

‘Please save cricket’

SPORTS REPORTER

“Please save cricket, that’s all there is to say.”

The comment, made on condition of anonymity by a leading Bangladesh cricketer, reflects growing frustration among players after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) reinstated director M Najmul Islam to his previous role as finance committee chairman, highlighting the sense of helplessness felt by cricketers under a board perceived to be failing to honour its commitments.

“We had given our observation to the board, and the board made the call,” BCB disciplinary committee chairman Faiazur Rahman informed The Daily Star yesterday.

Najmul had earlier been relieved of his duties as finance committee chairman following a wave of protests by cricketers. The protests stemmed from remarks Najmul made on January 14, when he said the board did not owe players any compensation if Bangladesh missed out on the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup, arguing that the board does not seek refunds from players for poor performances at global events.

“This is good news,” one player remarked sarcastically after Najmul’s reappointment. “You can understand how things are happening here,” he added, underscoring the prevailing sense of discontent.

Najmul’s comments prompted cricketers to boycott all forms of cricket, leading to the recently concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) being halted for a day. Players eventually returned to the field “for the greater interest of cricket,” scaling back their initial demand for Najmul’s complete removal from the board. Instead, they sought a public apology and the continuation of the process regarding his directorship, as promised by the board.

However, no apology was issued. Najmul also responded to a show-cause letter from the BCB a day after the stipulated deadline.

In fact, it was learned that during a board meeting on Saturday, Najmul enjoyed the support of board directors when the decision to reinstate him was taken. A BCB source further claimed that the disciplinary committee had submitted its observations to the board and that “by the president’s direction, he [Najmul] was reappointed.”

Cricketers’ Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) president Mohammad Mithun, visibly unhappy with the development, was reluctant to dwell on the matter but made clear where cricketers stand in the board’s list of priorities.

“We made our demands known openly and they made commitments openly. So who is not keeping the commitments should be clear. The responsibility also lies with those who are not keeping commitments,” Mithun told The Daily Star on Sunday.

The BCB media committee could not be reached for comment regarding Najmul’s reinstatement at the time of filing this report.



Bangladesh cricket in DISARRAY

EKUSH TAPADER

“A sad moment for the game” – that was the phrase used by the World Cricketers’ Association (WCA) while reacting to Bangladesh’s exclusion from the upcoming ICC Men’s T20 World Cup.

Few descriptions could better capture the turbulence currently engulfing Bangladesh cricket – turbulence that continues to wound genuine lovers of the game across the country.

Under the leadership of former national captain Aminul Islam Bulbul, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) appears to be struggling both internally and externally. Many now fear that if this trajectory continues, the game itself could become the biggest casualty in this cricket-crazy nation.

Missing out on the World Cup is only part of the damage. Domestic cricket remains largely paralysed. Although the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) managed to conclude, controversy followed it to the finish line. As the tournament ended, a match-fixing scandal surfaced, adding yet another chapter to a growing list of irregularities.

Following allegations of involvement in match-fixing in the BPL, BCB director Muhammad Mukhlesur Rahman was forced to step down from his role as audit committee chairman. Another franchise adviser publicly raised fixing allegations via a Facebook Live session, further eroding public trust.

Following Saturday’s board meeting, influential director Ishtiaque Sadeque resigned, with rumours suggesting that more may follow. Disagreements with the board president and unresolved personal conflicts among directors have now become open secrets rather than internal matters.

Meanwhile, controversial figures continue to resurface. M Najmul Islam, removed from his role as finance

WCA
WORLD CRICKETERS' ASSOCIATION

“The withdrawal of Bangladesh from the T20 World Cup, and resulting absence of a valued cricketing nation from cricket’s pinnacle international T20 event, is a sad moment for our sport, the Bangladesh players and fans, and one that requires deep reflection. Rather than allowing division or exclusion to take hold, we call on the game’s leaders to work with all stakeholders, including Governing Bodies, leagues and players, to unite the sport, not divide it ...”

WCA chief executive **TOM MOFFAT** said in a statement.

committee chairman after making derogatory remarks about cricketers during protests, was reinstated following the BPL, making the growing disconnect between the board and the players unmistakable.

The long-standing stagnation and disputes in Dhaka club cricket have reached a breaking point. With Bangladesh out of the T20 World Cup – set to be played in Sri Lanka and India

from February 7 – there is no clarity on the next domestic schedule. Even Rajshahi Warriors captain and Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto publicly voiced his frustration, saying he had no idea when they would next take the field.

With cricket disrupted both at home and abroad, organisers appear directionless, unable to chart a clear path forward.

In what many see as an attempt to mask failure, the BCB has floated the sensational idea of bringing back the country’s most successful cricketer, Shakib Al Hasan, who is currently in exile. For many, the move lacks logic and appears to be a desperate and misguided effort to divert attention from the ongoing turmoil surrounding the World Cup exclusion.

This is not merely the pain of missing a global tournament – Bangladesh cricket is passing through what may be its most fragile phase in history. In such moments, resilience is only meaningful when guided by a clear mission and vision, something that currently appears to be missing.

BCB president Bulbul said on Thursday, following a meeting with players and Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul, that the board “will keep on fighting” to ensure Bangladesh’s participation in the T20 World Cup. But when the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland on Saturday, the BCB confirmed it had accepted the decision and would not pursue further action.

“We are not going into any separate arbitration or any other process,” the board stated – a declaration that underlines the absence of a clear roadmap.

Bangladesh cricket is, quite literally, struggling to stay afloat in a sea of sorrow, not only because of exclusion, but because a fight without purpose, clarity, and vision rarely leads to recovery.

Sabina and Co add another laurel for Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh wrote another chapter in the country’s women’s football history as Sabina Khatun and Co emerged unbeaten champions of the inaugural SAFF Women’s Futsal Championship with a resounding 14-2 victory over Maldives in their last match in Bangkok yesterday.

The women in red and green finished the seven-team round-robin tournament with 16 points from six matches, ending four points clear of runners-up India and six ahead of third-placed Bhutan.

The maiden futsal triumph extends Bangladesh’s recent dominance in women’s football. It follows their back-to-back SAFF Women’s Championship titles and historic qualification for 2026 AFC Women’s Asian Cup, alongside success at age-group levels on the regional and continental stage.

Captain Sabina, who led Bangladesh to SAFF Women’s Championship titles in 2022 and 2024, once again underlined her importance by guiding the team to glory in the new futsal format. The



32-year-old returned to the national colours after a 15-month absence and proved her worth emphatically, scoring a tournament-high 14 goals. She was ably supported by experienced campaigners Krishna Rani Sarkar and Matsushima Sumaya, who contributed seven and four goals respectively.

This title was a story of redemption, tactical evolution and the unyielding spirit of players who refused to be defined by past exclusion.

Ahead of the tournament, expectations were low. Bangladesh were widely considered outsiders in the fast-paced futsal format, with India and Nepal tipped as favourites. Played on a hard surface with five players per side and a low-bounce ball, futsal demands relentless stamina, rapid transitions and technical precision in tight spaces.

Yet Saeid Khodarahmi’s charges quickly defied those assumptions. They announced their credentials with a commanding 3-1 win over India in the opening match and followed it up with consistent, increasingly assured performances.

Khodarahmi implemented a high-pressing system built around swift transitions, effectively utilising Sabina’s clinical finishing to dismantle regional powerhouses. Rather than treating his players as discarded figures, he moulded them into seasoned professionals with a point to prove.

Bangladesh’s technical flair, one-touch passing and intelligent movement stood out even in Thailand’s humid conditions, establishing their supremacy in the new format.

Pakistan name T20 WC squad amid uncertainty

STAR SPORTS DESK

Just a day after raising doubts over Pakistan’s participation in the upcoming T20 World Cup in support of Bangladesh, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) yesterday announced a 15-member squad for the marquee event, scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka and India from February 7 to March 8.

“We are selectors, and our job is to pick the team,” said PCB chief selector Aaqib Javed, adding that Pakistan’s participation will still depend on a decision from the government. “We’ve announced the team very close to the deadline. The government will decide on our participation, so I can say nothing on that front. That’s what the chairman has said too, so we’ll wait for their decision.”

Earlier on Saturday, PCB Chairman and Pakistan’s Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said Bangladesh were “being treated unfairly” by the International Cricket Council (ICC) and should be allowed to participate in the T20 World Cup. Regarding a potential boycott of the tournament

by Pakistan in support of Bangladesh, Naqvi said a final decision would be taken after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s return from abroad.

The ICC officially replaced Bangladesh with Scotland for the 20-team tournament on Saturday, rejecting the Bangladesh Cricket Board’s (BCB) request to shift their World Cup matches outside India.

The ICC also reportedly threatened the PCB with sanctions yesterday, including suspension of all bilateral series, denial of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for foreign players in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), and exclusion from the Asia Cup, following Naqvi’s comments.

PCB were the only board to support Bangladesh’s request for relocation of matches outside India during an ICC Board meeting last Wednesday.

Pakistan Squad: Salman Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk), Usman Tariq.



French superstar Kylian Mbappe struck a brace to hand Real Madrid a 2-0 LaLiga win away at Villarreal yesterday. Despite an underwhelming start to the season and the departure of coach Xabi Alonso, Real have found timely momentum, registering three consecutive victories across all competitions as Los Blancos look to revive their campaign and cut the gap on LaLiga leaders Barcelona. Much of that push hinges on Mbappe’s sizzling form. The 27-year-old tops the LaLiga scoring charts with 21 goals and also leads the Champions League standings with 11 strikes. Overall, he has now racked up 34 goals and five assists in all competitions -- the joint-highest tally among players in Europe’s top five leagues, alongside Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

U-19 WORLD CUP Bangladesh face England today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on England in their opening match of the Super Sixes stage of the ICC Men’s Under-19 World Cup in Bulawayo today, with the match scheduled to start at 1:30pm Bangladesh time.

Bangladesh have carried one point from the group stage and currently sit behind India and England, both on four points, and Pakistan, who have two points, in the six-team Group A of the Super Sixes. The Junior Tigers will need victories against England today and Zimbabwe on January 31 to keep their hopes of reaching the semifinals alive. Bangladesh won only one of their three group-stage matches, losing one and seeing another washed out, while England progressed to the Super Sixes with a perfect record, winning all three of their matches.

The top two teams from each Super Sixes group will advance to the semifinals of the tournament, which Bangladesh have won once, in 2020.