

ARTETA IN 'GOOD SPIRITS'

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has returned to working from home, the club confirmed on Thursday after testing positive for coronavirus last week. As a result of the Spaniard's diagnosis, the Arsenal squad were sent into self-isolation for 14 days. "We're pleased to say that Mikel is feeling much better," Arsenal said in a statement. "He's in good spirits, doing detailed planning with the coaches and speaking to the players regularly." The Gunners do not know when they will return to action on the pitch with football in England suspended until at least April 30 due to strict measures on mass gatherings to control the virus.

-- AFP



(Anti-clockwise from L) Although the Abahani ground in Dhanmondi was closed on March 15 due to the outbreak of coronavirus, students continue to find their way inside. Here they are seen climbing over the gate with their gear in tow. Meanwhile some of the club's footballers have left their boots out under the sun. At the Sheikh Jamal ground in the same area, a notice restricting entrance accompanies a container of handwash.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Students flock to playgrounds

SPORTS REPORTER

Different national sports federations have postponed competitions due to government instructions and clubs have suspended training camps, but the gathering of students at playgrounds around the city continues despite the outbreak of coronavirus.

Yesterday afternoon, more than a hundred boys, split into at least 10 groups, were seen playing cricket and football matches on the sand-filled Brothers Union ground in Gopibagh.

Only some were wearing masks while sprinting about and making body contact while chasing after balls or running between wickets.

Confining students to their homes has become tough for guardians. Some boys said that although they were aware of the coronavirus, they could not keep themselves from sport and had snuck away from parents.

"I learned about the coronavirus by watching television, but we can't keep ourselves from playing games because we only get two days in a week to play," said Rakib Khan, a grade-8 student at Mitali High School.

"My mother and elder brothers advised me to stay inside but I came out of the house in the afternoon despite my fears of the coronavirus," Sahil Islam, another grade-8 student at the same school, said.

Sakib Khan, a grade-3 student, was prudent in wearing a mask and said he was taking other precautions but could not resist the field's aura.

"I wore a mask to avoid coronavirus as well as to avoid dust. We come here twice a week. We know we should stay home, but we can't be confined because we are habituated



Children inside the Abahani ground in Dhanmondi play a game of cricket. There were numerous groups of children playing games of football or cricket despite restrictions.

PHOTO: STAR

to playing sports. But we wash our hands and face with soap when we return."

"We have seen in the media that young guys are at less risk than the older population, so we dared to come here and play cricket," Mashrafe Mahi, who sat for his SSC exam from Motijheel Govt. High School, said.

"Nothing will happen to us because the situation is not at its worst in Bangladesh," said Ayon of Nababpur High School.

Brothers Union official Masum Ali said the club would take stricter measures in the future: "We can't stop boys from entering the ground because they regularly gather here

to play football and cricket. However, most of the boys are not from Gopibagh area. We are going to hang a notice restricting entrance tomorrow and will deploy people to stop them from tomorrow."

Some boys were also seen playing at the Abahani ground although the club authority imposed restrictions on playing at the ground by suspending all cricket and football coaching centers on March 15.

They jumped over the fence and entered, saying that they did not feel good at home so they came out to play at the Abahani ground, a place where, until recently, guardians would be littered around and

watching their children train.

The BFF yesterday locked its artificial turfs, where some 250 to 300 footballers from the adjacent area trained regularly, while Sheikh Jamal also locked their ground, only allowing its football team to train there.

"The government closed the schools so that children stay home. If they come to play on the BFF astro-turf, then the government initiative won't be successful. That's why we locked the ground for 10 days upon recommendations from a few members of the BFF executive board. We also discussed it with the residents of Arambagh," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag.

Olympics could be delayed, admits athletics chief Coe

AFP, London



World athletics chief Sebastian Coe admitted on Thursday that the Tokyo Olympics could be moved to later in the year by the coronavirus outbreak, but said it was too early to make a definitive decision.

Olympic bosses acknowledged on Wednesday there was no "ideal" solution as a growing number of athletes expressed concern.

The COVID-19 pandemic is playing havoc with the global sporting calendar, forcing the postponement of Euro 2020 and a suspension of the tennis season.

International Olympic Committee chairman Thomas Bach said earlier this week that starting on schedule on July 24 remained the organisation's goal.

But Coe, who is a member of the Tokyo Olympics Games Coordination Commission, conceded in an interview with the BBC that a delay was possible.

"That is possible, anything is possible at the moment," said Coe when asked whether the Games could be postponed to September or October.

"But I think the position that sport has certainly taken, and it was certainly the temperature of the room in the conversation I had the other day with the IOC and our other federations, is that nobody is saying we will be going to the Games come what may. But it isn't a decision that has to be made at this moment."

Coe, who played a pivotal role in securing the Olympics for London in 2012, said postponing the Games until 2021 could present problems.

Britain's retired four-time rowing Olympic gold medalist Matthew Pinsent called for decisive action.

"On a global front we have other priorities and I think the Olympics should at the very least be saying we should postpone or indeed just cancel at this stage and we'll talk about postponement later on," he told the BBC.

"I just don't think there's much of a choice at this stage."



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PL suspension extended till April 30

AFP, London

The shutdown of English football was extended until at least April 30 on Thursday after the Premier League and English Football League (EFL) held crisis meetings.

"We've agreed that the professional game in England will be further postponed until no earlier 30 April," said a joint statement by the English Football Association, Premier League, EFL, players and managers' bodies.

UEFA's decision to postpone Euro 2020 earlier this week could allow games to be completed over the summer if strict restrictions on travelling are lifted in time.

The leagues still hope to finish the season once play can be restarted rather than accepting the current standings as final or declaring the campaign null and void.

Even if play can commence in early May, that could mean matches stretching beyond the June 30 goal UEFA agreed on for finishing the season on Tuesday. However, the English authorities are putting no limit of when the 2019/20 season must be finished by.

"The FA's Rules and Regulations state that 'the season shall terminate not later than the 1 June' and 'each competition shall, within the limit laid down by The FA, determine the length of its own playing season'. However, The FA's Board has agreed for this limit to be extended indefinitely for the 2019/20 season.

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