



FORMER CAPTAINS GET PRIVILEGE CARD... Recipients of the 'Captains Card' pose for a photograph during the handover ceremony at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka yesterday. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) ad hoc committee president Tamim Iqbal introduced the card, which offers various benefits to 33 former and current Bangladesh national captains -- 27 men's and six women's -- across formats since 1977. A total of 21 recipients attended the ceremony in person. PHOTO: BCB

**Read full story on The Daily Star website

Bangladesh hockey: Sleeping through the alarm?



SYSTEMIC ROT:

A two-year domestic league deadlock has left players without income or match fitness.

HISTORIC LOW:

A fifth-place finish in Asian Games Qualifiers marks a sharp decline.

LOSING GROUND:

Proactive investment from Oman and Sri Lanka is rapidly closing the regional gap.

ANISUR RAHMAN

"Bangladesh don't have any plans, while other countries are improving fast with proper ones," said former national player-turned-coach Mahabub Harun, summing up the precarious state of the country's hockey at present.

Bangladesh hockey has lived two contrasting realities within four months. In December, the youth team turned heads on debut at the FIH Junior (U-21) World Cup in India. This month in Bangkok, the senior side clung on for survival in the Men's Asian Games Qualifiers -- a far cry from asserting dominance among Asia's second tier.

Beyond the continent's elite -- India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Japan and South Korea -- Bangladesh have long competed with China for the sixth spot, staying ahead of teams like Oman, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. That position now looks increasingly fragile.

A fifth-place finish among nine teams in Thailand, just enough to secure an Asian Games berth, underlined a worrying slide. Bangladesh, once regular finalists in this competition -- champions in 2014 and runners-up in 2018 and 2022 -- failed to reach the semifinals this time after a costly draw against Uzbekistan. The narrow shootout escape against Hong Kong only masked deeper issues.

Last year, Bangladesh failed to qualify for the Men's Asia Cup, finishing behind Oman and Chinese Taipei in the AHF Cup in India, and only made it due to Pakistan's withdrawal. The warning signs have been there.

Preparation remains a glaring weakness. While rivals arrived battle-ready after overseas camps and warm-up matches, Bangladesh went in undercooked. Coaches and players have pointed to the lack of competitive exposure, and it showed -- even if past results suggest they have fared well without it before.

But the problems run deeper. Poor selection, the absence of a clear plan, a dormant domestic structure, and a prolonged standoff between the federation and clubs have eroded the foundation.

"Our squad [in Thailand] was also not perfect. How would a midfielder perform by playing in the backline?"

"The selection committee don't know the players, and it is the coaches' responsibility to demand the right ones," Harun told The Daily Star, recalling how he brought a player back two years after retirement and went on to win an international tournament in 2012.

Two years since the last Premier Division Hockey League, the Bangladesh Hockey Federation has yet to revive its top-tier competition. Players are left without regular income or match practice, as the federation remains locked in a financial deadlock with clubs unwilling to play without support.

Meanwhile, others are moving forward. Sri Lanka launched a franchise league in 2025 alongside its domestic competition. Oman runs multiple tournaments across levels. Nations like Indonesia, Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan are investing steadily in development. Bangladesh, in contrast, remain stuck in a cycle of excuses.

Harun suggests alternatives: "If the federation cannot run the league regularly... cash-rich tournaments involving services teams and corporate houses could keep hockey active year-round."

Qualification for the Asian Games offers only temporary relief, but without urgent structural reforms and a consistent competitive environment, the escape in Bangkok may mark the beginning of Bangladesh's slide out of Asia's competitive bracket.

A clash of experience and fresh faces

Bangladesh take on New Zealand in the opening match of the three-match ODI series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium today, looking to maintain their recent strong form in the format and close the gap with eighth-ranked England in the ICC ODI rankings. For New Zealand, however, the series serves a different purpose. Missing several first-choice players, the visitors have brought a relatively inexperienced squad, aiming to give fringe players valuable exposure in subcontinent conditions. Nevertheless, they will be keen to replicate their 2023 success, when they secured a 2-0 series win in Bangladesh despite a depleted lineup -- ending a 13-year wait for an ODI series victory in the country.

● Only Tom Latham, Henry Nicholls, and Will Young in the current New Zealand squad have prior experience of playing international cricket in Bangladesh. However, Nick Kelly, Dane Cleaver, Dean Foxcroft, Adithya Ashok, and Jayden Lennox have previously toured with the 'A' team.

● Bangladesh players have a combined 761 ODI appearances, compared to New Zealand's 368. Only four members of Bangladesh's 15-man squad have played fewer than 10 ODIs, while eight players in New Zealand's 14-member squad fall into that category.

● Latham is the most experienced ODI player across both squads with 163 matches. For Bangladesh, Mustafizur Rahman (119) and Mehidy Hasan Miraz (117) have crossed the 100-match mark, while Litton Das (98) is nearing 100 ODIs.

● Bangladesh enter the series on the back of successive 2-1 home series wins over Pakistan and West Indies, with the most recent victory coming against Pakistan in March. New Zealand, meanwhile, are unbeaten in their last five ODI series, with their most recent bilateral defeat coming against Sri Lanka in November 2024.

● New Zealand have won 34 of the 46 ODIs between the two sides, while Bangladesh have won 11 -- eight of those at home. Their last meeting came in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 in Rawalpindi, where New Zealand secured a five-wicket win.

● New Zealand are ranked second in the ICC ODI rankings with 114 points, while Bangladesh are ninth with 79. Even with a 3-0 or 2-1 series win, Bangladesh will remain ninth but can



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

"We've got some guys with a little bit less experience in these conditions, but I think the more that they're exposed to places like Bangladesh, then it's only going to be a good thing for us."

Tom Latham,
New Zealand stand-in skipper

"If we can win the series, it will be a big achievement for us. Considering our ranking, this series is extremely important for us."

Mehidy Hasan Miraz,
Bangladesh ODI skipper

improve their rating to 85 or 83 points, closing in on England (88). A 2-1 or 3-0 defeat would see them slip to 80 or 78 points, though still above 10th-placed West Indies (77).

Stuck between form and fate: Soumya's curious case

Soumya Sarkar continues to embody one of Bangladesh cricket's enduring puzzles, where form and opportunity rarely align. Despite looking fluent in the nets and producing occasional match-winning performances -- notably against West Indies last year -- his place in the ODI side remains uncertain. Competition from in-form openers and gaps in recent game time have limited his chances, while injuries and conditions have also played a role. Since his 2014 debut, Soumya has featured inconsistently despite clear potential. Now 33, he remains caught in a familiar cycle -- showing promise, yet struggling to secure sustained opportunities in the national side.

** Visit The Daily Star website to read full story.



PHOTO: REUTERS/ARSENAL

Bayern sink Real in 7-goal thriller

AGENCIES

Bayern Munich struck twice late through Luis Diaz and Michael Olise to seal a dramatic 4-3 win over Real Madrid in their Champions League quarterfinal yesterday, advancing 6-4 on aggregate after a pulsating tie.

Diaz scored in the 89th minute before Olise struck in stoppage time to send treble-chasing Bayern into the semi-finals, where they will face holders PSG.

Real's night unravelled late on as substitute Eduardo Camavinga was sent off in the 86th minute after two bookings in eight minutes. Arda Guler, who scored twice, was also dismissed for dissent after the

25th UCL quarterfinal, gifted possession to Guler, who fired into an empty net. Bayern responded five minutes later as Aleksandar Pavlovic headed in from close range with Andriy Lunin out of position.

Guler restored Real's lead in the 29th minute with a superb free kick, but Bayern hit back again through Harry Kane, who netted his 12th goal of the competition eight minutes later. Kylian Mbappe then levelled just before halftime from a Vinicius Jr. assist.

After a breathless first half, the turning point came when Camavinga was sent off four minutes from time.

"It was all over after the red card," said Real coach



SEMIFINAL LINEUPS

PSG vs Bayern Munich, April 29 (Wednesday) at 1:00 am

Atletico Madrid vs Arsenal, April 30 (Thursday) at 1:00 am

- Bayern Munich have qualified for their 22nd European Cup/ Champions League semifinal, with only Real Madrid having reached more (33).
- Real have lost both legs of their quarterfinal ties in each of the last two Champions League campaigns. Prior to last season, they had only lost both legs of a European Cup/Champions League quarterfinal once (1966-67 vs Inter).
- The last time Bayern conceded three goals in the first half of a Champions League knockout match was also against Real Madrid, on 29 April 2014.
- Bayern striker Harry Kane reached 50 goals in a single season for the first time in his career.
- No English player has ever scored more goals than Kane (12) in a single Champions League campaign.
- Michael Olise scored a brilliant left-footed curler -- his 18th goal in all competitions -- and leads Europe's top five leagues with 29 assists, taking his tally to 47 goal contributions in 48 games across all competitions this season.

final whistle as frustration boiled over for the record 15-time European champions.

Bayern became only the second team to trail three or more times and still win a Champions League match.

"It was a great night for the club," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany. "What remains for me is the total togetherness that we showed. We showed absolute belief and the will to fight our way back."

Real struck after just 35 seconds when Manuel Neuer, outstanding in the first leg and playing in his

Alvaro Arbeloa. "You can't send a player off for something like that on such a big stage."

Bayern capitalised immediately, with Diaz's deflected strike followed by Olise's stoppage-time finish to complete a famous win.

In the other quarterfinal, Arsenal advanced after a goalless home draw secured a 1-0 aggregate win over Sporting CP. Kai Havertz's first-leg winner proved decisive as Arsenal set up a semifinal clash with Atletico Madrid.

55 DAYS TO GO



So close, yet so far

The Netherlands have played 55 World Cup matches and reached three finals but have never lifted the trophy. They finished runners-up in 1974, 1978, and 2010, losing to West Germany, Argentina, and Spain, respectively. Hungary and Czechoslovakia also reached two finals each but fell short of becoming champions.

** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Colombia: The only host to say no to the World Cup'.

7-year-old scripts taekwondo history



STAR SPORTS DESK

Muhammad Abdul Musawwir has etched his name into Bangladesh's taekwondo history, becoming the youngest Black Belt 1st Dan holder in the country at just seven years of age.

The landmark recognition, awarded by Kukkiwon (World Taekwondo Headquarters, South Korea), came through Banani Taekwondo Club.

This is not the first time the young prodigy has made headlines. In August 2025, he claimed a gold medal at the 8th Heroes Taekwondo International Championship 2025.

His journey in taekwondo began at a very young age, with his development shaped by the guidance of coaches Lubaba Binte Amjad and Nooruddin Husain. Their efforts, alongside the unwavering support of his parents and encouragement from peers, have played a key role in his progression.

The achievement has sparked celebrations among his friends and well-wishers, who see it as a reflection of "discipline, courage, and integrity."