

No football this year

SPORTS REPORTER

As it had been predicted, football will not roll onto the ground this year.

This was confirmed yesterday when the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced a new date for the inaugural Professional Football League. After a series of delays, the Pro League's new launching date is January 13 but it looks suspect as it is just a week before the schedule of the general election.

The league was scheduled to begin on December 21 but the BFF postponed the November 15-December 31 transfer due to the countrywide blockade, which resulted in deferring the league further.

In spite of the threat of another blockade from this week, the BFF has planned to hold the transfer from December 5 to January 31.

"Even if the blockade continues, we will start the transfer. We had decided to see the situation and now we feel that the blockade would not hamper the transfer," opined BFF

general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal yesterday.

When asked if they had the consent of the clubs, Helal informed that he expected the participants to honour the latest decision of the federation.

"As far as I know, all the clubs have completed their preparation and won't object.

"We have set the new date just after the Eidul Azha holidays. I know the election is due in January but it would hardly stop one week's fixture.

The footballers, however, are not certain that the BFF would be able to fulfil its commitment this time.

And they have decided to protest BFF's apathy by staging a sit-in programme this afternoon at the BFF Bhaban. Current and former footballers are expected to take part in the protest.

"Why didn't they start the transfer on schedule, showing excuses of the blockade? They are now announcing the transfer date during blockade. It is silly," criticised a national footballer.

"The National Cricket League is going on smoothly. No one would try to disrupt sports during political programmes. So the BFF should take all the responsibility," he added.

Not only the federation, but also the clubs should be blamed because they pressed to delay the transfer in demand of completion of the renovation works of the Bangabandhu Stadium although they knew it would be ready by November.

Had they agreed to go for the transfer in October, the league could have easily been started by December. They were also reminded of the possible political unrest in December but played a deaf ear to the appeals of the players, who had their last transfer almost two years ago.

The last leagues (Dhaka Premier League and National Football league) were held in 2005, meaning football would return after a near 16-month gap.

Rafique's unique double

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna

"If you can prolong your career then records will automatically land in your account," the simple statement was made by Mohammad Rafique while he was talking about his reaching a milestone at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

The 36-year-old became the only Bangladeshi cricketer to have the all-rounder's double -- one thousand runs (1078) and 100 wickets -- in one-day cricket when the experienced left-arm spinner captured two wickets yesterday against Zimbabwe to achieve the feat in 104 matches.

His hunting began with the scalp of Indian great Sachin Tendulkar in the 1995 Asia Cup and the 50-mark came in the 62nd appearance when he dismissed then Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly, also in the Asia Cup, in 2004.

A straightforward Rafique, however, said that all wickets are important to him.

"I never thought about who the batsman was because every wicket is important. I am really excited with the fact that I am the first bowler in the country to achieve

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Asiad starts today

AFP, Doha

Qatar started its 24-hour countdown to the Asian Games opening ceremony on Thursday and insisted its three-billion-dollar investment in the tournament will be a success despite fears over security and organisation.

More than 13,000 athletes from 45 nations will be taking part in the Games which run from December 1-15.

"It will be a secure Games and a Games that everyone will enjoy," said spokesman Ahmed Abdulla Al-Khulaifi. "This is a safe country."

Despite their confidence, the organisers have faced a growing list of problems in recent days.

Although the tiny-rich Gulf state has been commended by a UN rights official for trying to curb the exploitation of migrant laborers here, it has been urged to do more to combat the scourge.

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Nafees goes on and on



BISHWAJIT ROY from Khulna

After smashing his third unbeaten century against Zimbabwe in as many matches, Bangladesh vice-captain Shahriar Nafees issued a warning that there are lot more to come in the series.

And no doubt there was a reason for the left-handed opener to make such a bold statement after his side's massive nine-wicket victory against the southern African nation, against whom he has an amazing record of making 476 runs in seven matches including three undefeated tons.

"There are lot more to come not only from me but also from my colleagues because I believe that we have a bunch of good cricketers in the squad. What I can say is that we have made a perfect start in the series and I am happy that I could contribute to this win," said a delighted Nafees after his 105 not out in the first one-day international at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

It seemed that Bangladesh and Nafees both started their campaigns against Zimbabwe from where they had left off in the previous match in the ICC Champions Trophy in India last October where the Tigers rode on the left-hander's unconquered 123 to a massive 101-run victory.

"It is really nice that all my hundreds played a role behind my team's victory which is very important for any batsman. I am looking forward to contribute more in the series to realise our dream come true," said a confident Nafees, who has had a great year in every aspect.

The obvious question during the post-match briefing was whether the weak Zimbabwean attack helped him to continue the run feast but the southpaw was dismissive of the notion.

"I don't think I love most to play the Zimbabwean bowlers because I respect all international bowlers in same manner. The main thing is how you utilise your opportunities," he explained.

The 20-year-old branded his latest knock, the sixth hundred for Bangladesh after one each from Mehrab Hossain Opee, Mohammad Ashraful and Rajin Saleh, as his best.

"Every hundred is important but I must say technically it was the best innings I have played so far. I'm not much concerned about my personal achievement because I always emphasise on team result," said the newly wed, who made his maiden hundred (118 not out) in Zimbabwe last August.

A good timer of the ball, he played some magnificent drives and

pull shots all over the park and a spectacular six over mid-wicket against pacer Elton Chigumbura but showed his cool by completing the fifty and the hundred with singles.

Nafees, who always concentrated on settling before going into the charge, took only 29 matches to cross the 1,000-run barrier whereas Aftab Ahmed had to play 43 games to achieve it.

"Consistency is very important and I think that's why I enabled to reach it a bit earlier than my other colleagues. It is my dream to be consistent in my batting because I don't like to go into hibernation after playing one or two big innings," said N a f e e s , w h o a l s o

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PHOTO: AFP
JOB DONE, 100TH TIME: Wily left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique (2nd R) is being patted at the back by Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar (R) after he took the wicket of Zimbabwe batsman Brendan Taylor during the first one-day international at the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Flight Lieutenant Motiur Rahman Stadium in Khulna on Thursday.

Arafat denies Chittagong

SPORTS REPORTER



Arafat Salahuddin struck a magnificent 139 to save Barisal from a certain defeat

against Chittagong while Dhaka and Khulna both played it safe on the final day of the four-day matches in the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League across the country yesterday.

Barisal were reduced to 68-5 in

their second innings chasing 375 to win at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium, but young Arafat ensured a draw with a brilliant hundred as the visitors reached 293 for six at close of play.

At the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium, the hosts were set a 314-run target in less than a day and did not take any chance, reaching 165 for two at stumps.

Meanwhile, Sylhet were frustrated all day by Khulna who declared their second innings only two hours before play ended, giving Sylhet an improbable target of 309 to win in 22 overs at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. They were 87 for three when the match ended.

CHITTAGONG v BARISAL

The visitors lost skipper Hannan Sarkar early when he was bowled by seamer Tareq Aziz for 10. Spinner Sabbir Khan then joined the lanky paceman and the two demolished the Barisal top-order with only Humayun Kabir surviving the wreck.

Coming together at 68-5, Humayun and Arafat did the task of surviving throughout the day properly.

They thwarted the rival attack for nearly four hours as Arafat reached his ton in 113 balls. He struck 14 boundaries and seven sixes in his 157-ball stay. Humayun supported him well, hitting six fours and a six in his 73 during a 203-run stand for the sixth wicket.

RAJSHAHI v DHAKA

Fast bowler Alamgir Kabir took the early wicket of Dhaka's overnight batsman Uttam Sarkar who scored 77. But Shamsur Rahman prevailed as Dhaka looked to draw the game. He patiently batted for more than four hours to score just 58 with four boundaries.

Home left-arm spinner Soharwardi Shuvo took three wickets but with the big target,

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What to WATCH

TEN Sports

Pakistan v West Indies

Third Test, Day Five

Live at 10:30 am

ESPN

Australia v England

2nd Ashes Test, Day One

Live at 6:00 am

STAR Sports

South Africa v India

Twenty20 Int'l

Live at 10:00 pm

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