

‘Players are now hostages’

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The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), now under the leadership of Aminul Islam Bulbul, has seen changes in its board of directors following the recent election -- but the state of the country's domestic cricket has grown even grimmer.

Payment disputes, match-fixing allegations, and poor facilities had already plagued the domestic scene. Now, adding to those woes is a growing fear among cricketers of being sidelined -- not for lack of talent, but for lack of opportunity.

A fallout from last October's board of directors' election has prompted organisers of 43 out of 76 clubs across four divisions -- the Dhaka Premier League, First Division, Second Division, and Third Division -- to withdraw from the upcoming domestic season.

In the First Division, eight of the 20 participating clubs sent a letter of protest to the BCB CEO. None of them were present on the opening day of the players' draft at the BCB headquarters yesterday. While nine clubs attended, the rest three are expected to show up on the final day today.

A similar situation looms over the franchise-based Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) which has been reduced to just five teams, the fewest in its history.

While the clubs' withdrawal highlights growing friction between the board and organisers, and a deepening crisis in domestic cricket, for players -- the board's biggest stakeholders -- it means fewer opportunities. Many who depend on local leagues for their livelihood now fear being left without a team.



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

One First Division player, still searching for a side, collected a token from the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) yesterday in hopes of finding a spot -- though competition is fierce, with over a hundred players doing the same.

"Truth be told, I took a token, but we players are now hostages. We weren't prepared for such a situation. Like me, around 200 players have taken tokens, hoping that if an opportunity comes, we might get to play for some team," First Division cricketer Zubair told The Daily Star.

"We aren't even sure which teams are participating, but at the end of the day, it's the players who are suffering," he added.

A BCB source said the eight clubs skipping

the players' transfer would have created opportunities for at least 150 First Division players.

"We'll try to increase the number of domestic players in the five teams by adding some clauses. But it is still unfortunate since many capable players may miss out on chances that a seven- or eight-team BPL could have provided," is what BCB cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim had to say about the situation.

As several Premier League teams also show reluctance to join the upcoming season, the plight of domestic cricketers remains uncertain -- and in reality, simply "adding some clause" may not be enough to solve the crisis.

‘IDEAL CANDIDATE’ Salahuddin’s premature exit

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin tendered his resignation to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday -- a decision that has the potential to adversely impact local coaches' future within the national team's structure.

"He [Salahuddin] has expressed his desire to step down after the series against Ireland," BCB cricket operations committee chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim was quoted in the media release.

There was a lot of expectations surrounding his appointment in November 2024. Local coaches usually get overlooked for the national team in favour of coaches from overseas. Salahuddin had a chance to change that perception.

Faruque Ahmed, BCB president at the time, felt he was the "ideal candidate for this role" and said his appointment would be the beginning of integrating "more capable Bangladeshi coaches into the system".

Even Salahuddin himself has said at the time, "If I can do my job well, it would open doors for other local coaches."

But in the end, he left the post with around two years left in his contract, a move that may have set back local coaches even further.

In the absence of a batting coach, Salahuddin worked mostly with the batters in his year-long tenure.

During this period, the team's batting performances were on the decline across



formats and as coach, Salahuddin faced criticism over it. Several reports also accused him of favouring certain players, which drew further scrutiny.

The situation reportedly worsened after the BCB appointed Mohammad Ashraful as a specialised batting coach for the Ireland series -- a move believed to have caused dissatisfaction for Salahuddin.

He was initially contracted until the ICC Champions Trophy in March 2025, but later his contract was extended through to the 2027 ICC World Cup. But just a little over three months after his extension, Salahuddin chose to step down.



Anfield relief, Paris mayhem, Arsenal joy

A brilliantly timed header from Alexis Mac Allister finally broke Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois' resistance on Tuesday, as Liverpool enjoyed a much-needed Champions League boost after six defeats in their previous eight games. Courtois made eight saves but couldn't deny Mac Allister's effort from a perfectly delivered Dominik Szoboszlai freekick shortly after the hour mark -- the only goal in Liverpool's 1-0 win at Anfield. The night saw former Red Trent Alexander-Arnold greeted with boos, and another Liverpool legend, Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso, suffer just his second defeat of the season. [Top Right] Over in Paris, Luis Diaz was both hero and almost villain -- scoring twice in Bayern's 2-1 win over defending champions PSG before being sent off late in the first half for a cynical foul on Achraf Hakimi, who left the pitch in tears. [Bottom Right] Meanwhile, it was all smiles for Arsenal as rising star Max Dowman, aged 15 years and 308 days, became the youngest player in Champions League history during their 3-0 win over Slavia Prague.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

‘Paid for risky play’

International Master **Mohammad Fahad Rahman**, country's chess prodigy, returned home on Tuesday after competing in his third FIDE World Cup, held in India. Having previously faced elite opponents such as Anish Giri (2019) and Daniele Vocaturo (2022), the 21-year-old made headlines this time by drawing against legendary Ukrainian grandmaster Vasyl Ivanchuk. In an interview with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman, Fahad reflected on his World Cup lessons and the road to GM title and more; the excerpts of which are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): You drew against Ivanchuk in the second game after losing the first. How do you rate your performance?

Mohammad Fahad Rahman (MFR): I think I did better than in my previous World Cups. The plan was to win with white and draw with black since Ivanchuk's white openings are very strong. I played well in the first game but took too much risk and had to pay the price. If I had held a draw there, I would've had a play-off chance to reach the second round.

DS: What were your expectations heading into the tournament?

MFR: My preparation was brief but guided by Russian GM Peter Kiriaikov, who planned my strategy. The goal



was to reach the second round, which I felt was achievable since I've beaten GMs rated above 2650 and drawn with players over 2700. Advancing meant more to me than just getting a draw.

DS: Were you nervous facing a legend like Ivanchuk?

MFR: Not as much as before. I learned about my opponent only a few days before leaving for India and didn't know which colour I'd play until the draw. I was a bit tense in the first game, but in the second, I played freely and without pressure.

DS: How does the World Cup compare to other tournaments?

MFR: It's much tougher because it's knockout -- you can't recover from

a bad game, unlike in nine-round Swiss events. We don't often play in this format, so it's harder to prepare for. Still, I enjoy the atmosphere. You meet familiar faces and can even ask top players for advice -- they're very open and supportive. I'd rate the Chess Olympiad slightly higher for its overall atmosphere, but the World Cup is far more competitive.

DS: Any standout memories from your World Cup appearances?

MFR: Yes, during my first World Cup, I analysed my game with Anish Giri afterwards. I was quite young then, and his analytical depth really impressed me. He even posted on Instagram that I'd played well against him, which top players rarely do. That was special.

DS: You narrowly missed winning the National Championship before travelling to India. Did that affect you?

MFR: Not really. I was leading until the 11th round but slipped in the last two. Finishing runner-up four times in a row was disappointing, but I try not to dwell on past results.

DS: You still need two norms to become a Grandmaster. What's next?

MFR: I earned my first GM norm in April 2024, but my HSC exams kept me away from tournaments for over five months. I missed the second norm by just half a point in Hungary. Now that exams are done, I want to refocus on chess and aim to complete both norms by 2026.

I've been funding my overseas tournaments myself, which isn't easy -- it may take around Tk 20 lakh to compete abroad in 2026. Any sponsorship support would be a big help.

DS: What are your immediate plans?

MFR: I'm preparing for the Leonine GM Tournament starting Friday [Nov 14] in Dhaka. If I can secure a GM norm there, I'll go for the final one in an open tournament. Otherwise, I plan to play in Vietnam in December. My goal is to become Bangladesh's sixth Grandmaster.



The Ashes fever soared yesterday as the iconic urn descended onto the Sydney Cricket Ground by a helicopter, making a grand arrival before being received by Australia great Steve Waugh. The former skipper featured in nine Ashes series, winning eight and losing just one, and led Australia to two Ashes triumphs as captain.

PHOTO: ICC