



BFF's Petronas illusion A FARCE GONE GLOBAL

Heartbreak or habit?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

In age-level or Emerging teams' tournaments, results are secondary as the primary focus is on gauging performances rather than bringing home trophies. From that perspective, Bangladesh 'A' team's campaign in the Asia Cup Rising Stars in Doha, Qatar, was a success despite their heartbreaking defeat in the final.

The Akbar Ali-led side lost a nail-biting final against Pakistan Shaheens in the Super Over on Sunday. However, several of their players impressed – like opener Habibur Rahman Sohan, who finished as the third highest run-getter and second highest six-hitter, and pacer Ripon Mondol, who topped the wicket-taker's list.

In that sense, the defeat in the final should not be too much of a concern in the grander scheme, yet, it is.

In the tournament, the 'A' team players failed to correctly assess match scenarios in crucial stages multiple times – a trait eerily similar to what is prevalent across national teams and other levels in Bangladesh.

The lapses rekindled memories of past heartbreaks – like the men's national side failing to score two off three balls against India in the 2016 ICC T20 World Cup and more recently, the women's senior side falling short while needing 12 off 12 balls against Sri Lanka in the ICC Women's ODI World Cup last month.

In the tournament, the 'A' team nearly lost the semifinal against India in the Super Over chasing a one-run target. Earlier, a comedy of errors had forced the match into the tie-breaker in the first place.

In the final, Bangladesh 'A' bowlers did their jobs well, restricting the Shaheens to just 125.

Habibur gave Bangladesh 'A' a flying start in the chase but once he departed for a 17-ball 26, their troubles began. From 36 for 2, the side slumped to 53 for 7.

The team's strategy at the time should have been to not give any wickets to the biggest threat Sufiyan Mueqem, but they carelessly lost three to the left-arm leg-spinner.

Majority of them failed to keep away the googly and even the experienced Yasir Ali, who has played for Bangladesh, chipped one straight to extra cover.

Yet, the 'A' team's tail impressively batted its way to a Super Over, where the batters had a chance to redeem themselves but once again, made a mess of it.

When Pakistan's Ahmed Daniyal bowled a wide which resulted in five runs and an extra delivery, Bangladesh 'A' had four deliveries in hand with six runs already on the board. The only drawback was that they had lost the wicket of Abdul Gaffar Saqlain.

Instead of taking the game deeper, Jishan Alam tried a wild whack to a length delivery and lost his stumps, ending the innings abruptly with three more deliveries remaining, setting up a seven-run target, which the Shaheens chased down with two balls in hand.

Mohammad Ashraf, the Tigers' batting coach in the just concluded Ireland series, had told The Daily Star in a recent interview that the mental side of the game – not technique – has been Bangladesh's biggest issue for a long time.

"This has been a persistent problem since my playing days. To build a strong batting unit, players must think for themselves – develop individual game plans and read match situations better," he said.

Jishan's shot selection reflected this very problem – individuals struggling to align their decisions with the match scenario. Ultimately, the defeat in the final felt less like a heartbreak and more like the continuation of a chronic issue that continues to haunt Bangladesh cricket at every level.

ATIQUÉ ANAM

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has long displayed a knack for committing faux pas. During the previous tenure under Kazi Salahuddin, the country's football governing body frequently reduced itself to a national laughing stock through unprofessional conduct and a glaring lack of leadership.

Hopes had been high for the new committee, led by industrialist-turned-politician Tabith Awal, sworn in just over a year ago. Early signs were promising: the women's national team scaled unprecedented heights and the men's side generated fresh enthusiasm with the arrival of several high-profile overseas-based players.

Yet it appears that the second-most affluent sporting body in the country cannot shed its old habit of turning itself into a punchline. The latest fiasco, involving Malaysian multinational oil and gas giant Petronas, has now earned the BFF international embarrassment.

After running the Bangladesh Football League (BFL) – formerly the Bangladesh Premier League – for two months without a title sponsor, the BFF on Sunday unveiled a new league logo prominently featuring the Petronas insignia.

When asked about the sponsorship arrangement, BFF vice-president and marketing committee chairman Fahad Karim told The Daily Star:

"We signed the deal (with United Group, the authorised distributors of Petronas products in Bangladesh) over two months ago. But United Group took some time deciding which of their

products would front the league, which is why the announcement was delayed."

The low-key nature of the announcement immediately drew suspicion, but the real shock came the following morning when Petronas issued a statement flatly denying any involvement.

"PETRONAS has become aware of

recent social media postings regarding an alleged title sponsorship of the Bangladesh Football League. We wish to confirm that PETRONAS has not entered into any sponsorship agreement for the Bangladesh Football League, nor have we authorised the use of our name or brand in connection with this league. PETRONAS takes the integrity of our brand seriously and remains focused on delivering value to our stakeholders and communities where we operate," the release stated.

The news spread rapidly across East Asian media, subjecting the already fragile credibility of the BFL – and the BFF behind it – to intense scrutiny.

Red flags had already appeared on Saturday when a draft BFL logo emerged on social media, bearing an uncanny

resemblance to two existing logos: a health-and-fitness app and the emblem of top-tier Australian football league. That leak triggered a wave of memes, with netizens deriding the BFF's questionable design choices and apparent frivolity.

For those familiar with the federation's dubious modus operandi, none of this is surprising. Alongside a handful of respectable deals, the new marketing committee has repeatedly struck partnerships with obscure companies, prompting questions over who truly benefits from such arrangements.

Worse still, rather than addressing the Petronas debacle transparently – an embarrassment that could even invite legal repercussions – the federation appears intent on sweeping it under the carpet. After multiple requests for clarification, the BFF issued a press release claiming that United Health Care, a United Group subsidiary, had been confirmed as the league's title sponsor. It further asserted that "Petronas announced that it would not be able to participate as title sponsor for this season" – a claim that is decidedly inconsistent with Petronas's categorical denial.

When contacted, Arif Hoque, the United Group's head of PR and Business Development, confirmed that United Health Care would indeed assume the title sponsorship, attributing the situation to a 'miscommunication'.

But when pressed on which party was responsible for the mix-up – and what motive may have led to the premature branding of a substandard domestic league with the name of a global corporation – he could offer no meaningful explanation.



Cristiano Ronaldo, fresh from international duty, rolled back the years with a sensational 96th-minute bicycle kick for Al Nassr in their 4-1 win over Al Khaleej on Sunday. The 40-year-old posted "Best caption wins!" on X after scoring his 954th career goal, an acrobatic strike reminiscent of his iconic 2018 effort against Juventus and his 2024 Nations League overhead against Poland. Returning after Portugal secured World Cup qualification, Ronaldo now edges closer to a record sixth tournament appearance -- still proving his enduring brilliance.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Mohammedan edge Abahani 3-2

Sheikh Morsalin, fresh off a match-winning goal against India in last week's AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers, continued his scoring form but could not prevent Abahani from losing 3-2 to archrivals Mohammedan Sporting Club as the Bangladesh Football League (BFL) resumed yesterday. The season's first clash between the country's two most popular clubs was crucial, with both sides having recorded a loss and a draw so far. At Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium, defending champions Mohammedan raced to a 3-0 lead within an hour, only for Abahani to pull back two goals in quick succession. Despite the late rally, Mohammedan extended their unbeaten streak to six league meetings against the archrivals, who had beaten them in last year's Federation Cup. The win allowed Mohammedan to close the gap on leaders Bashundhara Kings, who moved top with seven points after a 2-0 win over Arambagh KS in Manikganj.

BCB's U-17 hosting decision raises eyebrows

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) plan to stage a three-day match between Bangladesh U-17 and Sri Lanka U-17 at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium this week has drawn criticism, with several officials questioning the choice of venue.

The itinerary for Sri Lanka U-17's tour, confirmed on Monday, includes two three-day matches and three one-dayers. The first three-day match will be held in Mirpur from November 27, followed by the second at the Bashundhara Sports Complex from December 2. The one-day matches are scheduled in Chattogram on December 7, 9, and 12.

BCB head curator Tony Hemming voiced disappointment over the decision while speaking to The Daily Star, noting that the wicket needs more rest and age-level matches should ideally be moved to other venues.

Mirpur's pitches, frequently criticised for lacking sporting balance, are under pressure due to the heavy volume of games played there.

Newly appointed grounds committee chairman Khaled Mashud Pilot echoed the concern, saying he only learned about the matches after taking charge.

SHORT CORNER

Women's team 'on the right road'

Head coach Peter Butler is comparatively satisfied with the Bangladesh women's football team's fitness as they prepare for the upcoming tri-nation tournament at home, featuring higher-ranked Azerbaijan and Malaysia.

Bangladesh U-17s thrash Brunei 8-0

Bangladesh Under-17 men's football team thrashed Brunei 8-0 in their second Group A match of the AFC Asian Cup 2026 Qualifiers in Chongqing, China on Monday.



India women retain kabaddi title

India retained the Women's Kabaddi World Cup crown with a 35-28 points victory over Chinese Taipei in a thrilling final at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium on Monday, maintaining their 100 percent winning record in this edition.



Chelsea host Barcelona in UCL

Neck and neck in the Champions League standings at the midway point of the competition, Chelsea and Barcelona collide at Stamford Bridge in Tuesday's most engrossing contest. Both sides have shown their imperfections this season, but Barcelona can boast a record that's seen them score in each of their last 24 games in this competition.

Italy see off Spain to complete Davis Cup hattrick

Italy claimed a third Davis Cup in as many years on Sunday after beating Spain 2-0 in front of delighted home fans in Bologna and completing a treble without star player Jannik Sinner. Flavio Cobolli sparked loud celebrations by coming back from a set down to beat Jaime Munar 1-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 and ensure that Italy retained their title.

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No electioneering for national athletes, warns NSC

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Sports Council (NSC) on Monday issued a circular to all national sporting bodies, instructing them to refrain from using national-team athletes in any form of electoral publicity.

"Athletes of Bangladesh's national teams are treasures of the country and symbols of unity for all citizens. Using their image, or that of sport in general, for political or electoral publicity is unacceptable in order to preserve neutrality and the sanctity of sport," read the circular, signed by NSC director (sports) Mohammad Aminul Ehasan.

The notice stated that certain groups and individuals have recently attempted to involve current national players in political and electoral campaigns ahead of the upcoming elections. The NSC said it believes such involvement contradicts the national sports policy and risks compromising the sporting environment.

The circular is assumed to have been prompted by a video showing several national footballers – along with BFF president Tabith Awal and his father, Abdul Awal Mintu – encouraging residents of their locality in Feni to watch the AFC Asian Cup Qualifying match between Bangladesh and India.



South Africa's towering left-arm quick Marco Jansen took 6-48 to bundle India out for 201 and put the Proteas on the brink of their first Test series win in India in 25 years, having already won the first Test in Kolkata. Replied to South Africa's 489, India trailed by 288 but the tourists chose not to enforce the follow-on, reaching 26 without loss at Stumps on Day 3 in Guwahati on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP