

## SHAKIB'S RETURN in balance amid legal hurdles

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN AND SUKANTA HALDER

Recent political developments have significantly strengthened the possibility of all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan returning to the national team, but several legal obstacles still stand in the way.

For more than a year and a half, Shakib's comeback appeared improbable due to his association with the ousted Awami League government, under which he served as a Member of Parliament from Magura-1. His political role placed him at the centre of a rapidly shifting national landscape.

When the Awami League government fell on August 5, 2024, following a student-led mass uprising, uncertainty loomed over Shakib's return home and taking the field for the Tigers.

Despite the political turmoil, Shakib, one of the country's most prominent sporting figures, continued to represent Bangladesh in international cricket immediately after the regime change, playing matches in Pakistan and India.

He had hoped to conclude his illustrious Test career with a farewell appearance against South Africa in Mirpur in October 2024. That plan, however, collapsed when the Prof Muhammad Yunus-led interim government denied him clearance to return home, citing potential security risks. The decision left his international future suspended and sparked widespread debate among fans and analysts alike.

The matter remained largely dormant until January 24 this year, when the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced that Shakib would be considered for selection in both home and away series, subject to his availability. The announcement came shortly after the International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh with Scotland in the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup after the interim government refused to have its team travel to India over security concerns.

### POLITICAL SHIFT

Initially, the BCB's statement was viewed by some as an attempt to shift focus away from the World Cup setback. However, following the February 12 national elections, in which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) returned to power with a landslide victory, the stance over the Shakib issue gradually softened.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed recently instructed law enforcement agencies to re-examine cases initiated after the uprising, emphasising that innocent individuals should not face harassment. This directive was widely seen as a signal that politically sensitive cases could undergo renewed scrutiny.

Meanwhile, subsequent remarks from State Minister for Youth and Sports

Aminul Haque suggested that the cricketer's return was not impossible, provided legal issues were resolved through proper channels.

Shakib's comeback, however, hinges on three cases filed against him: cheque dishonour, money embezzlement and murder. Each case remains under legal review, creating uncertainty around his immediate future.

State Minister Aminul echoed a similar tone regarding Shakib's situation. He stated that the matter remained one of state concern because of the cases against the cricketer but reiterated that the government would adopt a soft approach. He also remarked that Shakib and fellow cricketer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza should resolve their legal matters through lawyers. If they prove their innocence and settle the cases, he said, their return to competitive cricket would be welcomed.

### MURDER CASE

One of the most serious allegations involves a murder case filed at Adabor Police Station in late August 2024. The case concerns the death of a garment worker during the student-led uprising. Shakib was listed as the 28th accused in the First Information Report (FIR), alongside former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and several other Awami League leaders.

At the time of the incident, Shakib was in Canada participating in the Global T20 Canada tournament. The investigation has since been transferred to the Detective Branch (DB). According to the investigation officer, Md. Tipu Sultan, approximately 148 individuals have been named in the case. No charge sheet or final report has yet been submitted. Authorities have verified Shakib's immigration records to confirm his whereabouts, and the verification process remains ongoing.

Tipu is reportedly the fourth investigation officer assigned to the case, reflecting its complexity.

### CHEQUE DISHONOUR CASE

In January last year, a Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against Shakib and three others in connection with a cheque dishonour case involving IFIC Bank. According to the case documents, Shakib Al Hasan Agro Farm Ltd took business loans from the Banani branch of the bank. The company later issued two cheques totalling Tk 41.5 lakh, which were dishonoured due to insufficient funds.

Md. Rafiqul Islam, deputy managing director and spokesperson of IFIC Bank, stated that discussions regarding loan rescheduling are ongoing. Shakib's representative has deposited Tk 22 lakh as a down payment, and the matter awaits board approval. The total outstanding amount stands at nearly Tk 5 crore. However, until a settlement is formally reached, the arrest warrant remains active.

### ACC MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

On June 17, 2025, the Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) filed a case against Shakib and 14 others, alleging embezzlement of Tk 256 crore through stock market manipulation and money laundering. The ACC summoned the accused for questioning in November but has not yet submitted its investigation report.

Court sources indicate that the next hearing is scheduled for early March. No charge sheet or arrest warrant has been issued against Shakib in this case, though a travel restriction remains in place.

### WHAT LAWYERS SAY

Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua explained that a case under section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act is bailable and that individuals typically secure bail in such cases. He noted that loan rescheduling and criminal proceedings are separate matters, and obtaining bail could remove legal barriers to Shakib's participation in cricket.

Regarding the murder case, he suggested investigators may not find evidence of involvement if Shakib's absence from the country is confirmed. However, legal formalities must still be addressed.

Supreme Court lawyer Ishrat Hasan emphasised the principle of equality before the law, stating that Shakib, despite his popularity, must comply fully with due process like any other citizen.

BCB'S POSITION AND WHAT LIES AHEAD  
The BCB has forwarded details of Shakib's cases to the Ministry of Youth and Sports upon request. Board director Asif Akbar stated that the board has completed its responsibility and expressed satisfaction with assurances that post-August 5 cases would be reconsidered. He added that negotiations with the bank are nearly finalised.

With Pakistan scheduled to arrive on March 9 for a three-match ODI series, anticipation is mounting over whether Shakib could return during that tour.

Yet insiders caution that unless the legal matters are resolved promptly, his comeback may face further delays.

Shakib, however, said he was unwilling to make any comments regarding his availability for the upcoming series and his stance on other legal issues, leaving fans waiting for clarity on the future of one of Bangladesh's most celebrated cricketers.



## Damage control central to Bangladesh strategy

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team are placing strong emphasis on tactical discipline in a bid to minimise mistakes and avoid heavy defeats in the group stage of the AFC Women's Asian Cup, which got underway on Sunday with hosts Australia defeating the Philippines 1-0.

Bangladesh are set to make their debut in the continental showpiece when they face defending champions China at Western Sydney Stadium on Tuesday.

Following a one-and-a-half-hour training session at Jubilee Stadium, Bangladesh goalkeeper

coach Masud Ahmed Uzzal said the team have been closely analysing the strengths of China, North Korea and Uzbekistan, while also working to address their own weaknesses since qualifying for Asia's premier women's competition.

"In today's training session, we focused on positional roles and responsibilities in every zone of the pitch. If we maintain our tactical discipline and proper technique, we will minimise errors and avoid major setbacks," said Uzzal in a video message sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation, adding that the Bangladesh defence playing deep is a strategy to stop strong opponents

like China, a nine-time Women's Asian Cup champions.

The women in red and green are also preparing to counter long-range shots and deal with attacks from multiple angles.

"We have analysed our opponents' shooting patterns and finishing angles. We have worked extensively on this, and I am confident that our goalkeepers will not struggle with distance strikes," Uzzal said. "Regarding set pieces, we are currently refining our attacking routines. We will focus more comprehensively on defensive set pieces clarifying individual marking and positioning."



HEALY'S ODI FAREWELL

India line up to give Australia skipper Alyssa Healy a guard of honour in her 126th and final ODI in the third match in Hobart yesterday -- and the 35-year-old delivered a farewell for the ages. Healy blazed 158 off 98 balls, hammering 27 fours and two sixes (120 runs in boundaries). Her eighth WODI century, joint second-most by an Australian woman, came off just 79 balls. It was also the highest women's ODI score in Australia and the highest anywhere against India, as she joined South Africa's Johmari Logtenberg as the only women to score a century in their final ODI. Beth Mooney added 106 off 84, reaching her sixth ODI ton off 82 balls, as the pair shared a 145-run stand to power Australia to 409-7. The hosts then bowled India out for 224 in 45.1 overs to seal a clean sweep.

PHOTO: BCCI

## YOUNGEST OF THE CENTURY

Teenage star Lamine Yamal netted his first career hat-trick to propel Barcelona to a 4-1 win over Villarreal on Saturday, reaching a personal milestone while also taking the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of LaLiga, albeit having played a match more than second-placed Real Madrid. Yamal, at 18 years and 230 days, struck twice in the first half and once after the break to become the youngest player to score a hat-trick in the Spanish top flight in the 21st century. Only two players have ever registered a hat-trick at a younger age: Jose Iraragorri, aged 17 years and 337 days in 1930, and Pablo Pombo, aged 18 years and 200 days in 1934.



PHOTO: REUTERS

## RECORD ROAR IN PERTH



The AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 got underway yesterday at Perth Stadium in front of a tournament-record 44,379 spectators, as star striker Sam Kerr's 14th-minute header gave hosts Australia a 1-0 Group A win over the Philippines, handing the 2010 champions an unconvincing but victorious start to their campaign. PHOTO: AFP

## Arsenal sink Chelsea to stay on title track

AFP, London

Arsenal won their set-piece battle with 10-man Chelsea as Jurrien Timber sealed the Premier League leaders' crucial 2-1 victory over their London rivals on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side struck twice from corners and also conceded from the same route in a match that underlined the increasing importance of set-pieces in the Premier League.

William Saliba's first goal since December 2024 put Arsenal ahead in the first half at the Emirates Stadium.

Piero Hincapie's own goal drew Chelsea level from one of Reece James' deadly corners just before the break.

But Timber won a priceless three points for Arsenal with his second-half header before Chelsea winger Pedro Neto was sent off for a second booking.

The Gunners' second successive league win reestablished their five-point lead over second placed



Manchester City, who have a game in hand and had closed the gap with a 1-0 victory at Leeds on Saturday.

The Gunners have just one top-flight match left against sides currently in the top six -- a potentially decisive trip to Manchester City on April 18.

Chelsea, meanwhile, dropped to sixth place after losing to Arsenal for the third time in Liam Rosenior's brief reign.