



Bangladesh players were all full of joy and excitement during the final training session in Phu Tho, Vietnam on Tuesday, ahead of today's opening match of the AFC Under-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers against the hosts. With Yemen and Singapore being the other teams in strong Group C, Bangladesh will look to make a positive start in their bid to make the tournament proper for the very first time. The 11 group winners and four best runners-up teams will qualify for the final round where they will be joined by hosts Saudi Arabia in January next year.

PHOTO: BFF

### SHORT CORNER

#### Starc retires from T20Is

Australian quick Mitchell Starc announced his immediate retirement from T20Is on Tuesday, saying he wanted to focus on his Test and ODI career, ruling himself out of the T20 World Cup in February-March. Starc steps away with a busy schedule to come, including a home Ashes series starting later this year and a one-day World Cup on the horizon.

#### Neymar hits back at Ancelotti over Brazil selection snub

Brazil superstar Neymar has contradicted with coach Carlo Ancelotti over why he was left out of the national team squad. Brazil are gearing up for two crunch World Cup qualifiers: against Chile in Rio and then Bolivia at the dizzying altitude of El Alto. "If I was left out, it was a technical decision, it had nothing to do with my physical condition," Neymar said after playing a full 90 minutes in Santos' 0-0 draw with Fluminense on Monday.

#### Bangladesh plugs into game-changing FCH via FIFA Connect

The recent Bangladesh Premier League transfer window brought a quiet but important change. For the first time, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) registered players through FIFA's digital system instead of the old paper-based process. It caused some confusion, but the move signals progress towards professionalism. At the heart of this change is the FIFA Clearing House (FCH), a system designed to ensure that clubs which train young players are rewarded when those players move on.

*\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website*

## FROM T20 TO 50-OVER Bulbul's ambiguity continues

NABID YEASIN

From claiming he was here to play a "T20 innings" as Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president to announcing his intent to contest in the upcoming board elections yesterday, Aminul Islam Bulbul has remained consistent in one regard -- the ambiguity that often characterises the leadership positions in any line of work in the country.

Bulbul replaced Faruque Ahmed as the 17th BCB president on May 30 this year, gaining the position through the National Sports Council's (NSC) approval. "I have come to play a quick T20 innings. So I will play a good T20 innings that you will remember," Bulbul had said during his first interaction with the media as board president.

However, the former national skipper now insists his "quick T20 innings" is still not over.

"The quick T20 innings is not over yet. Let that be over first, and if I need to continue, I shall go from playing T20 to 50-over (ODI) cricket," Bulbul told reporters at the Sylhet District Stadium on Tuesday, following a meeting with district and divisional coaches.

Despite expressing his eagerness to possibly stretch his "T20 innings" into a longer one-day style knock, Bulbul remains unsure about his next step.

"I have not had any discussions with the NSC yet. I just expressed that I will contest the [BCB] election if possible.

Right now, I don't know from where [which constituency] I will contest or how I will do it.

"My only reason is that the work I had started is progressing well, and I feel that instead of leaving it half done, I should carry it forward to completion. That is one of the main reasons for wanting to continue," he added.

Following his announcement, it appears unlikely that Bulbul will continue as an NSC-nominated director. Instead, he is expected to directly contest the upcoming BCB elections, scheduled for the first week of October. If successful, this would secure him a four-year term as a BCB director and potentially another term as president -- provided he chooses to run for the top post after being elected to the board.

Bringing about drastic change in just three months -- the time Bulbul has had as BCB president -- is not realistic in any line of work. The same is true for Bulbul, but his accomplishments in these months have not offered much inspiration either.

Other than touring different parts of the country -- including Rajshahi, Barishal, Chattogram, Fatullah, Sylhet, and Khulna -- to assess cricket at the divisional level, and directly intervening to address the low and slow pitches at the

Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Bulbul has little to show for the work he insists should not be left "half done."

Since the ouster of the Awami League government on August 5 last year, there has been talk of reforming the BCB constitution ahead of the elections, along with renewed calls to tackle one of the game's long-standing challenges in Bangladesh -- decentralisation of cricket. However, the constitution reform committee, formed by Bulbul's predecessor Faruque Ahmed and led by BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, has remained inactive for months. Bulbul himself has not spoken in detail about either issue since assuming office.

With just a month left before the BCB polls, the scenario remains unchanged: those aiming to continue in the organisation responsible for the country's cricket development remain wrapped in the same ambiguity that has lingered for years. It also raises the question: Will the BCB boss eventually pad up for an even longer innings, transitioning from 50-over-style to a Test-like knock?

But so far, the scoreboard tells its own story: plenty of dot balls, not enough boundaries.



### EUROPEAN TRANSFER WINDOW

## PL flexes muscle

AGENCIES

The Premier League's financial firepower showed no signs of slowing as the summer transfer window shut with clubs spending a record-breaking €3.4 billion -- more than the annual gross domestic product of Bhutan.

The drama peaked late on Monday night when Liverpool confirmed the British record €143 million signing of Newcastle striker Alexander Isak, capping off a window in which they also landed Germany star Florian Wirtz for an initial €114 million.

The Premier League accounted for 51% of the gross spend across Europe's top five leagues, leaving rivals scrambling to keep pace. Liverpool led the way with a €482 million outlay, followed by Chelsea (€328m) and Arsenal (€293m), according to Transfermarkt.

"Stadium expansion and enhanced commercial partnerships coupled with on-pitch success has pushed their revenue line up over €684m," said Dan Plumley, football finance expert at Sheffield Hallam University, explaining the capabilities of the Premier League holders.

Outside England, the Bundesliga was hit hardest, losing Wirtz, Ekitike, Woltemade and Sesko to English clubs for a combined €380m. Bayern CEO and club legend Oliver Kahn publicly questioned whether Germany was destined to remain a "talent factory" for others.



PHOTO: REAL BETIS

Brazilian winger Antony reacts on his unveiling in Sevilla after sealing a permanent switch to Real Betis from Manchester United for a fee of €28m yesterday. Signed for €82m, Antony leaves Old Trafford as one of the club's most expensive flops.

### BEYOND THE PREMIER LEAGUE

Real Madrid landed Trent Alexander-Arnold (€11m), Franco Mastantuono (€38m), Alvaro Carreras (€50m) and Dean Huijsen (€57m).

Barcelona shocked Spain by prising goalkeeper Joan Garcia (€25m) from city rivals Espanyol.

European champions PSG added Illia Zabarnyi (€63m) from Bournemouth.

AS Monaco posted Europe's highest net income: +€104m.

Bayern Munich signed Luis Diaz (€86m) from Liverpool but saw Bundesliga talent drained by English clubs.

Borussia Dortmund recruited Jobe Bellingham (€33m), following in brother Jude's footsteps.

AC Milan snapped up Christopher Nkunku (€42m) from Chelsea.

Galatasaray pulled off a coup with Victor Osimhen (€75m) from Napoli.

Los Angeles FC lured Son Heung-min (€23m) from Tottenham.

## Spotlight on Tigers' bench strength in dead-rubber

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

After passing up two opportunities in the series, the Bangladesh team management is finally set to experiment when they face the Netherlands in the dead-rubber third and final T20I at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today.

Although the ongoing T20I series forms part of the 'Tigers' preparations for the upcoming Asia Cup T20I--scheduled to begin on 9 September--head coach Phil Simmons and skipper Litton Das had both downplayed the importance of results in the build-up. However, their cautious approach in the first two games told a different story.

Despite winning the toss in both matches, Bangladesh opted to field first on each occasion, favouring the conditions for chasing due to the dew factor. They comfortably chased down modest targets in both encounters, sealing their third successive T20I series victory. With the series already secured, the team now has the luxury to focus on experimentation--both



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

in strategy and squad selection--for the final match.

According to a team official, Shamim Hossain--who had been recovering from a fever and missed the first two matches--is now fully fit and available for selection in the final game.

As today's fixture is Bangladesh's last before their opening Group B Asia Cup

match against Hong Kong on 11 September in Abu Dhabi, players such as Nurul Hasan Sohan and Mohammad Saifuddin could also be given opportunities to prove themselves ahead of the team's departure for the UAE on 7 September.

On Tuesday afternoon, four Bangladeshi players--Jaker Ali, Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain and Rishad Hossain--took part in an optional practice session at the Sylhet Outer Stadium.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands will be eager to salvage some pride from the final match after suffering heavy defeats in the opening two games.

"I think there's always disappointment, but we're here to learn. We're here to give the guys their experience. But with all the work they put in, it is pretty disappointing--not just for us, but for them as well," Netherlands batting coach Heino Kuhn told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We've beaten some big teams and are looking to continue that journey--hopefully starting tomorrow again," he concluded.

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