



Liton Das is going through a purple patch after making two centuries against Zimbabwe during the recently concluded home series. The stylish right-hander will be hoping to carry his form when he starts the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League campaign for Abahani against Partex Sporting Club today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO: BCB

## Despite concerns, DPL begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



With the outbreak of coronavirus having a major impact on the sporting world, upcoming international and domestic events in Bangladesh were also affected.

Many sports federations had grand plans to commemorate the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman but those plans were forced into postponement while federations had to cancel most of the local and international events scheduled to begin in recent times.

International events of archery, volleyball, basketball, golf and cycling were postponed along with the Bangladesh national football team's World Cup qualifiers.

The BCB's plans to host a concert on March 18 were deferred while the two T20 games that would follow, between Asia XI and World XI, on March 21 and 22 were also postponed. The BCB is also monitoring the national team's upcoming tour to Pakistan, scheduled for later this month, and with things going the way they have been, that tour is also in jeopardy.

Domestically, the Bangladesh Games, a multi-sport extravaganza that was to be arranged on a large scale and set to begin from April 1, were also postponed along with all relevant training camps.

However, the country's top-tier football competition, the Bangladesh Premier League, and a few age-level football and hockey tournaments have continued while the country's

prestigious 50-over club-based tournament, the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League, is set to begin from today.

Despite the cricketers and board focusing on matches, precautionary measures and containment issues have remained a major talking point in the cricketing arena.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed that the board was well aware of the situation and had taken precautionary measures by raising awareness and even discouraging the



traditional handshake between players.

"We have given an advisory to the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis and also to the clubs. We will follow the guidelines and steps given by the government and the medical advisories. We have already communicated with the clubs and also had a meeting and the BCB will ensure medical support if any player or official falls ill or even has any symptoms. We have told them to contact the medical team.

The club must also inform us and we will take steps accordingly," he told reporters yesterday.

"We are also trying to minimise handshakes. We are habituated but we have to keep in mind the recent practice around us is to discourage it."

According to Nizamuddin, the measures regarding the crowd such as reducing ticket sales was only a consideration for international games. He said there would be no such restrictions needed for DPL matches. And why not? Spectators have already lost interest in going to the stadiums and supporting their clubs in the domestic leagues as club competitions have lost most of their charm over time.

Amidst all that noise, clubs and players have started preparations. Abahani take on Partex SC, Legends of Rupganj face Old DOHS SC and Prime Doleshwar SC meet Brothers Union in the first-round games across venues in Dhaka today.

Newly-appointed ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal, who will feature for Prime Bank CC this season, was well aware of the coronavirus outbreak and said that the situation was a matter of concern.

"Like everyone, I am also worried about it. I hope the entire world will be able to overcome this tough time. There is a lot to be concerned by as sporting events worldwide have been cancelled. But I am sure our authorities have taken the decision after contemplating it. We were asked to continue playing and we were ready to play. Obviously, we will work accordingly if we get further instructions in the future. About handshakes, it's better for us to avoid it. In our culture many might not like that but the situation is like that," Tamim told reporters yesterday.

## 'Please don't lose patience'

SPORTS REPORTER



The inspirational Mashrafe Bin Mortaza always tried to create a family-like atmosphere in the Bangladesh team during his reign as the Tigers' captain.

So much so, that despite his remarkable record as captain -- 50 wins from 88 games -- what was most commendable was his way of keeping the troops together, on or off the field.

Tamim Iqbal has now been handed the baton and while the left-hander mentioned that it would not be possible to be as great a leader as Mashrafe, it still seemed that Tamim will be following Mashrafe's ideals and footsteps.

The newly-appointed ODI captain promised that he would focus on 'team culture', an area he believes he can improve upon to bring success on the field.

"I think there are a lot of things that are beyond our control on the field. But one of the things that is under our control is the team culture. I believe how we think outside the field or how professional we are... I think these are the areas we can improve on and that will be first job as captain," Tamim said in Mirpur yesterday while speaking to reporters for the first time after being named ODI captain.

According to Tamim, if he can help improve the team's off-field attitude, then it will also impact their performance positively on the field.

"If we do things right outside the field, if we can be more disciplined in cricketing matters and if we work hard and not repeat the mistakes that we make during practice while playing a match, then we can gradually see the changes. Whenever I think of leading this team, the first thing that comes to mind is that I need to look into off-field matters. We are a very disciplined side, but we can be better. If I can improve

these matters then it will also impact our performances on the field positively," continued Tamim.

Tamim was also aware that the fans and media of a cricket loving country like Bangladesh do not shy away from criticising the team's performance. And the 30-year-old, who mentioned he would step aside if he could not make any changes, asked everyone to have patience during the initial stages.

"I always like to be attack-minded.

Whenever I think of leading this team, the first thing that comes to mind is that I need to look into off-field matters. We are a very disciplined side, but we can be better. If I can improve these matters then it will also impact our performances on the field positively.

**TAMIM IQBAL**  
BANGLADESH ODI CAPTAIN

We need to assess the situation and also understand our strengths. We need to take a decision considering everything. All I want to ask is that all of you stay patient. The batting might falter in one or two series or in five matches. I hope that it won't, but it can happen. Please don't lose patience and I will also request the fans the same. I will try my best to get everything in order. And if I cannot do anything for the team in six months, one year or one-and-a-half years, then I will definitely step aside," concluded Tamim.



## Japan still preparing for Olympics: Abe

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan is still preparing to host the Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Saturday, despite rising global concern about the viability of the summer Games due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Abe and his government have been adamant the Olympics will go ahead, even as other global sporting events have been put on hold. Speculation about a delay from the July start date has grown since U.S. President Donald Trump said organisers should consider a one-year postponement.

Abe and Trump held a call after those comments, prompting the U.S. president to say on Twitter that the Olympic venue was magnificent. But this may not be enough to assuage sponsors of the Games, who are increasingly nervous about how the impact of the outbreak on the competition.

The Olympic Torch relay, in which the Olympic flame typically starts a tour around the host nation, is due to start in the Japanese prefecture of Fukushima in less than two weeks. The tour of the torch through Greece has already been cut short.

"We will overcome the spread of the infection and host the Olympics without problem, as planned," Abe told a news conference in Tokyo, adding that delaying or cancelling the Olympics was "not a subject at all" in his call with Trump.

He said Japan working closely with the International Olympic Committee, which will have the final decision whether the Games go ahead, and the U.N. World Health Organization, suggesting he accepted that Tokyo would not ultimately decide on the event.

He said Japan had a relatively low infection rate and had not seen an explosion in cases as seen in South Korea, China, Italy, Iran and elsewhere. He said delaying the peak of infections was vital to ensure treatment of those in critical condition.

## Australia-New Zealand series postponed

AGENCIES



Australia and New Zealand's limited overs tours have been postponed in the wake of new travel restrictions announced by the New Zealand government on Saturday aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Saturday that everyone entering the country from midnight Sunday must self-isolate for 14 days in an effort to contain the outbreak.

The development also means that the three-match Twenty20 series, set to be held in New Zealand at the end of the month, has been called off, as the mandatory self-isolation period would also apply to the Australian squad as soon as it crossed the border into New Zealand.

New Zealand Cricket said in a statement that they believe the series can be replayed in their entirety at a later date, and supported the decision.

"NZC understands and supports the government's position. This is a time of unprecedented risk and peril, and the personal health and well-being of our players is paramount."

The Black Caps had already undergone their own coronavirus scare the night before, with star seamer Lockie Ferguson has been placed in isolation after his side's opening ODI defeat.

Ferguson reported a sore throat at the end of the first ODI, and the fast bowler was immediately placed in isolation due to fears of the coronavirus outbreak which has seen sport in Australia either cancelled or moved behind closed doors.

The latter option was chosen for the Black Caps' 71-run defeat to Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground, in which Ferguson took 2-60 in his nine overs before making one off seven balls in New Zealand's innings, before reporting a sore throat at the conclusion of the match.

New Zealand Cricket confirmed that Ferguson had been placed in isolation at the team hotel for 24 hours - "in accordance with recommended health protocols" - and



**New Zealand pacer Lockie Ferguson tested negative for coronavirus after being quarantined.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

tested for COVID-19.

That test came back negative, with Ferguson set to return to New Zealand today morning.

Earlier, Australian bowler Kane Richardson was also tested for the coronavirus, having reported a mild sore throat on Thursday, promoting Cricket Australia to take action and remove him from the squad. However, the test came back negative.

## PCB to defer Tigers' tour?

SPORTS REPORTER



The fate of the third phase of Bangladesh's tour to Pakistan has been cloudy recently due to the coronavirus outbreak and, according to sources in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), the hosts are set to

postpone the rest of Bangladesh's tour.

It was also learned that due to the alarming situation, the PCB would make their decision regarding the tour soon. If postponed, the remaining matches -- one ODI and Bangladesh's second World Test Championship fixture -- would be played later when the two boards find a common window.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan mentioned that chances of the matches being held according to schedule were very slim.

"As far as I have seen, there are still a lot of uncertainties [regarding the tour]. We are still waiting. We will get a confirmed decision in one or two days. But still nothing can be said. It is still in process. I think we can clearly say what is happening in two or three days. But the way there are travel restrictions all around the globe, I think the chances are very slim," Nazmul said yesterday.

Bangladesh were scheduled to leave the country on March 29 for Karachi, where they are scheduled to play the lone ODI on April 1 before playing their second World Test Championship fixture from April 5. There were talks of shifting the fixtures to a different venue but Nazmul said that was "no chance".

"No. There is no chance [the venue will be shifted]. But we might have to arrange the tour at a later period."

Earlier yesterday, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed the media that they had been waiting for the PCB's response on the matter.

"Pakistan is the home country. They will take the decision. Even nine to ten players, who were playing their domestic league [Pakistan Super League] already left the country. We are waiting to get Pakistan's response. We are the visiting team and we can be monitoring it closely. We are hoping the PCB will communicate their decision to us soon," Nizamuddin said.



Let's stay strong and fight the #COVID19 outbreak by taking all precautionary measures. Stay safe, be vigilant and most importantly remember, prevention is better than cure. Please take care everyone.

**VIRAT KOHLI**  
INDIA CAPTAIN  
tweeted reacting for the first time on the global outbreak of coronavirus.