DHAKA MONDAY OCTOBER 26, 2026, KARTIK 10, 1433 BS

SPORT



I wanted to apologise to our fans for my words during the World Cup. They were a mistake on my part, both in the way I said them and in the timing.

JULIAN ALVAREZ, after scoring in Atletico Madrid's 1-0 LaLiga win over Deportivo yesterday.

Ashraful's removal leaves more questions than answers

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashraful oversaw Bangladesh's training on Saturday ahead of their crucial two-Test series against West Indies. By night, he had been removed as national batting coach without prior notice or any reason publicly stated by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), raising fresh questions over its handling of a role marked by frequent changes.

His appointment in November last year had drawn criticism, with many questioning whether the former national captain had sufficient coaching experience for such a key position.

Yet, his tenure brought notable results in Test cricket. Bangladesh won five of eight Tests under him and drew one, including a historic victory over Australia in Darwin. They also secured three consecutive ODI series wins at home. However, their struggles away from home, particularly during the recent UAE ODI tri-series, appear to have proved decisive.

Ashraful, speaking after his removal on Saturday, defended his record in the longer format, arguing that Bangladesh's Test side remained settled and that the batters had performed consistently under his watch.

"Since I joined, we have won five of eight Tests and drawn one. Our batters have scored nine centuries and 22 or 23 half-centuries, with a century partnership in almost every Test," he told reporters yeterday.

"The cricket board can best explain why I am no longer there."

The numbers offer a more nuanced picture of his tenure. Bangladesh averaged 202.8 runs per innings across 14 matches under Ashraful, with no totals exceeding 300. In the preceding 14 matches under Mohammad Salahuddin, the average was 217.6. Salahuddin, who previously oversaw batting as senior assistant coach, has now been appointed interim batting coach for the West Indies series.



Mohammad Salahuddin returns as Bangladesh batting coach after just 11 months, as BCB removed Mohammad Ashraful from the role. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The change adds to a history of uncertainty surrounding the role. Following Neil McKenzie's resignation for family reasons, the BCB appointed Ashwell Prince, who sources suggest helped several batters. However, Prince resigned in 2022 after the board had already brought in Jamie Siddons as batting consultant a month earlier.

Siddons was expected to address Bangladesh's longstanding batting problems, given his previous stint with the team, but some considered his methods outdated. David Hemp followed, yet concerns persisted within the BCB that his work remained focused on basics without delivering the desired improvements.

Ashraful is the latest to make way. While some believe he has strong mentoring qualities, there are suggestions that players were less receptive to working with him on individual technical issues, having established relationships with domestic coaches before his appointment.

There is also a question of consistency in the board's judgement. Salahuddin was in charge during the recent Asian Games, where Bangladesh's batting failures were also apparent. As the BCB keeps searching for a high-profile batting coach, Ashraful's departure leaves a familiar question unanswered: can frequent changes deliver the stability the team's batting needs?

AWARD CATEGORIES

- The Men's and Women's Ballon d'Or
- The Men's and Women's Young Talent of the Year
- The Men's and Women's Goalkeeper of the Year
- The Men's and Women's Coach of the Year
- The Men's and Women's Club of the Year
- The Men's and Women's Striker of the Year
- Socrates Award



Who will win it this time?

A new winner could emerge on Tuesday as the 2026 Ballon d'Or ceremony, the 70th edition of football's most prestigious individual award, takes place at the London Palladium Theatre for the first time, moving from its traditional home in Paris to honour the inaugural winner, Sir Stanley Matthews. Set to begin at 2:00am Bangladesh time, the ceremony will feature awards across multiple categories, but the spotlight, as always, will be on the player who claims the ultimate prize. Harry Kane, Kylian Mbappe, Lamine Yamal and Michael Olise could all get their hands on a maiden Ballon d'Or, while Lionel Messi could make history by winning the award for a record-extending ninth time. With the 2026 FIFA World Cup also set to play a major role in the race, the final outcome could hinge on performances on the biggest stage in international football. Voted for by journalists representing the top 100 nations in the FIFA rankings, the award often leaves room for surprises, with the final tally determining who comes out on top. Here, we take a look at the leading contenders, their numbers and the titles they have won.



Harry Kane (Bayern Munich and England)
Goals: 73
Assists: 8
World Cup: 6 goals and 1 assist in seven matches, helping England finish third.
Titles won: Bundesliga, DFB-Pokal, and German Super Cup.



Lamine Yamal (Barcelona and Spain)
Goals: 26
Assists: 21
World Cup: 1 goal, 0 assists.
Titles won: FIFA World Cup, LaLiga, and Spanish Super Cup



Kylian Mbappe (Real Madrid and France)
Goals: 58
Assists: 14
World Cup: 10 goals, 4 assists; won Golden Boot as France finished fourth.
Top scorer in LaLiga and Champions League.
Titles won: 0



Lionel Messi (Inter Miami and Argentina)
Goals: 44
Assists: 30
World Cup: 8 goals, 4 assists; one of the best individual performances but Argentina lost in final.
Titles won: MLS Cup



Michael Olise (Bayern Munich and France)
Goals: 26
Assists: 41
World Cup: Record 6 assists, 0 goals
Titles won: Bundesliga, DFB-Pokal, and German Super Cup.

Ronan, Mahe tasked with filling No 9 void

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Thomas Dooley has turned to overseas-based forwards Ronan Sullivan and Mohammed Mahe Khan in a bid to solve the national team's long-standing No 9 problem ahead of the SAFF Championship, which begins in Dhaka on November 5.

The German-American coach has overlooked local forwards such as Sourav Dewan and Shahriar Emon, while promising Raphael Tudu has also missed out, instead banking on the US-based Sullivan and English ninth-tier forward Mahe to provide the goals Bangladesh have been lacking.

Since taking charge in June, Dooley has seen Bangladesh score just four goals in as many international matches. Defender Topu Barman scored twice, while Farhaan Ali Wahid and Shuki Itofusa netted once each.

"Everybody knows that we're looking for a number 9 because we don't have a number 9," Dooley told reporters at a hotel on Sunday, after 21 players from the 28-member preliminary squad reported for the residential camp.

The coach explained that a traditional centre-forward needed the physical presence, courage and positional awareness to compete with defenders and get to the ball first inside the penalty area.

"You have to have as a centre-forward a specific player who needs to go in front of the goalkeeper, in front of the defender, to be the first one to get that ball," he said.

"If you are not afraid to go in there where it hurts, then you are a number 9, then you are a centre-forward, but we don't have that."

Dooley identified Sullivan and Mahe as the two candidates he hopes can fill the role.

"Ronan is one of them and Mahe Khan is also one of them. So those are obviously with us to fulfil that number 9 position that we so desperately need," he said.

Mahe, who recently represented Bangladesh at the AFC U-20 Asian Cup qualifiers, had initially faced uncertainty over his inclusion. Dooley said he wanted the forward to join the camp for assessment but was informed two days later that the final 28-man squad had to be announced, leaving him no time to evaluate the player.

Despite playing in England's ninth tier, Mahe has impressed the coach with his profile as a traditional striker.

"Maybe he doesn't play at the highest level, but he is a typical number 9. He scores goals," Dooley said, adding that he had encouraged the forward to seize the opportunity to establish himself.

Sullivan, who has also represented Bangladesh at the youth level, became an option after the coach received confirmation that his college would release him to join the national team.

"He played for the U-20, scored. He is a typical number 9, fantastic," Dooley said.

The coach believes finding a reliable centre-forward is essential to Bangladesh's hopes of winning the regional title.

"If we go to the SAFF tournament and we don't have a number 9, it will also be very difficult to be successful," he said.





Midfielder Marcus Tavernier celebrates a goal as Bournemouth piled further misery on Michael Carrick's Manchester United with a 3-0 Premier League thrashing at Old Trafford yesterday. The defeat extended United's winless run to eight games across all competitions and left the Red Devils 15th in the table with just seven points from eight matches. It also capped a terrific week for Bournemouth, who beat AC Milan 3-0 at home in the Europa League last Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

IN BRIEF

Double delights for Imranur, Shirin

SPORTS REPORTER

Sprinters Imranur Rahman and Shirin Akter completed their campaigns on a high note, winning gold medals in their respective 200m sprints on the concluding day of the Koko 18th National Summer Athletics Championships at the National Stadium on Sunday.

Both athletes completed sprint doubles after winning the 100m events on the opening day of the three-day competition, which saw nine national records set. Bangladesh Army re-established their supremacy, finishing on top with 21 gold, 20 silver and 19 bronze medals. Bangladesh Navy finished runners-up with 18 gold, 17 silver and 10 bronze medals.

Navy's Imranur clocked 21.18 seconds to win the men's 200m gold, his second title in the event. In the women's 200m, Shirin set a new national record by clocking 24.35 seconds.

Naim, Robin hit double hundreds as batters dominate

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Naim Sheikh and Mahfijul Islam Robin struck double centuries as batters dominated day two of the fourth round of the National Cricket League (NCL) on Sunday, scoring 282 for Dhaka and 217 for Mymensingh respectively.

Naim resumed on 171 overnight and went on to make 282, missing out on a triple century as Dhaka piled up 521 all out against Rajshahi at Rajshahi Divisional Stadium. Mahidul Islam Ankon also impressed with a 289-ball 165, while Wasi Siddique was the pick of the Rajshahi bowlers with four for 112.

Opener Robin struck a 351-ball 217 as Mymensingh declared on 465 for seven against Chattogram at Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura. Mahmudul Hasan missed out on a century, scoring 76, as Chattogram reached 134 for two at stumps.