



Although a 27-member Bangladesh preliminary squad is undergoing week-long training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, the Bangladesh Cricket Board is still waiting for a response from Sri Lanka Cricket for updates on a revised health protocol and the scheduled tour. According to the BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury, the board is keen to start domestic cricket while continuing preparation for the Sri Lanka tour. He also said that there is no connection between resumption of domestic cricket and the Sri Lanka tour as BCB intends to continue both local and international commitments in coming days.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Zia hails efforts but wants classic events

SPORTS REPORTER



Grand Master Ziaur Rahman believes holding the Joyti Sheikh Hasina International Online Chess Tournament will enhance Bangladesh's image among players across the world and that the healthy prize pool would motivate local players to perform.

The South Asian Chess Council in association with Canadian University and Bangladesh Chess Federation is holding the online chess tournament from today to mark the birth anniversary of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. US\$6,000 will be disbursed as prize money among the players, with a kept separately for local players.

"Such a tournament will motivate players so much because there is a good amount of prize money. Holding such a tournament will improve the image of the country because it will give the message to chess players across the world that Bangladesh is going to be a good venue for chess," Zia said ahead of the rapid-chess tournament, which will be held in Swiss-League System in three days.

Bangladesh's international arbiter Haroonur Rashid confirmed that 17 Grand Masters, including three from Bangladesh, would be among a total of 74 players.

"It is happy news for us that such a good initiative has been taken after a long gap. Maybe it is going to be a very strong event because of the strong participants. Players from top Asian countries such as India and Iran are participating, so it is going to be tough for all players," said Zia, who however would prefer to play the

classic event but believe online chess helps players be engaged in the game.

"While there are no classic events due to the pandemic, online chess has nevertheless helped keep players connected to the game rather than sitting idle. Players will struggle to keep their performance intact if they don't play any tournaments, so it is a good initiative to play online. In terms of professionalism, players won't be able to earn money if they don't get opportunity to take part," Zia said, advising to start classic events immediately.



"Staging the classic game is very necessary to take country's chess forward because Europe has already started the classic game. I think it is also possible to start chess in Bangladesh and we need a big hall room and follow the way Europe is staging it. If it happens, senior and junior players will then be able to produce good results in online chess tournaments. Players have been almost out of action for nearly one year and such big gap is a threat to maintaining performance," said Zia.

'Dhoni not leading from the front'

AFP, Dubai

India great Mahendra Singh Dhoni faced criticism on Wednesday for his uncharacteristically slow start in Chennai Super Kings' unsuccessful run chase in the IPL against Steve Smith's Rajasthan Royals.

Dhoni, the Chennai captain, sent up Sam Curran and IPL debutant Ruturaj Gaikwad ahead of him in his team's chase of 217 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, on Tuesday.

Finally coming into bat in the 14th over, the veteran wicketkeeper-batsman scored just 10 runs off his first 13 balls while partner Faf du Plessis was on a hitting spree in his 72-run blitz including seven sixes.

The former India skipper, who announced his international retirement last month, only got going in the final over to hit three successive sixes but by then the chase was beyond Chennai who lost by 16 runs.

"This is not what you call leading from the front. Batting at No. 7 when you're chasing what...213 (217)? The game was over. Faf was probably the lone warrior," former India opener Gautam Gambhir told ESPNcricinfo.

"Yes, you can talk about MS Dhoni's last over, but it was of no use to be honest. It was just all personal runs."

Curran had smashed 18 off six balls after being promoted ahead of Dhoni, who last played in India's semi-final exit of the 2019 World Cup, in Chennai's win over holders Mumbai Indians in the IPL opener last week.

Dhoni, known for his finishing skills during the peak of his international career, said his lack of time in the middle prompted him to shuffle the batting order.

"I haven't batted for a long time. 14-day



quarantine (in the United Arab Emirates) doesn't help," Dhoni, who remained unbeaten on 29, said in the post-match chat.

"Also wanted to try different things, give opportunities to Sam. Have the opportunity to try different things. If it doesn't work, you can always go back to your strengths."

Chennai coach Stephen Fleming told reporters, "MS is a specialist at the end of the innings, always has been."

But the statements cut little ice with fans who criticised their cricketing hero with one Twitter user saying, "Next time Dhoni should warm-up before the match and not during the match."

Dhoni though got some support from his fans who took note of his three big sixes with one hit going out of the Sharjah stadium. The 39-year-old has come under fire for batting slowly in the slog overs during last year's 50-overs showpiece event.

Bogura's local women cricketers hit hard by Covid-19

MOSTAFA SHABUI from Bogura



Since the halt of cricketing activities due to the coronavirus pandemic, the hardships of male domestic cricketers were well documented, but the plight of female domestic players is as bad, if not worse.

They used to pay for their yearly expenses through income from various domestic leagues, but the long hiatus has put them in financial hardship.

Bristy Das, 25, a local cricketer in Bogura, said, "Last year, I played the premier league for Keraniganj with a Tk 1.5 lakh contract but this year all kinds of cricket has stopped due to coronavirus. With that sum I could bear all my yearly expenses, including cricketing equipment. I had even given money to my family from the income last year, but this year I have to take money from my poor family," said Bristy Das.

"Although BCB gave me Tk 28,000 during the pandemic, but it was not enough to continue practice for a year," she further said.

Like Bristy, Labony Akter, 24, another local player who played the premier league last year for Khelaghor with a contract of Tk.1.65 lakh, said, "The premier league is the only source of income for women cricketers not in the national team. This year we lost the income.

"We need enough money to practise year-round. This year, I

thought I would give money to my parents for the first time but now I am taking money from my parents to continue my cricketing expenses. BCB gave us Tk 28,000 in two phases but it is not enough for a year.

"The camp for the national team has also stopped. During the national team camp, at least 30 cricketers like us can save Tk 20,000-30,000," Laboni added.

Most. Mim Khatun, 18, who played first division cricket last year

She needs Tk 3,000 per month for food and rent. Lima was in the U-19 team and also plays first division cricket for Gulshan boys.

"Bogura has many facilities for women cricketers, so I have lived here for the last year. My father is a bricks supplier. During this Covid-19 pandemic, his income has reduced a lot. This year, my parents would not allow me to come to Bogura because of the financial crisis, but I forced them to let me come."



for Mirpur boys, lives 35 kilometres away from the Shaheed Chandu Stadium. She comes to practice at the venue every afternoon, for which she needs Tk 150.

"During the coronavirus [pandemic], my father's income decreased and sometimes he could not give me this Tk 150."

However, the story is bleaker for the players who came from other districts to learn cricket in Bogura.

Lima Akter, 22, came to Bogura from Narsingdi's Monohardi upazila a year ago to play cricket. Lima lives in a mess in Bogura's Sabujbag area.

In 2019, Lima played premier league cricket for Gulshan Youth Club for Tk 25,000.

"My father gives me Tk 3,000 only. I can't buy nutritious food for myself after paying for basic food and accommodation," she said.

Sharmin Akter, 19, came to Bogura from Natore's Naldanga upazila. Sharmin has also been living in a mess for the last two years so that she could keep honing her cricketing skills. She played first division cricket for Anowara SC in 2018 and is studying in a college in Natore, but staying in Bogura only

for the love of cricket.

"My mother dreams that one day I will play cricket for the national team. My parents are poor and they can give me only Tk 2,000 for my mess accommodation and food. Sometimes, I can't buy good food or fruits for myself," she added.

According to Lima and Sharmin, there are at least eight girls who came to Bogura for cricket.

NO DISTRICT COACH AFTER MUSLIM UDDIN PASSED AWAY: The death of Muslim Uddin, the Bogura district coach who earned fame in the national and international arena for his generosity and dedication, on February 10 left male and female cricketers suffering from a lack of guidance.

Even some of the women national team cricketers are missing him badly. Labony Akter said, "Muslim sir was our guardian, our friend, mentor and a good teacher. His unfortunate death is a huge loss for women's cricket. When he was alive, we did not want for anything, including cricket equipment. Now, the junior boys and girls are practising on their own. Sometimes, seniors help them but it's not enough."

National player Sharmin Sultana said there are many things during practice that the players cannot fully grasp, but a coach can explain those.

"So, practising under a coach is very important," said Sharmin.

However, sources said BCB is yet to appoint a district coach to succeed Muslim.



SEVILLA? INTER? WOLVES?

Not too long ago these three players were playing taboo at Barcelona unmindful of their impending departure. We do not know if they were writing down names of their favourite destinations, but we know now that all three of them have been shipped off. And there is more to come as the clearout gathers speed under new coach Ronald Koeman.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Now Neymar under racism scanner

AFP, Paris

Marseille claim to have footage of Neymar racially abusing Japanese right-back Hiroki Sakai during their Ligue 1 win over Paris Saint-Germain earlier this month, a source close to the club said on Tuesday.

The individual said they have evidence of the Brazil forward making the comments on two occasions. A Marseille spokesperson refused to confirm the allegations. "We have no comment. We entrust all our expertise and analysis to the examiners" of the league, they said.

Neymar alleged he was the victim of racist abuse by Marseille defender Alvaro Gonzalez in the fixture where five players including Neymar himself were shown red cards. Last week Brazil's Globo Esporte said PSG had submitted a video of the incident to the French league (LFP) "to attempt to prove that Neymar was the victim of racism".

Three Brazilian lip-reading experts interviewed by Globo TV on Sunday agreed Gonzalez had called Neymar "mono" -- "monkey" in Spanish -- after watching the footage.

However, other lip-reading experts have analysed the same tape and found no evidence the defender used a racial slur. According to some Spanish media reports, Neymar in fact used a homophobic slur against Gonzalez. A PSG source told AFP the allegations had "no value".



A TOAST FOR THE SUPER CUP?: The traditional Oktoberfest may have been cancelled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, but Champions League winners Bayern Munich did not let the occasion go without a sip of the Bavarian speciality. Hansi Flick's side, who have won a treble last season, warmed themselves up for tonight's UEFA Super Cup tie against Sevilla, the Europa League champions from Spain.

PHOTO: BAYERN MUNICH FC