



## BCB, PCB agree on 3-phase Pak tour

SPORTS REPORTER

The uncertainty regarding Bangladesh's upcoming tour of Pakistan finally ended when the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced that the Tigers' tour of Pakistan will be split into three phases. However, the BCB mentioned that the second and the third phase of the tour will depend on security clearance for that period with BCB media release stating that the Bangladesh team is 'expected to return' for the remainder of the full tour.

The BCB announced that it had come to an agreeable resolution with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) regarding the matter following a meeting between the two board high-ups, with ICC Chairman Shashank Manohar as the mediator at the sidelines of a meeting of the ICC in Dubai yesterday.

Bangladesh will be playing three T20Is in the first phase from January 24 to January 27 in Lahore. The Tigers will then visit Pakistan again for their first ICC World Test Championship fixture, to be held from February 7 to 11 in Rawalpindi.

The last phase of the tour will be played after the Pakistan Super League (PSL) ends on March 22. The last phase will include the one-off ODI, scheduled for April 3 and

the second ICC World Test Championship fixture from April 5 to 9, to be played in Karachi.

The two boards have been in discussions regarding the matter for a considerable amount of time in recent past. The BCB had earlier mentioned that it would only prefer playing a short tour, preferably just the three T20Is with the Test rescheduled as per government directives. The PCB was more inclined to play the two Tests first and push the T20Is to a later date.

The PCB chairman Ehsan Mani mentioned that the Pakistan board was pleased to have finally reached an agreeable resolution to the matter.

"I am pleased that we have amicably achieved a resolution that is in the best interest of this great sport as well as both the proud cricket playing countries. I also want to thank ICC Chairman Shashank Manohar for the leadership he provided and ensured the sport continues to grow and thrive in the two countries," PCB chairman Mani was quoted as saying in a media release by the PCB yesterday.

While an ODI was not in the original tour schedule, BCB sources said the board kept PCB's request of including an ODI match to enable their counterpart to cover the cost of accommodating the Bangladesh team in three separate phases.



Bangladesh will have to keep their focus till the end against Palestine in their opening Bangabandhu Gold Cup fixture, the way Jamal Bhuiyan (L), Faisal Ahmed Fahim and Matin Mia (R) were doing in training yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Booters looking for a fresh start against Palestine

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh coach Jamie Day believes Palestine will be the favourites against his team in today's opening match of the Bangabandhu National Gold Cup despite the defending champions bringing a second-string side to compete in the six-nation tournament.

The match will kick off at 5:00pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, with BTV and RTV telecasting it live.

Palestine team, ranked 106th in FIFA, feature only six players who were part of their 2-0 win over Uzbekistan in their last World Cup qualifying fixture in November last year. There are seven Olympic-squad players while the other 10 players are from domestic-league teams.

During the pre-tournament press conference at the BFF house yesterday, Bangladesh coach Day said they would need to perform like they did against Qatar and India if they are to get a result against Palestine.

"We want to kick off the tournament on a positive note as we want to win every game. Palestine are a good team on paper. It's not the same team that came last year but they have some technically good players despite not

sending their best players.

"Some of them played in under-23 tournament in Bahrain. We have better chance and we have home advantage but still Palestine will be favourites [against us]. But if we play well and get support from the stands, we may win the game. If we repeat the performance like we did against India, Qatar and first half against Oman, it will make things difficult for Palestine," Day said.

The 40-year-old coach had a closed-door session at the Sheikh Jamal DC ground yesterday as their final preparation. Defender Tapu Barman, midfielder Mamunul Islam and striker Matin Mia are likely to come in place of Riyadul Hasan, injured Biplu Ahmed and fever-hit Nabib Newaz Jibon in the starting eleven which played against Oman in November. Day also worked closely with winger Rabiul Hasan, forward Mahbubur Rahman Sufil and defender Sushanta Tripura in training.

Even though the national team played well



against Qatar and India, the under-23 side were below-par in the South Asian Games where they lost against Bhutan and Nepal, drawing against Maldives and winning against Sri Lanka.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan wants to recover from that poor display through the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in order to prove a point.

"Those who played the SA Games know they didn't perform well. So this is a good chance to recover from that and to show everyone that SA Games was a mistake and we can do better," Jamal said. "This time the preparation and practice has been good. We want to give our best

### GROUPS

**GROUP A:** Palestine, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka  
**GROUP B:** Burundi, Mauritius, Seychelles

### FIXTURES

DATE	MATCH	TIME	VENUE
15 Jan	Bangladesh v Palestine	5:00pm	BNS
16 Jan	Mauritius v Burundi	5:00pm	BNS
17 Jan	Palestine v Sri Lanka	5:00pm	BNS
18 Jan	Burundi v Seychelles	5:00pm	BNS
19 Jan	Sri Lanka v Bangladesh	5:00pm	BNS
20 Jan	Seychelles v Mauritius	5:00pm	BNS
22 Jan	Semi-1 (A1 v B2)	5:00pm	BNS
23 Jan	Semi-2 (B1 v A2)	5:00pm	BNS
25 Jan	Final (Winner SF1 v SF2)	5:00pm	BNS

I must thank the PCB for understanding our position. We are pleased that a mutually acceptable resolution has been reached and this is a prime example of our sincere efforts at respecting the ICC FTP commitments.

**NAZMUL HASSAN**  
BCB PRESIDENT

### FIXTURES

DATE	MATCH	VENUE
Jan 24	First T20I	Lahore
Jan 25	Second T20I	Lahore
Jan 27	Third T20I	Lahore
<b>Feb 7-11</b>	<b>First Test</b>	<b>Rawalpindi</b>
Apr 3	One-off ODI	Karachi
<b>Apr 5-9</b>	<b>Second Test</b>	<b>Karachi</b>

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**EHSAN MANI**  
PCB CHAIRMAN



Chattogram Challengers will expect Chris Gayle to provide a boost to their side when they face Rajshahi Royals in the second BBPL qualifier in Mirpur today. PHOTO: STAR FILE

## Gayle threat looms over Rajshahi

SPORTS REPORTER

After more than a month-long battle between seven teams, the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) entered the final phase with Chattogram Challengers, Rajshahi Royals and Khulna Tigers the only three sides left fighting for the ultimate glory. Khulna already made it to the all-important final while Chattogram Challengers will battle it out against Rajshahi Royals in the second qualifier under lights for a place in the final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Chattogram Challengers had the most dominating start to the tournament, winning six of their first eight games. For the majority of the tournament, Chattogram missed regular captain Mahmudullah Riyad, who played six of their 12 fixtures owing to a recurring hamstring injury, with the captaincy moving to and from Rayad Emrit and Imrul Kayes. Chattogram looked the most likely to secure top place finish but after a few hiccups at the late end, they only managed third place.

Having got Mahmudullah back after injury and with T20 superstar Chris Gayle joining the team at the business end of the tournament, Chattogram went on to win their eliminator against Dhaka Platoon on Monday to get to the second qualifier.

Gayle played the whole of the last Dhaka leg but the BBPL is yet to see some fireworks from the 40-year-old West Indian. But if the past is any indicator, Gayle, who featured in each of the seven BPL editions

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**MUKTAR ALI**  
CHATTOGRAM CHALLENGERS PLAYER

till date, usually fires at the latter stages of the tournament. On his day, Gayle alone decides the game for his team.

Gayle's teammate Muktar Ali was of the same opinion when he talked to the media at a city hotel yesterday.

"We got a boost in confidence after Gayle joined the team. He is playing and slowly getting into his groove. But the day he will play, [like his usual self] he can change the game all by himself and no one else would need to step up in that match," Muktar said yesterday.

So far, Gayle's highest innings has been an uncharacteristic 49-ball 38 that came against Dhaka in the only eliminator. Having proven himself in this format in the past and carrying the team all by himself, the self-proclaimed 'Universe Boss' will be depended on with today's game being a do-or-die situation for both Chattogram and Rajshahi. Time may not be on his side but Gayle had earlier reiterated that 'feels younger as the days go by' and Chattogram will be hoping their star opener lives up to his billing.

### SHORT CORNER

#### I feel like a kid again: Bravo

West Indies star all-rounder Dwayne Bravo, who last played a T20I in 2016, is excited to be back in national colours for the three-match T20I series against Ireland.

"It's a great feeling," Bravo said in a radio interview with Trinidad's 1955 FM. "I feel like a kid again when I first get a call from [West Indies' chairman of selectors Roger Harper] that welcome back to the team and play international cricket and they were looking forward to have me back.

"It is something that was always on my mind since the change of leadership and stuff. So just happy I get the opportunity to represent the region again and I am looking forward to doing my best." -- ICC

#### AB eyes international comeback

Former South Africa batsman AB de Villiers on Tuesday said he would love to make an international comeback with the Proteas at this year's ICC T20 World Cup slated to be played in Australia.

De Villiers scored 40 on his Big Bash League (BBL) debut as his team Brisbane Heat defeated Adelaide Strikers by seven wickets on Tuesday. "There's a lot that needs to happen before that becomes a reality," the 35-year-old was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au. "It's a long way away still, and plenty can happen - there's the IPL coming up, I've still got to be in form at that time," he added.

-- AGENCIES



## The four other teams

### MAURITIUS

Mauritius is an East African nation, which is more popular for its tourism than football. Mauritius coach Francisco Filho informed that they have come here with a youthful squad, with six players from the under-17 side. According to Filho, Mauritius do not have any professional league but they have two leagues which are not high in standard. Interestingly, despite not having professional players, Mauritius football ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA ranking (172) and they are dreaming to win the title. "We have come here with a young team to gather experience because this tournament is good for our boys. We want to win but we have to be realistic because the opponents are experienced. We know our group opponents as Burundi is coming with local players and we see our chance," said Filho.

### SEYCHELLES

Seychelles is another African nation more known for its tourism than football. Seychelles are ranked 200th by FIFA, but they have a good domestic structure with three leagues, the top league featuring 12 teams. They played in World Cup playoffs against Rwanda, losing 3-0 and 7-0 in September last year. Then they lost 2-1 and 1-0 against South Sudan in African Nations Cup prequalifiers in October last year. However, Seychelles coach Donanacoura is confident about winning the title. "We are well-prepared as the boys have been in full season with good shape and they are ready because our team is a mixture of

young, exciting and experienced players. It will be our tournament as we have come here to win it."

### BURUNDI

Burundi are the only team not to turn up at the official pre-tournament press conference as they were heading to the hotel at that time after landing here yesterday afternoon. Burundi are the second highest ranked side (151) in the tournament. Burundi played 14 matches last year, suffering nine defeats, drawing four and winning one against South Sudan. One of the draws came against World Cup campaigners Algeria in June last year while they drew twice against Tanzania and once against Gabon. Based on their ranking, Burundi should be one of the title contenders here and have a strong top league featuring 16 clubs.

### SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka are the team that Bangladesh are most familiar with. They are taking part in this tournament for a third time after being eliminated from the group stages twice. Interestingly the islanders were pitted against Bangladesh in the same group previously and were eliminated following a defeat to the host nation. They are also the lowest-ranked side (205) in the tournament. They have lost all five of their World Cup qualifying matches, conceding 16 goals without scoring any. Sri Lanka coach Packer Ali did not turn up at the press briefing, citing the leg-jet. Manager Colonel Pathnanathan vowed to fight against Palestine and Bangladesh to get out of the group stage with the squad comprising young and senior players.