKSP, which will feature two women's teams, named the red and green team, and the Under-15 men's team.

Each team will face each other twice in the 50-over tournament, which will be held in its entirety at the BKSP. The tournament will end on August 28, afterwards the team will return to Dhaka for another camp before leaving for India for the World Cup, set to begin on September 30.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) tried and failed to arrange international assignments for the national team following their World Cup qualification in April this year. The BCB held talks with Pakistan and Sri Lanka but those boards already had a schedule in place for the lead up to the World Cup while other top sides had prior plans to play among themselves.

As a result, an Emerging Teams series against South Africa at home in May is the only taste of international cricket the women's players have had this year since the qualifiers in Pakistan.

To make up for this gap in preparation, the board had arranged a few practice games for the women's team against the men's U-17 team during the Sylhet camp in July and have opted for the same option once again, this time roping in the U-15 boys for a tournament.

However, Nasiruddin Faruque Shajib,



the batting coach of the women's team, argued that playing against age-level men's sides is actually good preparation for the Tigresses ahead of the World Cup.

"The [U-17 men's team's] bowling unit that we faced in Sylhet was quite quick. It reflected the standards of big international sides such as Australia and England. The conditions were good, the wickets had variety where we got batting friendly surfaces, wickets with grass and seaming conditions too along with spinning tracks," Nasiruddin, who has been with the side in an on and off basis since 2021, told The Daily Star.

"In difficult times, your mindset comes out. I feel it's very stable and strong right now... I feel because of our improved mindset, we scored 230-240 regularly against that bowling attack in Sylhet. We scored 245 twice and also twice we reached 250. Since we averaged 240

against unknown quality opponents, I am hopeful," he added.

Nasiruddin felt that the overall preparation for the World Cup has been good and is expecting a better performance than the Tigresses maiden World Cup campaign in 2022 in New Zealand, when the side won only one out of their seven games.

"We have seen players come up through the qualifiers. After that we also observed new players in the Emerging programme, where the girls played against a quality South Africa side. There was a conditioning camp in Dhaka, another conditioning camp in Cox's Bazar and we also played matches in Sylhet. So, in general the preparations have been fruitful."

"We obviously expect better results and I believe execution would make the difference. I feel they are in a good flow at the moment."

U-23s eye right combination in first Bahrain friendly

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-23 football team is looking forward to crafting the right combination and building team chemistry ahead of next month's U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers, as they face their Bahraini counterparts in the first of two friendly matches in Bahrain today.

The match will be held behind closed doors at 9:00 pm (Bangladesh time) at the BFA Football Field.

With the ambition of achieving good results in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers in Vietnam, the team has been sent abroad for the first time for a solid preparation by playing two friendly matches against strong Bahraini opponents. However, head coach Saiful Bari Titu will not have access to Italy-based Fahamedul Islam and England-based Cuba Mitchell, who are expected to join the Vietnam-bound squad later.

Titu, who also serves as the technical director of the Bangladesh Football Federation, will nevertheless have the opportunity to assess two more overseas players -- Zayyan Hakim and



Tanil Salik -- alongside the remaining 22 players, which include six current national players with experience in the Bangladesh Premier League.

The squad will play their first preparation match following just three days of training in Bahrain. The head coach believes that facing the hosts presents a valuable opportunity, as Bahrain are considered a strong side, comparable to hosts Vietnam. Vietnam will host the group-stage matches that also include Bangladesh, Yemen, and Singapore.

"It is a big opportunity for us. We want to build the right combination and team chemistry by playing two matches against the Bahrain U-23 side because our main aim is to test the strength of every department," said Titu in a video message sent by the BFF.

"If we are tested intensively, then we will learn from these matches, and that will help us in the U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers," added Titu. He also noted that midfielder Sheikh Morsalin is likely to miss today's match following an injury sustained during his club's encounter in the AFC Challenge League.

National team defender Rimon Hossain mentioned that the players have been trying to adapt to the weather conditions in Bahrain, which are similar to those in Bangladesh, though the humidity is higher.

"I think this squad is a better one because it is comprised of players from the Bangladesh Premier League. So, we are hopeful of having a good preparation in Bahrain," said the Bashundhara Kings defender.

According to assistant coach Atiqur Rahman Meshu, the players focused on activation, build-up, and finishing in the attacking third during yesterday's training session, before being briefed about their opponents in the afternoon.

Alcaraz-Sinner title showdown ahead of US Open

AGENCIES

World number one Jannik Sinner and world number two Carlos Alcaraz on Monday (early hours of Tuesday in Bangladesh) will renew their fast-growing rivalry in the final of the Cincinnati Open, a tune-up event for next month's US Open.

The pair, regarded as the leaders of tennis's new generation, will be meeting in a major final for the fourth time this season.

Both players advanced with straight set wins on Saturday. Defending champion Sinner ruthlessly subdued 136th-ranked qualifier Terence Atmane 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, while Spanish second seed Alcaraz defeated an ailing Alexander Zverev, who was suffering badly from the 32 Celsius heat and humidity, by 6-4, 6-3.

Sinner and Alcaraz have faced off in finals in Rome, Roland Garros, and Wimbledon this season. Last month, Sinner snapped a five-match losing streak to Alcaraz to become the first Italian man to win the Wimbledon singles crown. Alcaraz, who lost that final, is eager to turn the tables in Cincinnati.

"We always bring our best tennis. We raise each other's level. I'm ready

to take the challenge," Alcaraz said.

"I will try and adjust my game better and correct what I did wrong in our last match. I want to be ready with my 100%. Mentally I'll be ready -- I'm excited for Monday."

Sinner, celebrating his 24th



birthday, has not dropped a set in his first tournament since Wimbledon and now aims to become the first man since Roger Federer in 2014-15 to win consecutive Cincinnati titles.

"It's a very, very tough challenge every time you play a new opponent," Sinner said. "In the later stages of the tournament, the pressure is on, they deserve to be there."

For Alcaraz, this will be a second appearance in a Cincinnati final after losing to Novak Djokovic in 2023. The

Spaniard, already boasting five titles this season, extended his ATP match-win lead to 53 with his victory over Zverev.

The German, a diabetic, needed a medical timeout early in the second set and struggled to finish the match,



allowing Alcaraz to sweep the last 12 points despite some patchy play. "We started with good rallies, but when he felt bad, I was more focused on his condition than on my tennis," Alcaraz said. "I just wish him all the best."

Monday's clash will once again showcase tennis's most compelling rivalry in recent times, with Sinner holding the momentum after Wimbledon and Alcaraz seeking revenge before the season's final Grand Slam.



Teen sensation Lamine Yamal celebrates scoring Barcelona's final goal in a 3-0 rout of Mallorca away from home, as the defending champions opened their LaLiga campaign with ease on Saturday. Yamal, who assisted Raphinha's opener and also played a key role in Ferran Torres' goal in the 23rd minute, scored with the final shot of the game after having picked up the ball on the right flank and leaving three defenders trailing before curling a left-foot shot into the top corner. Mallorca were reduced to nine men in the first half, as Manu Morlanes and Vedat Muriqi were sent off inside just six minutes.

PHOTO: REUTERS