

'Plan to make sports disciplines mandatory at school level'

SPORTS REPORTER

After being sworn in as the State Minister for Youth and Sports on Tuesday, former national football team captain Aminul Haque appeared before the media at his residence in Mirpur to outline the immediate and long-term sports plans of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government.

Aminul, regarded as one of the safest pairs of hands in Bangladesh football, assumed office under the technocrat quota after weeks of speculation, although he narrowly lost in the Dhaka-16 constituency in the national elections held on February 12.

Hailing from Bhola and raised in Mirpur, Aminul began his top-flight career with Mohammedan Sporting



Club, initially serving as third choice goalkeeper behind the experienced Saeed Hasan Kanan. He made his international debut in 1998 in a friendly against Qatar and represented Bangladesh until 2011, rarely losing his place.

The 45-year-old revealed his government's plan to create a healthy environment in sports, maintain good relations with India, make sports mandatory from Grade 4 across the country, establish a sports industry, solve burning issues regarding cricket and

cricketers, as well as corruption in sports and financial constraints of national sports bodies. Following are excerpts from the press briefing:

On sports environment: A distance among organisers, players and journalists has been created in past and we want to close that gaps to create a good relation among all sports stakeholders.

On sporting relations with India: Spoke to the Indian Deputy Commissioner in the parliament area soon after being sworn in and expressed

desire to have a friendly relation with India and other neighbouring countries through diplomatic ways. Want to solve the problem with ICC as per ICC rules and regulations.

On overall sports plan: The government has a big plan to make five sports disciplines, including football and cricket, mandatory from Grade 4 at school level and appoint three sports teachers each for five disciplines and one sports officer in all 495 upazilas in the next one year and bring them under payroll.

On BCB, Shakib Al Hasan and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza: BCB polls have been questionable. Shakib and Mashrafe are legendary cricketers and their cases should be dealt at the government level through discussion.

On corruption in sports: I maintain zero tolerance in corruption in sports and never allow corruption in sports.

On future of athletes: We will create jobs for athletes after their retirement, so that the athletes don't have to think about their future during their playing career. We want to give utmost priority to athletes in order to make the financially solvent.

On politics and sports: It has been a long practice in sports, so it is not possible to depoliticise the sports overnight but I want to keep politics outside the purview of sports.

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Black Caps spoil Samra's dream

AGENCIES

New Zealand produced a clinical chase to crush Canada by eight wickets in Chennai on Tuesday, sealing their Super Eight berth in the T20 World Cup and denying teenage sensation Yuvraj Samra a victory after a moment he had manifested for a while.

Chasing 174, New Zealand were never in trouble, reaching 176-2 with almost five overs to spare as Glenn Phillips finished unbeaten on 76 and Rachin Ravindra made 59 not out. Phillips said the pair stuck to their processes, taking it "one ball at a time."

Earlier, Samra had lit up the tournament with a breathtaking 110 off 65 balls – becoming the youngest centurion in T20 World Cup history. The 19-year-old anchored Canada's innings after captain Dilpreet Bajwa chose to bat first, sharing a 116-run opening stand in 14 overs.

Bajwa fell for 36, caught by Phillips off Kyle Jamieson, but Samra powered on, reaching his hundred from 58 balls with six sixes and 11 fours – the highest individual score of the tournament so far.

"I manifested this moment ever since we qualified," said Samra, who was named after Indian great Yuvraj Singh. "Every single day, I dreamed about scoring a hundred on this stage," he added.

Yet New Zealand's composed response ensured his dream innings ended in defeat. The win also eliminated Afghanistan, as New Zealand joined South Africa as Group D qualifiers.

Phillips praised Samra's knock as "fabulous", saying the teenager had "a long future ahead."



Historic Super Eight FOR ZIMBABWE

Australia, Ireland crash out

The match was washed out, but even without on-field action at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium on Tuesday, there was plenty to rejoice for Zimbabwe fans and the Sikandar Raza-led side in the pavilion. Zimbabwe reached the Super Eight of the T20 World Cup for the first time after their Group B fixture against Ireland was abandoned due to rain. The result also confirmed the elimination of Australia and Ireland, as Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe progressed from the group. Zimbabwe have five points from three matches, while Australia have only two and will be unable to catch the African side even if they win their final group game against Oman on Friday. This is only the second time Australia, champions of the 2021 edition, have exited at the group stage of the tournament, having previously been eliminated at the same stage in 2009. Meanwhile, Ireland have completed all four of their group matches, while Zimbabwe will face Sri Lanka in a dead rubber tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

Former captains rally for Imran

AFP, Islamabad

More than a dozen former international cricket captains, including India's Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, rallied Tuesday for jailed Pakistan ex premier Imran Khan, appealing the Islamabad government to give him "adequate" medical treatment.

The statement, signed by 14 captains and seen by AFP, demands the proper care of Khan, a former World Cup-winning captain who, according to his lawyer, has lost most of the vision in his right eye.

Khan has been in jail since 2023 and was sentenced late last year along with his wife to 17 years on corruption charges they both deny.

His lawyer visited Khan in jail last week and later submitted a report to Pakistan's chief justice and the Supreme Court detailing his concerns and requesting treatment for his client.

The statement signed by the former cricket skipper "respectfully" urges Pakistan "to ensure that Imran Khan receives immediate, adequate and ongoing medical attention from qualified specialists of his choosing".

The campaign is led by former Australian captain and contemporary of Khan, Greg Chappell.

Other signatories are Michael Atherton, Michael Brearley, Nasser Hussain and David Gower (England), Allan Border, Ian Chappell, Belinda Clark, Steve Waugh and Kim Hughes (Australia), Clive Lloyd (West Indies) and John Wright (New Zealand).



Do or die for Pakistan

STAR SPORTS DESK

Pakistan have their backs against the wall in Group A of the ICC T20 World Cup, with the 2009 champions facing a must-win clash against Namibia in Colombo today to keep their Super Eight hopes alive.

A 61-run thrashing at the hands of India on Sunday has left Pakistan in a precarious position. Title favourites India have already sealed their berth from Group A, while the second qualification spot is now a straight shootout on net run rate between Pakistan and the USA.

Both Pakistan and the USA have four points but the Americans hold a significant edge. Pakistan's net run-rate stands at -0.403, while the USA are comfortably placed at 0.788.

The equation for Pakistan is simple. Beat the winless Namibia and qualify. A defeat would eliminate Pakistan and potentially open a slim window for the Netherlands, who would need a massive win over co-hosts India in Ahmedabad on Wednesday to sneak through.

The spotlight will once again fall on Pakistan's fragile batting unit, including stalwart Babar Azam and skipper Salman Agha, which crumbled under pressure against India at the same ground.

Babar, in particular, has come under intense scrutiny after managing just five off seven balls in the high-voltage clash.

Their bowling also failed to fire. Pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi endured an off day, claiming just one wicket while conceding over 31 runs in his two overs.

Pakistan were heavily criticised for opting to field first against India and then folding meekly for 114 in 18 overs while chasing a daunting 176-run target. Now, there is no room for error.

Unpredictable Atletico brace for Brugge test

AGENCIES

Atletico Madrid's campaign has been unpredictable. They beat – nay thrashed – big teams at times, but again got smacked by sides fighting for survival, and that inconsistency sets the backdrop for Wednesday's Champions League playoff first leg against Club Brugge at the Jan Breydel Stadium.

Atletico Madrid arrive in Belgium after a mixed week, having demolished Barcelona 4-0 in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg before slumping to a 3-0 LaLiga defeat against Rayo Vallecano. Earlier this season, Diego Simeone's men also edged Real Madrid 5-2 in LaLiga, yet they now sit fourth domestically, 15 points adrift of the leaders – a stark reflection of a campaign defined by swings in form.

Both sides are chasing a place in the Champions League round of 16 after missing automatic qualification. Brugge finished 19th in the league phase with 10 points from eight matches, recording three wins, one draw and four defeats. Atletico placed 14th with 13 points, courtesy of four wins, one draw and three losses.



Ivan Leko's side head into the tie encouraged by domestic momentum, winning four of their last five matches in all competitions. Their Champions League home form has also been respectable, returning two wins, one draw and one defeat, including a commanding 3-0 victory over Marseille in their most recent European outing.

However, Brugge's continental numbers underline their volatility: 15 goals scored and 17 conceded, leaving them with a negative goal difference.

Atletico's European story is similarly uneven. They fell 2-1 at home to Bodo/Glimt in their final league-phase match and have conceded in each of their last eight Champions League games, digesting 15 goals overall so far. Another outing without a clean sheet would mark their longest such run in the competition. While they have found the net 17 times in Europe, defensive solidity has clearly deserted them.

Their away record offers Brugge encouragement – just one win, one draw and two defeats on the road – a vulnerability the Belgian side will hope to exploit.

History suggests little separates the teams. Across eight previous European meetings, both clubs have claimed three wins apiece, with two draws, including a goalless stalemate in their most recent encounter.

With Atletico favourites yet defensively fragile, and Brugge buoyed by home form, Wednesday's opener promises a finely balanced start to a compelling playoff tie.



Barca slip, Real benefit

The LaLiga title race intensified as Barcelona dropped crucial points, allowing Real Madrid to climb to the summit – by just two points – with 14 games remaining. Spanish champions Barcelona suffered a damaging 2-1 defeat to Girona on Monday, days after Los Blancos overtook the Catalans by beating Real Sociedad on Saturday. Hansi Flick's side had a chance to reclaim top spot but fell short in a gripping derby clash. Teenage star Lamine Yamal missed a penalty, though Barca briefly seized control when defender Pau Cubarsi struck just before the hour mark. However, goals from Thomas Lemar and Fran Beltran powered an impressive comeback for 12th-placed Girona.

PHOTO: AFP