

An election only for continuity?

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The stage is set, the voters are ready, as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) heads to polls today – not with anticipation, but with a weary sense of repetition.

The cash-rich board is once again electing its directors for the next four years, but the process, mired in controversy and control, feels less like an exercise of democracy and more like a scripted drama.

From the moment the election schedule was announced on September 21, controversy began to swirl. Allegations of government interference, disputes over councillorships, and loopholes in the BCB constitution marred the process.

What could have been an opportunity for reform, became a repeat of the old game – power over principle, influence over integrity.

With the ousting of the Awami League

government, there was genuine hope that the interim authority would seize this rare chance to introduce reforms in the BCB, paving the way for genuine cricket organisers to reclaim the board.

But those expectations have faded away. Rather than ushering in transparency, the election has exposed the same systemic flaws that have long crippled Bangladesh cricket's governance.

The controversy first erupted over the nomination of district and divisional councillors. Allegations of interference surfaced after it was revealed that several nominations were manipulated and deadlines were extended twice.

The root of the problem lies in the BCB's constitution, which allows the district sports association to send councillors "if" there is no district cricket association. That one word – "if" – has created endless disputes and left room for political and



"The Election Commission will decide whether it's an ideal election. At the end of the day, we all shake hands – like in cricket. No matter who wins, we must work together for Bangladesh cricket. That's the key."

BCB president
AMINUL ISLAM BULBUL

Twenty-five years later, everything still flows through Dhaka, and the system remains untouched.

The interim government, thought to have the best chance in years to oversee a transparent poll, has disappointed. Veteran organisers have grown disillusioned, realising this election is shaping up as another exercise in formality rather than fairness.

A total of 157 voters will cast ballots to elect 17 directors from 28 candidates. Six directors have already been elected unopposed. Once the board is complete, elections for president and vice-presidents will follow – though few expect surprises.

Current president Aminul Islam Bulbul, elected as a director from Dhaka Division, is widely expected to retain his post. His path was made easier by the withdrawal of several high-profile names, including former national captain Tamim Iqbal, who stepped aside citing "political interference and conspiracies."

Two major controversies have defined this election. First, Bulbul's September 18 letter to the Ministry of Youth and Sports in which he admitted that several divisions and districts failed to properly nominate councillors, prompting deadline extensions and accusations of manipulation.

The second centred on the 15 Dhaka Metropolitan clubs, whose councillorships were suspended, reinstated, and suspended again in a week-long drama that triggered protests and withdrawals.

Even yesterday, the saga continued. A Supreme Court chamber judge overturned a High Court order that had barred those clubs, restoring their voting rights at the last moment and forcing the Election Commission to reprint ballots.

The damage, however, is already done. Bangladesh cricket once again finds itself trapped in the same old loop – an election that promised change but is set to deliver continuance of a broken system.

administrative meddling.

Then came the clubs. As always, they remain the most powerful bloc in the board, with 12 of the 25 directors coming from Dhaka clubs. In no other major cricketing nation do clubs hold such disproportionate sway, but in Bangladesh, club politics has become the backbone of the BCB. Every attempt to reform this imbalance has failed, crushed by the same vested interests that benefit from it.

The irony runs deeper. Even as officials decry political interference, the BCB's own constitution ensures it – by allowing the National Sports Council (NSC) to directly nominate two directors. This structural dependency on the government leaves the board perpetually vulnerable to influence.

The promise once made to the International Cricket Council (ICC) – in Bangladesh cricket's former director of development Eddie Barlow's handwritten note – to form regional associations and decentralise power has long been forgotten.

BCB POLLS

➤ **Category 1:** (10 directors to be elected) Already six including former cricketer Abdur Razzak elected unopposed and four directors to be elected from nine candidates including Aminul Islam, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim.

➤ **Category 2:** 12 directors to be elected from 17 candidates

➤ **Category 3:** One director to be elected from two candidates – Debabrata Paul and Khaled Mashud Pilot.

➤ COUNCILLORS: 191

Category 1: 70

Category 2: 76

Category 3: 45

➤ The voting will take place between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm today at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka.

➤ The result of the BCB polls will be announced at 6:00 pm. The president and vice-president election will be followed after the result of BCB polls and the result will be announced at 9:00 pm.

➤ Two more directors are set to join the board as National Sports Council (NSC) nominees. These two names will be revealed after the board of directors' election.

➤ 58 councillors will cast their votes through e-mail while others are expected to cast their votes in person.

'Test specialists' coming alive in NCL T20

SPORTS REPORTER

The ongoing National Cricket League – NCL T20 – is going against the regular modus operandi of T20 tournaments in country. The likes of Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Shadman Islam, Amite Hasan or Fazle Mahmud Rabbi – considered red-ball specialists – are amongst the top run-getters, in absence of regular faces some of whom are in the UAE with the Bangladesh T20I or ODI teams.

Joy was the latest among the 'Test specialists' to hit a ton on Sunday, following Shadman's century the day before. The likes of Mominul Haque had found some runs in the last NCL but this season a few Test cricketers have turned a corner.

Joy batted at a strike-rate of just over 115 in eight innings in the last edition. Yesterday the 24-year-old moved to 99 with a six over long on off Rejaur Rahman Raja before completing his ton with a four. His acceleration was notable. Having reached his fifty in 40 deliveries, he needed just 19 more to get to the hundred. Joy finished with a 63-ball 110, laced with five fours and nine sixes, setting the record for the highest score in NCL T20 history.

Courtesy of Joy's exploits, Chattogram reached 214 for 6 – the highest score in NCL T20, with Mominul also contributing with a 19-ball 32.



Despite Amite's 25-ball 40 at the top, Sylhet were bundled out for 115, handing Chattogram a 99-run win.

Rabbi of Barishal believes that players such as Joy or Shadman are getting a chance to showcase their abilities in another format, which is a positive thing.

"It's a good thing. These players are getting an opportunity to showcase their T20 performances despite getting tagged as Test players. The players too want to perform in the top formats and do not want to be thought of as belonging to a certain format," he told The Daily Star.

Players such as Nurul Hasan, Shamim Hossain or Jaker Ali are playing for the national team at the moment. Asked about how it impacts the tournament, Rabbi said: "It's not possible to fill a gap left by players who are playing international cricket but you can see from a different point of view since a new player is getting an opportunity in those players' absence. There are quite a few players like that. If [Mohammad] Naim Sheikh was there, maybe Shadman would not have opened [for Dhaka Metro], so it's positive in that sense if players can capitalise."

IND-PAK HOSTILITY CONTINUES

For the fourth time in the last 25 days, India and Pakistan met on the cricket field and one thing remained the same – the cold vibe among the players. Similar to the three meetings during the recently concluded Men's Asia Cup, the skippers of the two sides refused to shake hands during their ICC Women's World Cup match at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. India's Harmanpreet Kaur and Pakistan's Fatima Sana walked past each other without any display of friendliness following the toss, as issues beyond cricket continued to spill onto the field between the two politically charged neighbouring nations.

PHOTO: AFP



'No need for panic'

AGENCIES

Arne Slot urged calm after Liverpool's slump continued with a 2-1 defeat at Chelsea on Saturday – their third loss in a row and second consecutive Premier League defeat.

Brazilian teenager Estevao delivered the decisive blow in the 95th minute at Stamford Bridge, condemning Slot to a first-ever run of three successive defeats in his managerial career.

It marked another agonising late collapse for Liverpool, coming just a week after Crystal Palace's 97th-minute winner and following Tuesday's 1-0 Champions League loss to Galatasaray. The Reds have not endured such a streak since 2023 when Jurgen Klopp was in charge.

"Another disappointing loss, that is clear," Slot admitted after the game. "We created three big chances in the first half, they only had one and they scored it. The second-half performance, I liked. We created more than enough to score more than one goal. There were periods where I thought we were going to win it."

Liverpool's struggles were

glaring, particularly in the first-half, as they again looked disjointed despite just two of their starting outfield players having joined this summer. Nearly £450 million worth of new signings have yet to bring cohesion, with £116 million midfielder Florian Wirtz's advanced role behind forwards Hugo Ekitike and record signing Alexander Isak leaving the team exposed through the middle.

Slot, however, chalked the defeat up to fine margins going against his side and the impact of a turbulent off-season, with the tragic death of Diogo Jota.

"I don't say we deserved the win, a draw we definitely deserved and then we would have had a great start to the season, if you take into account everything that happened in the summer in Liverpool," Slot said.

Up front, Isak's rhythm remains off following a truncated pre-season, while Mohamed Salah's dip continues to concern. The Egyptian has just five goals in his last 21 appearances and missed several key chances against Chelsea.

Liverpool managed only one shot on target before the 51st minute, despite Chelsea missing several key defenders due to injuries. The hosts, who had lost their previous two league matches, were vulnerable, yet Slot's side failed to capitalise.

"We didn't play the final pass well enough in those [final] chances. It was end to end in the last few minutes. Either team could have won it and Chelsea did," Slot added.

The defeat leaves Liverpool second in the Premier League table, a point behind Arsenal, having led the Gunners by five just two weeks ago.

A staggering 10 goals have been scored after the 80th-minute mark in Liverpool's 11 games so far this season. All but two of those goals have altered the result of the match. Seven such strikes gave Liverpool the win.

Newcastle United, Arsenal, Burnley and Atletico Madrid, and Southampton all fell to last-gasp blows – but it was a high-risk unsustainable strategy, especially with Liverpool so far from their best. And now they have received a bitter taste of their own medicine twice in seven days.



Bangladesh's Nishita Akter Nishi, Sumaiya Akter, Ritu Moni, Sanjida Akter Meghla, Shorna Akter, and Rabeya Khan look chipper as they pose for a picture at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati on Sunday. Fresh from a dominating victory over Pakistan in their ICC Women's World Cup opener in Colombo, the Tigresses will next face a strong England at the same venue tomorrow.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Cabrera confident of win against HK despite injuries

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera remains "absolutely convinced" that his side can secure all three points in their upcoming home fixture against Hong Kong, China in the Asian Cup Qualifiers – despite a growing injury list.

With just one point from their opening two matches, Bangladesh must win in the back-to-back clashes against joint leaders Hong Kong (four points) – at home on October 9 and away on October 14.

However, Cabrera has had to contend with several injury setbacks. Forwards Mohammad Ibrahim and Sumon Reza have already left the camp due to injury, while another forward, Mohammad Al Amin, along with key defenders Topu Barman and Tariq Kazi, are yet to resume training.

"Sumon and Ibra both arrived in good shape initially. Even Tariq, Topu and Al Amin – all five of them joined the camp. But we identified issues," Cabrera said before a training session at the National Stadium on Sunday evening. "We did everything we could to get Sumon and Ibra ready in time, but unfortunately, it wasn't possible."

The coach remains hopeful about the availability of the other three.

"Tariq and Al Amin are expected to return to training today. Hopefully, Topu will join soon as well," he added.

The squad is set to receive a boost with the arrival of Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury on Monday morning. However, Cabrera expressed concern over Canada-based Shamit Shome's late arrival.

"Hamza will have three training sessions if everything goes as planned," said Cabrera. "For Shamit, it will be more difficult – he arrives the day after tomorrow evening, so he'll only be available for the final training session before the match."

Cabrera, however, remains optimistic. "Hong Kong are a tough side.... But our belief is high. We are absolutely convinced we can get the three points," he added.



Vinicius Junior scored a brace as Real Madrid got back to winning ways in LaLiga, reclaiming the top spot with a 3-1 win over Villarreal on Saturday. Mbappe was also on target on the night in a much-needed win for Los Blancos after their 5-2 thrashing away to Atletico Madrid in the previous matchday.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID