

Bulbul relieved but debate rages on

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

No sanctions and the promise of hosting an ICC event -- Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Monday was thrilled with the outcomes of his "unbelievably successful" trip to Lahore, but not everyone shared his enthusiasm.

"The ICC was probably considering some decisions that wouldn't have been good for us. But we managed the situation so that our cricketing journey remains smooth in the future," Bulbul said to T-Sports on Monday, looking visibly relieved.

On Sunday, Bulbul had flown to Lahore on very short notice, under the invitation of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi to take part in a tripartite dialogue with the International Cricket Council (ICC) deputy chairman Imran Khawaja and PCB officials.

The following day, ICC confirmed in a statement that Bangladesh would not face financial or administrative penalties for refusing to travel to India for the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup over security concerns and would also receive hosting rights for an ICC event before the 2031 ODI World Cup, which they are scheduled to co-host with India.

The BCB and its president portrayed the developments as major achievements, and took it as a sign of tensions between them and the ICC easing off after the standoff over the T20 World Cup, which ended with Bangladesh getting replaced by Scotland.

However, former BCB general secretary

Syed Ashraful Huq questioned whether the ICC had ever seriously intended to punish Bangladesh as teams that have withdrawn from World Cup matches or from ICC events in the past have never been sanctioned.

"They have never fined a team before. Perhaps it was mentioned verbally just to create pressure. If we are celebrating this, it suggests our organisers care more

ego-driven stance is far more damaging than losing millions in fines," he said, adding that similar dialogue with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and ICC should have happened earlier. "I've been saying from the beginning -- talk, talk, talk. Everything can be solved through discussion."

Meanwhile, ex-Bangladesh captain and former BCB director Akram Khan urged

spiralled beyond control and agreed that while BCB's security concerns were valid, some decisions may have been made too hastily.

"I support the initial security concerns, but we should have waited for more discussions before taking other steps. The ICC is not like FIFA -- sometimes what is said doesn't immediately materialise. We'll only truly understand the consequences over time," he added.

Another crucial development from the talks in Lahore was the Pakistan government reversing its decision to boycott their group-stage match against India in Colombo on February 15, following requests from many stakeholders, including Bulbul.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had earlier said they were boycotting the match in solidarity with Bangladesh. The primary reason behind ICC's urgent talks in Lahore was to convince Pakistan to reconsider.

Although the ICC did not specify what it had to do to appease PCB in its official statement, it did enough to ensure that the India-Pakistan match, one of cricket's most commercially valuable fixtures, will go on as scheduled.

Ashraful claimed Bangladesh had been used as a "pawn" in a larger geopolitical struggle, suggesting Pakistan had emerged as a key power broker through the episode. After all the hoopla, Pakistan and the other teams will carry on with their World Cup campaigns as usual, while Bangladesh will remain absent from the global stage.



about money than the good of the game," Ashraful told The Daily Star yesterday.

He described the damage to Bangladesh cricket as "irreparable," pointing out that players like Litton Das and Mustafizur Rahman missed a global tournament during their prime.

"Missing a World Cup because of an

caution, fearing underneath ICC's positive announcements, resentment may be simmering.

"The ICC will not take this lightly. Whatever is said publicly, we must be extremely careful in how we deal with them going forward," Akram said.

Akram admitted the situation had

Hasaranga, Bracewell ruled out of T20 WC with injuries

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and New Zealand all-rounder Michael Bracewell have been ruled out of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 due to injuries, the International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed yesterday.

Hasaranga sustained a hamstring injury during Sri Lanka's tournament opener against Ireland on Sunday in Colombo, a match in which he played a key role, taking three wickets. Maheesh Theekshana also claimed three wickets in the win.

Sri Lanka have drafted in Dushan Hemantha as Hasaranga's replacement, with the change approved by the Event Technical Committee (ETC). Hemantha has featured in three T20Is since making his debut against Zimbabwe last year.

Sri Lanka will face Oman on Thursday as they push for a Super Eight spot.

The ETC has also approved a replacement for Bracewell, who reinjured his calf during warm-ups ahead of New Zealand's warm-up match against Afghanistan on February 8 in Chennai. He had been recovering from a calf tear suffered during the third ODI against India last month, but experienced a recurrence ahead of the Afghan game. Bracewell's replacement is yet to be named.

Adapt or perish: Depleted Australia stay confident

AGENCIES

Australia finally begin their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign on Wednesday in Colombo, the last team to do so, as they take on Ireland amid a challenging build-up that has tested both their depth and resilience.

The 2021 champions arrive without several key names and will have only 13 players available for selection in their opener. Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood are sidelined through injury, Mitchell Starc has stepped away from the format, while big-hitter Tim David is set to miss the first match as he continues his recovery from a hamstring strain.

Their preparation has been far from ideal. Australia were whitewashed 3-0 in Pakistan, and concerns also lingered over Nathan Ellis and Adam Zampa in recent weeks. Although Ellis has now been cleared to play, the pace attack remains relatively inexperienced, with Xavier Bartlett and Ben Dwarshuis expected to shoulder responsibility alongside him.

Yet, if history is anything to go by, Australia rarely let adversity define them.

Captain Mitchell Marsh struck a calm and defiant note on the eve of the match, urging his side to embrace



adaptability in Colombo's expected turning conditions.

"Look, I think we certainly want to be positive in the way we go about things," Marsh said. "In these conditions, it's just about being really clear on how you're going to go about it and playing what's in front of you."

"The word adaptability has been thrown around in our team meetings so far... just adapt to whatever situation is put in front of us and get the job done."

Marsh also expressed confidence in his reshuffled bowling unit, despite the absence of Australia's established quicks.

"They've all faced different situations in matches and whilst some of them haven't played a lot for Australia, they've played a lot of cricket and we've got great confidence that they're going to be able to do the job for us," he said.

Ellis, now the de facto leader of the pace group, echoed that belief, insisting Australia remain well placed to make a deep run despite missing their frontline fast bowlers.

"We've all got different skill-sets and can gel together on the night in different phases of the game," Ellis said. "A squad with 'Hoff' and Cummo is a strong squad obviously, but without them I feel like we're just as well placed to go deep."

Ireland, ranked 11th, will draw confidence from recent match time in Colombo but also carry scars from letting a winning position slip against Sri Lanka in their opener. They dropped seven catches and conceded 59 runs in the final four overs of that match.

While Australia's build-up has been far from smooth, the 2021 champions remain exactly what they always are at World Cups -- a force to be reckoned with.



It's great that the game is back on. It's going to be a challenge going to Colombo, where Pakistan have been for last two weeks.

India assistant coach **Ryan ten Doeschate** on facing Pakistan in a T20 World Cup group stage game on February 15

'Allegations not right': Shooter Koly hits back at suspension

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier shooter Kamrunnahar Koly has dismissed the allegations that prompted the Bangladesh Shooting Sports Federation (BSSF) to hand her a one-year suspension, insisting she did nothing wrong and suggesting the move stemmed from resentment over her earlier complaints against a top official.

The federation confirmed the ban on Monday following an executive committee meeting on February 2. Koly had been under temporary suspension since early January for allegedly breaching the national team training camp's code of conduct.

In its letter, the BSSF said Koly violated seven clauses and cited an incident at the federation office on January 25, alleging she displayed "extremely indecent, insulting, threatening, and aggressive behavior" toward the general secretary, executive committee members, officers and staff in the presence of a police officer. The federation said the episode damaged discipline and the institution's reputation, and imposed the ban under Articles 16.20 and 16.21 of its constitution.

Koly rejected that account.

"Whatever they mentioned in the letter, things like being very indecent, showing disrespectful and threatening behaviour towards the BSSF officials are not right. I did not do such things. Rather, former shooters pressed them in an attempt to withdraw the temporary suspension placed on me," Koly told The Daily Star on Tuesday in response to the punishment.

She believes the decision is connected to her earlier allegations against BSSF joint secretary GM Haider Sajjad.

"The allegations I brought against one of their bosses were proved by the investigation committee and he was suspended by the National Sports Council. I think they took such a decision based upon anger toward me," she added.

Bangladesh Olympic Association secretary general Jobayedur Rahman Rana echoed that view.

"We were supposed to sit with the shooting officials and the shooters on February 7 to look into the matter. But now we expect to meet them on February 17 to find a solution, because Kamrunnahar Koly is under an IOC Olympic scholarship. I think there are some 'buts' in the sanction the shooting federation handed her. The decision the federation took was an emotional one, driven by anger. We will try to resolve it," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.



Alpi's 'unexpected' season gathers speed

SPORTS REPORTER

Teenager Alpi Akter carried her scorching form into the resumption of the Women's Football League (WFL), as the Rajshahi Stars FC striker netted a hat-trick to power the league leaders to a commanding 8-0 victory over Suddopushkorini Jubo SC yesterday.

Fresh from emerging as both the top scorer and best player of the recently concluded SAFF Women's U-19 Championship, Alpi took her league tally to 28 goals from nine matches -- the third-highest single-season return in WFL history, behind former captain Sabina Khatun's 35 goals in the 2019-20 season and former national player Aungmraching Marma's 29 in 2012-13.

"I did not expect to outperform senior forwards," Alpi told The Daily Star. "My aim was simply to perform well from the start of the league and make the most of the opportunity to play alongside experienced players. Now I sit on top of the scorer chart. It's a blessing from the Almighty."

"For the first time, I became the top scorer [by scoring seven goals in four matches] and best player of a tournament [SAFF Women's U-19 Championship in Nepal], and I am really happy with this achievement, which I think will inspire me greatly going forward."

Rajshahi, who are yet to drop a point,



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

will look to avoid defeat in their final hurdle to clinch the league title in their maiden appearance. However, Bangladesh Army SC, who are breathing down Rajshahi's necks after eight wins in nine games, have the potential to cause an upset and force

play-off fixtures to decide the title.

"A good bonding among experienced and junior players has been the strength behind Rajshahi's nine straight wins. Now we want to win the trophy by winning our last match."

Alpi's rise has been particularly striking given that, despite scoring 11 goals for Siraj Smriti Sangsad in the 2023-24 WFL, she had previously operated in the shadow of established forwards such as Tohura Khatun, Shamsunnahar Jr, Mst Sagorika and Sauravi Akanda Prity.

The Grade 10 student from Boda upazila in Panchagarh traced her goal-scoring instincts back to her early years.

"I used to take a lot of shots at goal, always keeping the goalkeeper in mind. I also practised scoring from free-kicks, and that helped build my confidence," she said. "Now I believe that if I get the ball in front of the goal, I can score."

Her performances in both the WFL and the SAFF U-19 Championship have reportedly earned her a call-up to the senior national team for the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia in March.

"It is really pleasing to receive a call-up to the senior team, but it is not something to take lightly. It is a challenge to stay in the squad and compete with senior players."



PHOTO: AFP/PCB

Both New Zealand and Pakistan openers powered their sides to comfortable victories in their respective T20 World Cup group-stage games yesterday. New Zealand's Finn Allen (84* off 50) and Tim Seifert (89* off 42) steered the Black Caps to a 10-wicket win -- only the seventh such result in the tournament's history -- over the UAE, chasing down a 174-run target in just 15.2 overs in Chennai. The pair shared an unbroken 175-run stand, the highest for any wicket in T20 World Cups. Meanwhile, in Colombo, Sahibzada Farhan smashed a 41-ball 73 to help Pakistan post 190/9 in 20 overs before their spinners restricted the USA to 158/8 for a 32-run victory. Usman Tariq took three wickets, Shadab Khan -- who also struck a quickfire 30 off 12 -- claimed two, while Mohammad Nawaz and Abrar Ahmed picked up one each. The win helped Pakistan avenge their shock defeat to the USA two years ago in the last edition of the tournament and move top of Group A ahead of their crucial game against India on February 15.