

Govt to probe BCB irregularities

STAR SPORTS DESK

State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque told the parliament yesterday that the government will launch an investigation into officials and employees of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) involved in irregularities during the Awami League regime.

"We will take actions against the people involved in the irregularities after the probe," he said while replying to a supplementary question from BNP MP Mosharraf Hossain (Bogura-4).

The state minister said that those who were "illegally recruited through political favouritism" since 2008 would be investigated by a committee, and the names of those involved would be revealed.

"You will be surprised to know that BCB's funds and manpower were used to support a group in depriving people of voting rights. Officials and employees involved in such misconduct will face investigation and subsequent action," he said.

Mosharraf Hossain had asked whether BCB officials and employees would be brought under the law over allegations that since the Awami League government came to power, recruitment had been carried out with "incompetent, identified cadres", and that during the 2018 and 2024 elections, some had used board property for election activities.

Replying, the state minister said sports, including cricket, had been "politicised and paralysed" during the previous government, pushing the sector towards destruction.

"Following the prime minister's directive, we are working to free sports from politicisation and partisanship," he added.

Aminul Haque also said he had noticed issues regarding the personal wealth of some BCB officials and employees.

"I will call upon the Anti-Corruption Commission to inform us if there is any investigation underway, so that these matters can be presented before the nation," he said.

'I don't see a crisis anywhere'

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul returned to the country yesterday after spending over a month in Australia, during which a few intriguing developments took place. National Sports Council (NSC) formed an investigation committee to look into the BCB elections, the board responded with a statement, appearing to be in conflict with NSC over the probe and all the while domestic cricket remained static. The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi spoke with Bulbul about the recent issues. Excerpts of the conversation are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): From the board's statement, it seems that the government and the BCB are in confrontation. Does that put you in an uncomfortable position? **Aminul Islam Bulbul (AIB):** Actually, the explanation of the statement was not entirely accurate, I think. There is no confrontation. We are a self-governed institute, we work independently. At that time, it seemed like there could be interference. If you look at that statement closely, you would see that it said it could happen, it didn't say it has happened. Had there been some interference, international news organisations could have picked that up. That's why we gave that statement as a precaution.

DS: Does the government's decision to investigate the polls put your board in an awkward position?

AIB: The board has been up and running for five months. We have been playing series and domestic games. At the end of the day, the government is the custodian of our sports, not just cricket. We respect it.

DS: There was a sentence in the statement related to BCB requesting NSC to "close the matter" which many interpreted as a request to end the investigation. What was it?

AIB: No, that interpretation is wrong. Actually, sometimes meaning gets lost in translation. It was nothing like that. That would be absurd! We run cricket here in affiliation with the ICC and the ACC, but at the end of the day, we work under the Bangladesh government.

DS: Why didn't you handle the matter through talks with relevant people and not a press release?

AIB: The decision had already come [NSC gazette]. It wasn't a clash, we just clarified our position for all of our betterment.

DS: Two board directors have resigned, why?

AIB: It is completely their personal matter.



Having returned from a vacation in Australia, where his family resides, Aminul Islam Bulbul, president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, meets the Tigers' head coach Phil Simmons in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

But we haven't accepted their resignations yet. We will talk.

DS: Can this board overcome the current crisis?

AIB: I don't see a crisis anywhere. The board is running as it should. Our national team is playing and the women's team are preparing for the Sri Lanka series. This is an elected board running for five-and-a-half-months so we don't expect questions like that.

DS: How has your experience been in the last five-and-a-half-months as an elected president?

AIB: The first four months [becoming a director through NSC quota and being elected as president] and the next five-and-a-half months [elected as director and then as president] have been two different phases and it has been very challenging. We have been able to start cricket activities at the district level. But our main cricket, the lone List-A event, Dhaka Premier League has not happened yet. The Third Division league will start soon and teams from Second Division are playing while the First Division was completed. For the DPL, the board,

umpires, grounds, scorers and players are ready. We are only waiting for the clubs. We feel heartbroken for the players [missing out on DPL income]. But what can we do?

DS: The World Cup issue has created a distance with ICC. How much of it has been resolved?

AIB: We have already recovered from it, Alhamdulillah. Many things have happened in-between which perhaps is not known to the press. I had to accept the decision from the previous government and we will have to abide by the decisions of the current government.

DS: Did you ever feel that you had to stomach that decision due to request?

AIB: No. But I had tried very hard to play. I am a cricketer at the end of the day.

DS: There are talks of the sports ministry opening an investigation on why the team did not compete in the World Cup. What do you know about that? **AIB:** I came to know of it from newspapers. All we have done is listen to the government. We had selected the team, all preparations were done. But we had to abide by the government's directives.

Injuries leave midfield thin ahead of Singapore tie

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera is dealing with a growing list of concerns ahead of Tuesday's final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers match against Singapore.

The Spaniard is already without key players, as veteran centre-back Topu Barman and forward Rakib Hossain remain in Dhaka due to suspensions. Midfielder Sohel Rana Jr was also left out due to poor form, leaving the team particularly short in midfield.

Injuries have further compounded the problem. Following the 3-0 defeat to Vietnam, Bangladesh held their second training session in Singapore on Sunday, but defensive midfielder Mohammad Ridoy did not take part, while attacking midfielder Shah Quazem Kirmanee only trained lightly. Forward Arman Faysal Akash also picked up an injury during the session.

Ridoy and Quazem both missed the Vietnam match and are now almost certain to be unavailable against Singapore.

Canada-based midfielder Shomit Shome, who played the full 90 minutes against Vietnam, acknowledged the challenges after training.

"We are obviously missing Ridoy, Quazem, and the ones that didn't come - Rakib and Topu," said Shome. "There may be times when Hamza or I cannot play, so it's about the next man stepping up and contributing."



Despite the setbacks, there are some positives for Bangladesh. Attacking midfielder Sheikh Morsalin has returned to full fitness after playing only 45 minutes against Vietnam.

The team is also drawing encouragement from strong support in Singapore, where a large Bangladeshi expatriate community has attended training sessions.

"Everyone was a bit down after the Vietnam defeat, but we are improving and now fully focused on the Singapore match," Shome added. "The support from the expatriate Bangladeshis here is really motivating us, and we are hoping for a good performance."



Long wait ends as Rakin follows family legacy

ANISUR RAHMAN

The long wait is finally over for Khaled Mahmud Rakin, who has earned his place in the Bangladesh national hockey team, becoming the third member of his family to achieve the feat after his father Abdur Razzak Sona Mia and elder brother Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, one of the country's finest forwards.

A former BKSP player, Rakin had been waiting in the wings for nearly a decade. Despite being called up to preliminary squads on several occasions, he repeatedly fell short of making the final cut. Now, at 28, he has secured a place in the 18-member squad for the Men's Asian Games Qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Thailand from April 2 to 10.

Bangladesh are set to leave for Thailand on March 31 and will compete in Pool B against Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei, and Uzbekistan. Four of the nine participating teams will qualify for September's Asian Games in Japan.

"After hearing the news, the first person I remembered was my father, who dreamed that both his sons would represent the national team together," Rakin told The Daily Star after training at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium on Sunday.

"I still hope that one day I will get the chance to play alongside Jimmy bhai for the national team. I believe a new committee may recall him, as he is still fit and performing well," he added. The two brothers have previously played together for Mohammedan,

Bangladesh Navy, and in franchise-based domestic competitions.

Rakin admitted that repeated setbacks had taken a toll on him, but encouragement from his elder brother helped him persevere.

"My father would have been happier than me if he were alive. Still, my whole family is proud, and I am delighted. It's an indescribable feeling after waiting for 10 long years," said the right-back.

Alongside Rakin, goalkeeper Ashraf Haque Shad and midfielder Mehrab Hasan Samin have also earned their maiden national call-ups, as the squad blends experience with youth.

Head coach Ashiquzzaman expressed confidence in the team's chances, though he rued the absence of midfielder and penalty-corner specialist Sohanur Rahman Sabuj, who was withdrawn by Bangladesh Air Force following a media report.

"If the players can perform to their potential, we should not face difficulty in qualifying. Our immediate goal is to reach the semifinals, and then fight for the title," said the coach.

Penalty-corner specialist Amirul Islam, who was the top scorer in last year's FIH Men's U-21 World Cup, also echoed the optimism.

"We have a balanced squad with a good mix of senior and junior players, and the fitness level is very good. If we can play to our strengths, we have the ability to become champions," he said.

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DAYS
TO GO



Inside the dome

Hosts USA kicked off their 1994 World Cup campaign on June 18 at the newly built Pontiac Silverdome on the outskirts of Detroit. Playing before a crowd of 73,425 against Switzerland, the match made history as the first ever World Cup game to be played in an indoor stadium. The venue went on to host four more matches during that tournament.

****Visit The Daily Star website to also read: 'The story behind Gazzaniga's iconic World Cup trophy'**



Sabalenka completes 'SUNSHINE DOUBLE'

Aryna Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title on Sunday, beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a 'Sunshine Double'. World number one Sabalenka became only the fifth woman to win the Indian Wells and Miami titles back-to-back, a feat known as the 'Sunshine Double' given the tournaments' respective locations in California and Florida.

PHOTO: AFP



CWAB voices frustration over Dhaka leagues' stalemate

SPORTS REPORTER

The Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) has expressed frustration over the ongoing stagnation of Dhaka leagues in a letter addressed to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul, according to a CWAB media release on Sunday.

The letter was also sent to Adnan Rahman Dipon, chairman of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM), who was out of the country.

CWAB said both letters had been received by the board.

In the letter, CWAB highlighted that while the domestic cricket season is approaching its final stages, the stalemate between clubs and the BCB continues. It noted the lack of preparation for the Third Division League and the absence of any initiative for players unable to participate in the Second Division League.

"There are no visible discussions or plans to start the Dhaka Premier League. Overall, the current state of domestic cricket is extremely disappointing for the players," the letter read.

The association also raised concerns over the impact on players, many of whom depend on these leagues for their livelihood.

The letter concluded by expressing hope that, as the "guardian of Bangladesh cricket", Bulbul would take the necessary steps to resume the leagues.