

Tamim's first move: Cricketers get pay boost

STAR SPORTS DESK

The 11-member ad hoc committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), led by Tamim Iqbal, yesterday announced a significant increase in women cricketers' domestic match fees, among several key decisions taken at its first official meeting – held a day after assuming charge following the dissolution of the Aminul Islam Bulbul-led board.

Women cricketers will now receive Tk 10,000 for T20s, Tk 15,000 for one-dayers, and Tk 20,000 for longer formats.

Salaries for 30-35 contracted women cricketers have been raised from Tk 30,000 to Tk 40,000 per month.

For men's cricketers, Category A salaries have been increased to Tk 65,000 (from Tk 35,000), Category B to Tk 50,000 (from Tk 30,000), and Category C to Tk 40,000 (from Tk 25,000) per month.

Match fees for four-day games in the National Cricket League (NCL) and Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) have been raised from Tk 70,000 to Tk 100,000.

The committee will immediately meet Dhaka Premier League teams to find a quick solution to start the competition.

In line with government austerity measures amid the recent resource crisis, match timings for Bangladesh's upcoming white-ball series against New Zealand will be adjusted.

No shortcuts to leadership

EKUSH TAPADER

The latest developments surrounding Bangladesh cricket and the newly formed ad hoc committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) raise a familiar, uncomfortable question: will the dream of a politics-free sports arena ever move beyond being a hollow slogan?

The fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024, was hoped to be a turning point for the country's cricket, but now it appears to be yet another chapter in a long history of power struggles, political interference and administrative failures.

The dissolution of the Aminul Islam Bulbul-led board on Tuesday by the National Sports Council (NSC), following an inquiry on allegations of electoral irregularities in last year's BCB polls, was executed with remarkable speed.

While efficiency in governance is often welcome, such swiftness in a system otherwise plagued by delays naturally invites skepticism over whether this is a genuine attempt at reform, or simply another reshuffling of power.

Ironically, the very cricketers once celebrated as national heroes have become central figures in cricket's administrative decline. The transition from on-field excellence to off-field leadership has proven far more challenging than anticipated.

Names like Bulbul, Akram Khan, Khaled Mahmud Sujon, Faruque Ahmed, Naimur Rahman Durjoy once inspired millions with their performances. Yet, in administrative roles they have largely failed to deliver meaningful change, often becoming entangled in controversy and power politics.



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

The idea that former cricketers would naturally uplift the system was always somewhat romantic.

In 2013, under BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon, increasing the quota for cricketer-category councillors was seen as a progressive step. However, more representation did not translate into better governance. Instead, it exposed a harsh truth: sporting brilliance does not automatically equate to administrative competence.

Perhaps more concerning is how many of these former players have willingly – or reluctantly – become part of undemocratic practices.

Faruque, once admired for his principled stance as a chief selector,

eventually succumbed to the same pressures he once resisted.

His tenure as BCB president saw increasing alignment with political directives during the time of the interim government. What began as a promise of integrity ended in compromise and eventual removal.

The story repeated itself with Bulbul. Entering with a promise of a short, election-focused tenure, he instead became embroiled in one of the most controversial elections in BCB history.

His sudden exit, followed by the equally abrupt appointment of Tamim, underscores a troubling pattern of leadership changes driven not by transparent processes, but by shifting

political winds.

Tamim's appointment, accompanied by a committee with clear political affiliations, further weakens the argument that sports administration is moving toward independence.

The presence of politically connected individuals, combined with scenes of slogan-chanting crowds at the BCB premises during Tamim's first press conference after assuming the role, doesn't paint a pretty picture.

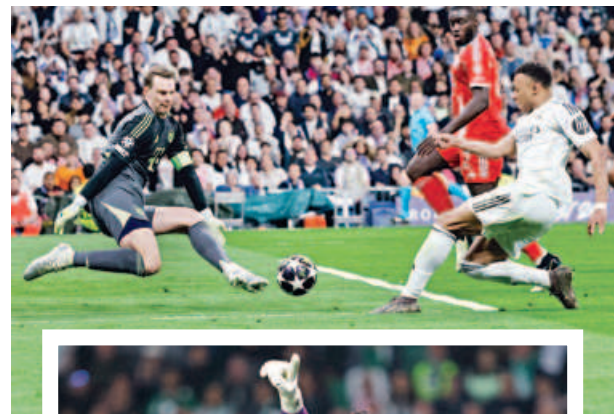
At the heart of this crisis lies the fundamental issue of legitimacy. Individuals assuming power not through robust democratic processes, but through endorsements, alignments, and, at times, outright intervention by powerful actors undermines institutional credibility and erodes public trust.

Former cricketers, in particular, need to be wary of their role in this cycle as their legacy as players is at risk of being overshadowed by their failures as administrators and their participation in questionable practices damages the very sport they once elevated.

If there is any lesson to be drawn from this ongoing saga, it is clear: true reform cannot come from recycled power structures or politically influenced appointments. It must emerge from transparent, democratic processes where accountability is paramount.

Tamim now stands at a critical juncture. Unlike his predecessors, he still has the opportunity to break the cycle. But doing so will demand a genuine commitment to democracy, independence and integrity.

Otherwise, the question will persist, louder than ever: is a politics-free sports arena in Bangladesh nothing more than an illusion?



Neuer, Raya steal the spotlight

AGENCIES

On a night when Europe held its breath, two goalkeepers stood tall between dreams and despair. In the roaring stage of the Champions League quarterfinals, it wasn't just goals that told the story – it was the saves, the defining moments, and the voices that followed.

In Madrid, under the blazing lights of the Santiago Bernabeu, Manuel Neuer delivered a performance that felt timeless. Guarding Bayern Munich's net, he faced relentless pressure from Real Madrid.

Early on, Vinicius Junior broke through, but Neuer rushed out to block bravely. Then came Kylian Mbappe – again and again – each attempt denied. A low drive was pushed away, while a curling effort was tipped wide, drawing gasps from the crowd.

Even Neuer acknowledged the danger: "You know how dangerous Real Madrid are... they had plenty of chances and could've scored more." Still, he stood firm.

Goals from Luis Diaz and Harry Kane put Bayern ahead, but it was Neuer's heroics that preserved the lead.

On the sidelines, Vincent Kompany praised the veteran: "At this level, you need special performances... and today we had that." He also highlighted Neuer's longevity, noting that few goalkeepers can maintain such standards for so long.

The display has reignited talk of a possible national team return ahead of the World Cup in June. The 40-year-old, who retired from international football in 2024, has been back in discussions among German fans.

However, Neuer dismissed the speculation. "We're not talking about the national team now," he said. "I've said my piece – my focus is on Bayern."

While Neuer dominated in Madrid, another hero emerged in Lisbon.

At the Estadio Jose Alvalade, David Raya produced a match-defining performance for Arsenal against Sporting. The standout moment came when Maxi Araujo unleashed a powerful strike, only for Raya to fly across goal and tip it onto the crossbar.

"I think that's a turning point," Raya said. "It's one of those moments that can change games."

He followed it up with more crucial interventions – smothering a low effort from Geny Catamo and later reacting sharply to push away a dangerous header.

His teammates were full of praise. Kai Havertz called him "unbelievable... the best keeper in the world," while Mikel Arteta described him as "phenomenal and extraordinary."

When Havertz scored the late winner, it felt like a fitting reward for Raya's brilliance.

All about KANE

When it mattered most, the expected difference-makers delivered. Harry Kane lit up the Santiago Bernabeu with the goal of the night – a precise, right-footed curler from outside the box that nestled into the bottom-left corner beyond Andriy Lunin – to seal Bayern Munich's 2-1 win over Real Madrid in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg yesterday. Michael Olise set up Kane for Bayern's second after Luis Diaz had given the visitors the lead, while Kylian Mbappe pulled one back in the second half for the home side. Kane's strike was his 49th in just 41 matches across all competitions this season, keeping him well ahead in the European Golden Shoe race, with Mbappe on his trail with 39 in 37. It was also Kane's 11th Champions League goal this term, second only to Mbappe's 14.

Bayern's victory was their first over Real since April 2012, ending a nine-game winless run against the record 15-time UCL champions in the competition (D2 L7).

This was only the sixth time Real have lost the home first leg of a European Cup/Champions League knockout tie, and the first since their 2-1 loss to Manchester City in the 2019-20 round of 16. They failed to progress in each of the previous five such ties.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

All or nothing for Bangladesh against Hong Kong

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national hockey team, who finished among the top two in the last three Asian Games qualifiers, now find themselves on the brink of elimination – or qualification – for the 2026 Asian Games, depending on the outcome of today's crucial clash against Hong Kong in Thailand.

The 2014 champions, who finished runners-up to Oman in 2018 and 2022, failed to reach the semifinals this time after being held to a 1-1 draw by Uzbekistan in their third and final pool match.

With the top six teams from the nine-team qualifiers securing berths for September's Asian Games in Japan, Bangladesh have been pushed into the fifth-to-eighth place classification matches. Victory over Hong Kong is now their only route to qualification – a stage Bangladesh have never previously failed to reach.

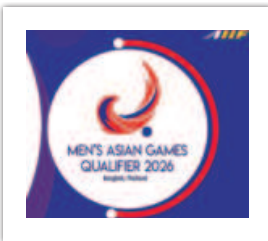
Putting aside their recent struggles, Bangladesh are focused on delivering in

this must-win encounter. Historically, they have enjoyed a strong record against Hong Kong, remaining unbeaten in their last five meetings since 2012, including identical 5-1 wins in the 2014 and 2018 Asian Games qualifiers.

"Our backs are now against the wall, and there is no alternative but to win against Hong Kong," said forward Rakibul Hasan Rocky, adding that failure to qualify would be a major setback for Bangladesh hockey.

"However, we are ready to give our maximum because we are determined to win at any cost," he said. "We may have beaten Hong Kong in the past, but there are no small teams now as all sides have improved. Still, we want to keep our unbeaten run intact, even though Hong Kong have also performed well in this tournament."

Hong Kong have shown resilience in the ongoing qualifiers, pushing stronger sides like Oman in a narrow 2-1 defeat and putting up competitive performances against Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Thailand.



Struggling for form, Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz appears to be trying something different during the Tigers' practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Miraz, who has failed to cross the fifty-run mark in his last six ODI innings, will be hoping to turn his fortunes around when he leads Bangladesh in a three-match ODI series at home against New Zealand, starting on April 17.

PHOTO: BCB

63 DAYS TO GO



Four names, 13 World Cups

Across 13 FIFA World Cup appearances, Serbia have amassed 63 points from 49 matches (18 wins and nine draws). Remarkably, they have competed under four different names: as Yugoslavia (eight times), FR Yugoslavia (1998), Serbia and Montenegro (2006), and Serbia in the three most recent editions (2010, 2018, and 2022).

** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: From leather to chip: The historical evolution of the World Cup ball.