



'CRICKET HAS WON'

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The scene had been chaotic a day earlier. Fans were left disgruntled, and the cricketers were locked in a standoff with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Yet Friday delivered an emphatic response, as the 12th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) resumed with the start of the Dhaka phase, a day after Bangladesh cricket was jolted by a players' boycott.

It was the fans' reaction that best captured the shift in mood. Fans, who had turned up for both BPL matches on Thursday, only to witness no action on the field, were seen in numbers on Friday. Loud roars echoed around the ground as the crowd cheered every wicket and boundary, epitomising the enduring bond between the fans and the game in the country.

While spectators had been repelled by security the previous day, the atmosphere on Friday underlined

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BPL member secretary Iftekhar Rahman Mithu

their commitment to cricket. Even as Chattogram Royals and Sylhet Titans played out a low-scoring afternoon contest, the focus never drifted from the action on the field.

"Even after so many things that happened, that we have a full gallery today and the games are happening, is proof that cricket has won," BPL member secretary Iftekhar Rahman Mithu told The Daily Star yesterday.

The turmoil was sparked by remarks from BCB director Najmul

Islam on Wednesday night, when he said the board "did not owe to the cricketers and it never asked for any compensation from cricketers" for poor performances. The comments triggered a chain of unpleasant developments.

While uncertainty still lingers over Bangladesh's participation in the upcoming T20 World Cup, the BPL itself was left on the brink of an indefinite postponement. The Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) called for a boycott unless Najmul resigned. In the aftermath, Najmul was removed as chairman of the board's finance committee, and both BPL matches scheduled for Thursday were postponed -- and were eventually played yesterday.

Late on Thursday night, however, CWAB reconsidered its stance and agreed to return to the field if Najmul "apologised publicly" and the process of reviewing his directorship continued.

"It was a gruelling day, but when you get an atmosphere like this, and given the fact that good sense prevailed among everyone, this is highly satisfying.

"The players compromised because everyone wanted the games to take place. This is great news for Bangladesh cricket. Despite all the criticism and discussions, people of Bangladesh love cricket tremendously," Mithu added, revealing that he finally slept soundly after a day of tough negotiations.

On the field, Shariful Islam's career-best T20 figures of five for nine helped Chattogram secure a five-wicket win over Noakhali, and his celebratory dance after a wicket reflected the easing of tensions.

Mithu later confirmed that Najmul is "supposed to reply" to the show-cause letter issued on Thursday, stating that the "process will go on." But for now, however, despite all that transpired, the Dhaka phase of the BPL has begun with renewed promise.

After more than a day of uncertainty, cricket in the country returned yesterday -- and so did the smiles on the faces of fans, players, and officials, as a large crowd turned up on the opening day of the Dhaka leg of the 12th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League in Mirpur. After two matches were deferred by a day on Thursday due to a standoff between the players and the board, it was smiles all around on Friday, as Bangladesh Cricket Board president Aminul Islam Bulbul appeared relieved and pleased to see play resume. Pacer Shariful Islam even broke into a dance to celebrate his career-best T20 figures of five for nine, which helped Chattogram Royals seal a convincing five-wicket victory over Noakhali Express.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

ICC delegate to arrive today for talks with BCB

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A delegate from the International Cricket Council (ICC) is set to arrive in Dhaka today for a meeting with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), a board official confirmed.

"I know that the ICC delegation is coming tomorrow [Saturday]," BCB umpires' committee chairman and Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) member secretary Iftekhar Rahman Mithu told the media on Friday.

"The president is aware of the whole program and our president and vice-presidents are expected to sit in the meeting. We are expecting a good outcome from it," he hoped.

On January 4, the BCB requested the ICC to relocate Bangladesh's matches in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup away from India, citing security concerns. Last Tuesday, the BCB top brass held a video conference with ICC, during which it maintained its stance while world cricket's governing body asked it to reconsider.

Media reports have suggested that government representatives are likely to be part of today's meeting. Mithu also hinted at that possibility, saying, "Definitely, meeting will take place with the cricket board and maybe our sports ministry as well." According to sources, the ICC will seek to persuade the BCB to reconsider by citing its responsibilities towards all participating teams in today's meeting, while the board remains optimistic that it can convey its concerns.



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Bangladesh will begin their ICC Under-19 World Cup campaign today against India in what promises to be a fiery contest at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe with rain threat looming large.

In recent times, the cricketing rivalry between Bangladesh and India has extended beyond the boundary ropes, adding further spice to an already intense rivalry.

The Young Tigers won their maiden and thus far only U-19 World Cup title in 2020 after beating India in the final. Both teams hurled sledges at their opponents in that match and that trend has continued in their matches since.

Many of Bangladesh's current U-19 crop were part of the intense U-19 Asia Cup final against India in 2024, which the Young Tigers won. Bangladesh captain Azizul Hakim Tamim, who had also led the team in that game, was ready for another intense bout against the familiar foes.

"When you play against big teams, there will be sledging on the field," Tamim had told The Daily Star before the team left for the tournament.

"We have to stay mentally and physically strong. If we do that, we can play much better cricket... We need to win not just with our heads, but also with our body language," he added.



The ongoing tournament has been severely affected by rain. From warm-up games to official fixtures, most matches so far have been reduced to shortened contests.

Bangladesh's two warm-up matches against Pakistan and Scotland finished without a result, while India managed to secure a DLS method win over the USA in a rain-affected tournament opener in Bulawayo on Thursday.

"We just came to practice; there was a lot of rain a little while ago, but the rain has stopped now," selector Ehsanul Hoque told The Daily Star on Friday.

"They've removed the covers from the practice nets, so we're hoping to get some net

sessions in. There's rain forecast again tomorrow [Saturday]."

"We couldn't play the full duration, not even 50 overs [in the warm-up games]. It seems the whole tournament will probably be affected by rain," he said.

Despite the uncontrollable conditions, the selector remains optimistic about the team's readiness. "Everyone is doing really well. Hopefully, they will stay fit and we will start well."

Ahead of the tournament, skipper Tamim had stressed the importance of a strong start.

"Every match is important because the World Cup eventually feels like a knockout tournament," he said. "The first match is definitely crucial. If you win, you stay ahead on the points table."

Bangladesh are grouped alongside five-time champions India, New Zealand, and the USA in Group A.

After facing India, Bangladesh will take on New Zealand on January 20 in Bulawayo before meeting the USA on January 23 in Harare. The tournament will then move into the Super Six stage, where the top three teams from each of the four groups will be divided into two groups of six teams. The knockout phase will feature two semifinals and a final, scheduled for February 6 in Harare.

Khoi Khoi's gold rush, Ridoy's return to top

SPORTS REPORTER

Khoi Khoi Sai Marma delivered a standout performance at the National Table Tennis Championships, winning six gold medals -- including the singles titles in both women's and girls' events -- at the 40th edition of the tournament, which concluded yesterday at the Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium.

Her run also propelled BKSP to overall glory, as they clinched nine of the 14 titles across senior and junior categories.

Khoi Khoi swept the singles, doubles, team and mixed titles in the junior section, while also claiming the women's singles and mixed titles in the senior bracket, along with two silver and one bronze medal in the eight-day-long competition.

In the women's singles final, she faced a stiff challenge from reigning champion Sadia Rahman Mou, who competed strongly in the first and third sets before eventually going down 3-0.



In the men's section, Muhtasin Ahmed Ridoy of Bangladesh Army reclaimed the singles crown he had lost to Ramhion Lion Bawm in the 2023 edition, defeating him 3-1 in the final.

He marked his third national title, following earlier triumphs in 2018 and 2020.

"During the 2023 championship, I had targeted both junior and

senior singles titles, but we had to be content with the junior title," said Khoi Khoi.

She credited regular training as the key behind BKSP's success in their first appearance at the national championships.

Khoi Khoi, however, admitted that the packed schedule took its toll, with the tournament featuring a total of 830 matches across senior and junior sections.

"In the last three to four days, we had to play five to six games a day. Even today (yesterday), I had to play five matches," she said.

Ridoy echoed those concerns, urging the federation to "be a bit more organised" and improve its match scheduling.

Several organisers present on the final day also suggested that the federation consider holding the senior and junior championships separately to ease the workload on players and preserve the standard of the national event by introducing clearer eligibility criteria, instead of allowing paddlers of all age groups.



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