

Surprised athletes savour TK 1 LAKH MONTHLY BOOST

ANISUR RAHMAN

The announcement was made, the amount was electronically disbursed instantaneously, and the proof of the transaction was on their phones via text message from their banks, still, the country's top athletes were in disbelief, pinching themselves and wondering whether it was reality or a dream.

Yesterday, 129 athletes from 21 disciplines, who have been initially selected in the newly launched Sports Card and monthly allowance programme, received Tk 1,00,000 each during the inauguration ceremony held at the Prime Minister's office in Tejgaon.

For years, athletes from different disciplines who represent Bangladesh internationally have demanded to be included in a salary structure from the government, but their appeals seemingly always fell on deaf ears.

Sportsmen who were used to getting let down time and again from the government were hence in disbelief with such swift execution of this long-standing demand by the current government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

"In my 17-year career as an athlete, I have never seen such an athlete-friendly policy before, I did not even imagine that I would get such a big amount as a monthly salary," five-time fastest man in Bangladesh sprinter Mohammad Ismail told The Daily Star after



PHOTO: PMO

attending the inauguration ceremony.

"To be honest, this seems like the goose that lays golden eggs. Because this is an incredible amount for an athlete in the context of Bangladesh.

"We had heard that national athletes would come under a pay structure after the formation of the BNP government. We expected that the government would implement it in its second or third year and

the amount would be around Tk 20 or 30 thousand. Receiving Tk 1,00,000 surprised us all."

Asia Cup gold-winning archer Abdur Rahman Alif was also pleasantly surprised by the amount of the monthly allowance.

"Firstly, I want to thank the prime minister and sports minister for taking such initiative. Tk 1,00,000 is a really big amount in Bangladeshi perspective," Alif told The

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated the country's first ever sports card and monthly allowance programme at his office in Tejgaon yesterday.

A total of 129 athletes from 21 disciplines have been initially named in the list.

The listed athletes received a monthly allowance of Tk 1,00,000 each yesterday.

A total of 500 athletes are to be included in the salary structure. The complete list will be declared by the first week of April.

Cricketers will not be considered for this allowance initially as they are under the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) — the most affluent sports body in the country.

The athletes in the list will undergo a performance evaluation every four months.

At yesterday's event, alongside allowance disbursement, several sportsmen who have recently won international prizes were honoured. Five athletes in individual disciplines received Tk 3,00,000 each while 22 members of three different champion teams received Tk 2,00,000 each.

Daily Star.

"Apart from playing, athletes usually think of alternative sources of income to run their family. From now on, athletes can

manage everything with this salary and concentrate more on his performance," he added.

Paddler Javed Ahmed felt that this initiative will encourage more to take up sports as a profession and that it "will change the country's sports in the coming days."

A total of 500 athletes will come under this salary structure, and the complete list is expected to be released by the first week of April.

The listed athletes will undergo a review every four months, after which changes could be made according to performance.

The athletes felt this would increase competition between them and drive them to improve their performance.

"The announcement of monthly salary has boosted the athletes. Those who are not in the list are eager to come under the pay structure. So, I have to uplift my standard to keep receiving a monthly salary," said sprinter Ismail.

Shuttler Al Amin said, "This initiative will encourage the juniors to knock us out to secure a place in the national team while it is our responsibility to keep our positions intact."

Although the players unanimously accepted that this was a step in the right direction, they felt that in order to achieve continued success at the global stage, the government also needs to ensure better training facilities, quality coaches and implement sports technology.



PHOTO: AFP

World number two Jannik Sinner powered past Jiri Lehecka 6-4, 6-4 to win the ATP Miami Masters 1000 for a second time on Sunday, adding the title to his Indian Wells crown. Sinner is the first man since Roger Federer in 2017 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. The Italian also became the first to complete the 'Sunshine Double' without dropping a set.

Depleted Bangladesh look to spoil Singapore's party

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite missing several key players, Bangladesh will aim to end their AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign on a high when they face already-qualified Singapore national football team in their final Group C clash today.

The match kicks off at 6:00 pm Bangladesh time at the National Stadium in Kallang.

Singapore have already secured the group's lone qualification spot with 11 points from five matches, while Bangladesh sit third with five points, courtesy of a win against India and draws against India and Hong Kong.

The first leg in Dhaka ended in a 2-1 defeat for Bangladesh, though the match could have ended in a draw after they were denied a late penalty following Rakib Hossain's goal. Rakib — arguably the team's most dangerous attacking threat — will miss the match due to suspension, as will experienced centre-back Topu Barman. Injuries to midfielders Shah Quazem Kirmancee and Mohammad Ridoy have further limited the squad.

Head coach Javier Cabrera, however, remains confident that his side can deliver a positive result. Speaking at the pre-match press conference, the Spaniard said he believes the available players are



PHOTO: BFF

well prepared and highlighted the chance to finish with eight points — taking seven from the last three matches — as a motivating target.

The closed-roof stadium in Kallang is expected to host a vibrant, near-capacity crowd, with Singapore fans set to celebrate their historic Asian Cup qualification secured in the previous match against Hong Kong. Head coach Gavin Lee has named a near full-strength squad, making only minor adjustments from the side that travelled to Dhaka.

Around 6,000 tickets have reportedly been allocated to Bangladesh supporters, likely to be filled by expatriate fans based in Singapore. Captain Jamal Bhuyan said the team is motivated to perform for those fans who have

shown strong support since their arrival.

"Whenever we go to countries where there are many Bengalis, we quite often see this kind of crowd, which is very positive," Jamal said. "It would be great if those fans who cannot get a ticket could get one and watch us play, because it is not every day the national team comes to Singapore. So, of course, we will have them in mind and fight for them as well."

While congratulating Singapore on their qualification, Cabrera made it clear that Bangladesh are determined to spoil the celebrations. The match could also mark his final game in charge, with his future dependent on a potential contract extension from the federation.



The definitive Asian debut

After a 72-year wait, the FIFA World Cup finally arrived on Asian soil in 2002, co-hosted by South Korea and Japan. The tournament was defined by massive upsets, starting with defending champions France losing the opener, and both France and Argentina crashing out in the group stages. Meanwhile, Japan topped their group, and so did South Korea but the latter stunned the world to become the first Asian nation to reach the semifinals. Ultimately, it was Ronaldo's magic that propelled Brazil to a record fifth title.

*Visit The Daily Star website to also read: 'Historical scars and 1966's ghost goal'



Italy on edge ahead of Bosnia showdown

STAR SPORTS DESK

The final six places for the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be sealed by Wednesday, with Italy's daunting trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina headlining a decisive slate of playoff finals.

The four-time champions stand one match away from ending a 12-year World Cup absence but must overcome a hostile test in Zenica, where Bosnia await at the Bilino Polje Stadium.

Italy's narrow win over Northern Ireland — secured by goals from Sandro Tonali and Moise Kean — did little to reassure fans after another unconvincing display. Head coach Gennaro Gattuso described the



Bosnia clash as "Everest," bringing forth the immense pressure on his side.

"I'm not interested in the performance," Gattuso said, with conditions expected to be soaking and the atmosphere intense following recent snowfall in Zenica.

The prize for Italy is a spot in Group B at this summer's finals alongside co-



hosts Canada, Switzerland and Qatar, and something to look forward to for a powerful football nation that has fallen behind its rivals since last lifting the World Cup in 2006.

Off-field controversy has only added to Italy's burden. Several players, most notably Federico Dimarco, were seen

celebrating Bosnia's penalty shootout win over Wales — a gesture that drew sharp criticism.

"Bosnia is waiting for them with open arms," former midfielder Miralem Pjanic told Gazzetta dello Sport.

Italy's World Cup winning goalkeeper Dino Zoff added: "It wasn't a good thing to do... it will just further fire up our opponents."

Dimarco later sought to calm tensions, saying: "I wasn't showing disrespect for Bosnia or the Bosnian people... there's really no reason to be arrogant. We've missed the last two World Cups."

Bosnia, meanwhile, are fuelled by belief and home support. Captain Edin Dzeko, who struck a crucial late equaliser in Cardiff to help knock out Wales, remains a key threat even at 40.

"Against Italy I don't know who can call themselves favourites," Dzeko said. "It would mean everything... for these young kids, the new generation."

He could again link up with 18-year-old Kerim Alajbegovic, whose emergence has added fresh impetus to the hosts.

Amnesty flags 'repression risk' at FIFA WC

AFP, London

Amnesty International has warned that the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico risks becoming a "stage for repression," urging FIFA and host nations to act swiftly to safeguard fans, players and communities.

In its report "Humanity Must Win", the London-based rights group said FIFA's promise of an inclusive and safe tournament contrasts sharply with realities on the ground, particularly in the US, which will host most matches.

Amnesty described the US as facing a "human rights emergency" under the administration of President Donald Trump, citing mass deportations, arbitrary arrests and aggressive immigration enforcement. Concerns have intensified after US authorities indicated immigration agencies like the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would play a role in World Cup security, while host city plans reportedly lack clarity on protections for fans and residents.

Travel restrictions affecting countries like Ivory Coast, Haiti, Iran and Senegal, alongside fears among LGBTQ+ supporters, have added to the fears. Amnesty said the tournament is far from the "medium risk" once suggested by FIFA, warning that growing gaps between promises and reality must be urgently addressed before kickoff in June.