

Senior Div leagues from July 28

In search of novelty

by Mir Ashfaq Zaman

This year's Star Premier Division football league, which is scheduled to begin July 28, conjures up signs of a real three-way battle after several years with Mukti Joddha Sangsad emerging as a new soccer power of the domestic circuit. Pundits may argue that it has always been for quite some time, suggesting that Brothers Union staking pretence at the theoretical third force status in the race for soccer supremacy at the club's level.

However, as it has been evident in the previous leagues that the Gopibagh outfit somehow managed to defeat their own causes some how or the other, leaving Mohammadian Sporting Club and Abahani Kira Chakra with the onus of pulling the crowd to the Dhaka Stadium till the end of the league.

But scenario is likely to change this year with Mukti Joddha, who hit the headlines of every news daily at the very onset of the current soccer season when they latched on to the openings created by an unprecedented players' revolt, roping in ten footballists with exposure to international level, making a sudden but superb impact when they knocked out both Mohammadians and Abahani en route to their first ever major title in the annals of the club hitherto been rated middlings. If their upset victory over the black and whites in the Federation Cup semifinals is to be taken as a mark of their clear intentions, then the victory over Abahani in the final should be treated as the confirmation that they have come to stay at the top flight for a few more years to come.

Unlike their superior opponents, who possess enough fi-

nancial strength to employ as many as eleven foreign players for their club campaign, Mukti Joddha made the most of the local resources. Thanks to Kazi Salahuddin, possibly the lone superstar the country has ever produced, Mukti Joddha made it all the way.

Salahuddin, who had been rather ignominiously discarded by Abahani, the side he served sincerely for most of his glittering career, succeeded in transforming a collection of pricey individuals into a cohesive unit, that more than made amends for a rather faltering start in the DMFA Cup.

Salahuddin's galvanising touch did go a long way in realising the side's potential but for lack of popular support Mukti Joddha somehow found themselves subject to inept, if not shamelessly bias, refereeing. For reasons best known to them, the men in the middle somehow worked out a way to make their rulings against Mukti Joddha.

Fortunately for the newly-crowned Federation Cup champions, they may not have to experience those nightmares in this league as the organisers, the Dhaka Metropolis Football Association (DMFA) has figured out a way to mitigate what seems to be an endless griping over refereeing decision by hiring four FIFA officials to supervise some of the crucial league encounters. Though not a novel concept as the league has, in the past, seen some foreign referees in the midst of things, this time the referees will be employed full time, getting into the act from the very start of the league. DMFA has promised to make necessary arrangements to import four referees from a Southeast Asian country.

The all too familiar sponsors of the league, the Bangladesh

Tobacco Company Limited, struck a Taka 18-lakh deal with the organiser yesterday.

This year's league will also mark a new dimension to the disciplinary stance of the organisers as they made a new resolution to punish the teams involved in arranged matches with a fine of Taka 25,000 each.

Defending champions Mohammadian Sporting Club, who will surely be driven by the urge to reassess their superiority after a string of dismal showing on the way to this year's league, meet new kids on the block, Bangladesh Boys in the inaugural match at the Dhaka Stadium. Mohammadians, seemingly in a dilemma regarding what to do with their Russian recruits, badly need a major shake-up in their camp and they will have to do with their present resources since they cannot do otherwise with their quota of four foreign footballists already exhausted.

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Hagi joins Barcelona

LONDON, July 25: Romanian striker Gheorghe Hagi, one of the stars of this summer's World Cup, has signed a two-year contract with FC Barcelona, club vice president Joan Gaspart announced Monday, reports AP.

Hagi, who has played for Brescia since the fall of 1992, will join the club August 1 when Spain's top team presents their players for the 1994-95 season, Gaspart said.

Barcelona's Dutch coach Johan Cruyff "wanted Hagi, and now we've got him," Gaspart told reporters.

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Silvia Costa from Cuba soars over the bar at 195 cm to win the women's high jump final of the Goodwill Games track and field competition in St. Petersburg on July 24. — AFP photo

Popov proves unstoppable



ST. PETERSBURG, July 25: Three gold medals for star swimmer Alexander Popov helped

Russia tie with the United States on six gold medals apiece from the 20-event Goodwill Games swimming programme on Sunday, reports Reuter.

But just as impressive, were the five gold medals which relatively unknown Chinese took in 10 women's events to reinforce their pre-eminence in women's swimming.

However, the mediocre times recorded throughout the programme once more added fuel to a row over the pool water.

Organisers failed to filter the cloudy water properly in time for the competition, obscuring the swimmers' events to be held on one day rather than two.

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