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NATIONAL CRICKET Sylhet secure regional title

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet banked on Rumman's half-century to become regional champions after they defeated Moulavibazar by 34 runs in the 28th National Cricket Championship at the Sylhet Stadium yesterday.

The right-handed batsman smashed two sixes and three boundaries in his 68 made from 105 balls as Sylhet posted a competitive total of 218 in 49.3 overs. The visitors replied in earnest but fell short as they were bowled out for 183 in 47 overs. Saiful top-scored with 61 while for Sylhet, Tanhar took three for 33.

But it was not all plain-sailing for the hosts in another part of the country as Jessore succumbed to a four-wicket loss at the hands of Jhenidah. Opting to bat first, Jessore were skittled out for 191 in 49.2 overs. Jhenidah batsman Sumon remained unbeaten on 87 as Jhenidah scored 194-6 in 45.5 overs.

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Did U Know?

Michael Schumacher is the only driver to win seven titles and tops Formula One's list of multiple champions ahead of Juan Manuel Fangio (5), Alain Prost (4), and Jack Brabham, Niki Lauda, Nelson Piquet, Ayrton Senna and Jackie Stewart (all 3).



Sachin Tendulkar

(Indian cricket icon)
"I'm very happy, it's difficult to explain in words. In 18 years, I have received several awards but this one is close to my heart. I'm happy that the government has acknowledged my contribution."
After receiving the Padma Vibhushan award.



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Live from 2:00pm
Argentina v Belgium
Live from 4:00pm
Pakistan v Malaysia
Live from 6:00pm
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Pioneer soccer from May 10

SPORTS REPORTER

Red Sun take on Saat Rawja Nabin Sangha in the opening match of the Dhaka City Corporation Pioneer Football League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on May 10.

Seventy teams including 18 new clubs, split into five zones (East, West, North, South and Central) will initially compete in league format.

Later, the top 20 teams, four each from five zones, will earn the right to play in the Super League. Finally, two teams will earn promotion to the Third Division Football League.



Action from the Green Delta Premier League match between Mohammedan and Wari at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

What really happened?

SPORTS REPORTER

Sanity was definitely missing when Bangladesh played their inaugural AFC Challenge Cup qualifying match against Afghanistan in Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek on Monday.

The match that ended in a goalless draw saw the football ambassadors of the country sport a jersey where there was no national flag or the BFF (Bangladesh Football Federation) logo, according to sources in the Kyrgyz capital.

Bangladesh football team perhaps travelled to Kyrgyzstan to play Group C qualifying rounds without proper kits.

The Bangladesh team on their arrival in Bishkek informed that their luggage was missing and when the local guys told them they

will lodge complaints, the team officials said there was no need to complain.

The source added that they requested if the Kyrgyzstan federation could provide them some kit but after refusal, they went to the market and purchased jerseys for two dollars each.

A national team should be professional enough to have proper kit with federation logos and players' names on the back.

It was also learned that the BFF had provided them the jerseys and probably, the allegedly 'lost luggage' contained all of them.

A source in Dhaka, however, told that midfielder Arman Aziz lost his baggage, which had his jersey only, but he could not confirm what happened next.

One such incident can be accepted but the same thing also happened when the team went to

play their World Cup pre-qualifier in Tajikistan last year.

The then manager and BFF member Amirul Islam Babu told The Daily Star last night that while attending the managers' meeting before the match against Tajikistan last year, the officials had said that only numbers 1-20 could be used for the team according to AFC regulations.

"We had numbers from 1 to 32 and I was forced to buy a new set in Tajikistan although we had two set of jerseys," Babu told.

Coordinator of the national team, Babu was supposed to travel with the team to Kyrgyzstan as manager but he pulled out in the last minute due to personal reasons.

"This time when the team came to the BFF on the eve of their journey, the jerseys were not available as far as I know," Babu added.

Talib, Rana bail out MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

Late goals by Zahid Bin Talib and Kamruzzaman Rana helped Mohammedan Sporting Club beat lowly Wari Club 2-0 in the Green Delta Premier Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Wari held Mohammedan to a goalless draw at the break but Talib broke the deadlock after 44 minutes while Rana sealed the victory from a 63rd minute penalty corner.

In the other match, recently concluded Club Cup's losing finalists Sonali Bank blanked Bangladesh Sporting Club 2-0 with Alamgir and Krishna scoring either side of the break.

No festival for U-14 booters

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will not be able to participate in the AFC Under-14 football festival to be held in Iran this month due to carelessness of the Bangladesh Football Federation.

Due to the preparation of April 28 election and the aftermath, no past or present BFF officials seemed to take care of the things for the trip of the youth team, who have had long residential camp at the BKSIP.

It was learned that members of the team did not get the government order as no BFF official or employee pursued the issue at the National Sports Council.

A member of the BFF said it was duty of the past committee but we also have to take responsibility. "It is our failure too as we failed to follow-up the issue," he said.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin said he had called AFC general secretary Dato Paul Mony to get more time to complete formalities at home and send the team.

The AFC general secretary called me back and said it was not possible," informed Salahuddin.

Afghans stun Kyrgyzstan

THE-AFC.COM, Bishkek

Afghanistan kept their hopes of qualifying for the AFC Challenge Cup alive with a shocking 1-0 victory over hosts Kyrgyzstan at the Spartak Stadium here yesterday.

Afghanistan, who held Bangladesh to a goalless in the opener, now have four points and will have to wait for the final Group C game between Bangladesh and the Central Asians to know their fate.

A draw or victory for Kyrgyzstan, who are out of the competition after their first match, in the final game will see Afghanistan through while Bangladesh need victory by two-goal margin to qualify for the tournament proper to be held in southern Indian city of Hyderabad from July 30 to August 10.

Klaus Stark's side relied mainly on counter attacks and it paid dividends in the 38th minute when Ata Yamrali silenced the cheering home crowd when he headed home a Obaidullah Karimi cross.

Vadim Harchenko could have

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Local test for Tigers

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

When the Premier Division Cricket Super League starts tomorrow it will remain to be seen how the under-fire stars of the national team react to their professional duties on the domestic front after two hugely disappointing international commitments against South Africa at home and away in Pakistan.

The Tigers are under tremendous pressure ever since they have returned home after conceding a series whitewash to Pakistan last month with their employer Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) refusing to accept their explanation for the poor performance and cricket fans raising questions about their professional commitment.

The focus will definitely be on non-performing skipper Mohammad Ashraful, who will be leading Mohammedan's quest for the title glory in the six-team fray. The competition ahead of another major international assignment at home in June -- a triangular one-day tournament also involving India and Pakistan -- will also give

the selectors some ideas on whether the players are focused to learn from their mistakes.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam would definitely love to see the top batsmen getting runs in the domestic competition ahead of the tri-nation one-day series which will take place at Mirpur from June 8.

Most of the national players except wicketkeeper Dhiman Ghosh, Shahadat Hossain, Mahmudullah Riyad, Forhad Reza and Syed Rasel will be involved in the Super League for different clubs. The Premier League, a major domestic competition, will be without any major foreign players because of the ongoing star-cast IPL in India. But this will give an opportunity for the national players to play a major role in deciding the championship.

"I think the Premier League will provide the national players a brilliant opportunity to boost their confidence before the tri-nation series in June. We are looking forward to see our top players return among the runs before the series. It is also a platform for them to prove their difference with the other players," said Rafiq yesterday during the national team's practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla

National Stadium.

"How one can expect to score in international level if he had not scored enough runs in domestic cricket?" he questioned.

Asked whether the performance in the competition will have any bearing on the selection for the coming series, the chief selector refused to make any comments. There has been a lot of talk about the selectors considering the return of experienced players subject to their performance in the competition but Rafiq made it clear that only an extraordinary effort can change their hearts.

"We never rule out anybody but one should show something extraordinary to get back his place in the team," said the former national player while giving an indication that they hardly have any intentions to bring about changes in the team right now.

Rafiq however was concerned about the replacement of all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan who ruled himself out for the tri-nation series due to his HSC examination.

"He is a very important player and it would be difficult for us to find a suitable substitute for him. We are yet to think about it," said Rafiq.

Transfers from May 15

Aslam manager for SAFF Championship

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The newly elected executive committee of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) kept its promise to roll the game into the ground as soon as possible by announcing a July start of the 2008 season.

The Kazi Salahuddin-led committee also showed respect to a tri-party agreement among the previous BFF body, clubs and players as it declared after yesterday's meeting that the transfer for the B. League -- the professional league -- will begin on schedule in May.

After the May 15-June 20 transfers, the Federation Cup will be held in July with the B. League clubs and another tournament is billed for August before the B. League rolls in September.

"This will make sure the footballers would be prepared fully for

the professional league. Also, we wanted to hold our main competition, the B. League, in winter as all the countries do that," said BFF president Salahuddin after the EC meeting at the BFF Bhaban.

When asked whether the tourney in August would be an international meet, Salahuddin said the BFF did not want to commit right now.

"It would be decided soon. Our main target is to make the B. League a huge success. We want people in other countries to recognise the B. League as the competition of Bangladesh," he added.

The BFF also made a number of decisions and the most convincing one was naming vice-president Badal Roy as the chairman of the National Team Management Committee.

"Badal will form the committee and he will have absolute freedom to take any decision regarding the national team," said the BFF chief.

Badal, who played a vital role by motivating the players to end a row between them and the management, leading Bangladesh to win the SAFF games football gold in 1999 in Nepal, said that he has already talked with national coach Abu Yusuf in Kyrgyzstan to know whether the team would need any additional player for next month's SAFF Championship in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

"The coach will let us know within a couple of days about his requirement and we will tell the players at home to prepare. We will also take the team to camp immediately after their return from Kyrgyzstan," informed Badal.

Former national striker and BFF member Sheikh Mohammed Aslam has been named manager for the SAFF Championship while vice-president Kazi Nabil the team leader.

The BFF also named former

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CWAB stands up

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Former general secretary of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Mahbubul Anam at a roundtable yesterday observed eight months have passed by but no reform has taken place at the board.

"I voluntarily stepped down hearing that there would a lot of reforms, but no such things have taken place. Moreover pushing aside our plans the incumbent officials are implementing their own plans. I also believe differences are acute in organising the game," he went on to tell the seminar titled 'Bangladesh Cricket: The Current State of Affairs & What Should Be the Future Course of Action', organised by the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB).

CWAB arranged the debate in the wake of the national team's poor performances at the highest level since the World Cup. This kind

of initiative to bring all the people concerned together to find a way out for Bangladesh cricket has been taken by the cricketers for the first time.

The forum, where present and former organisers, cricketers and journalists expressed their opinions, has raised more questions than answers during a four-hour long lively discussion at the lounge of the Jatiya Press Club, moderated by former national player Shakil Kasem.

Gazi Ashraf Hossain, the influential member of the current board, however differed with the former official, saying that it was easy to say many things when one is outside of the board.

"It is easy to say many things when staying out of any kind of responsibility. But I could understand that there were a number of obstacles and difficulties only after I was given with the responsibility," said Ashraf, who now holds the important post of the chairman of cricket operations.

"But we have to overcome the

obstacles step by step to go forward with our cricket and I am hopeful that the problems will be minimal in the coming years," the former national skipper hoped.

Most of the speakers however demanded for a unified effort to take the country's cricket few steps forward. They also questioned why we failed to work with unity for the greater interest of the game and felt the necessity for a 'strategic plan' for the improvement of the game.

A number of issues were raised for the national team's failures and many found too many young cricketers in the side as a big problem for Bangladesh cricket as they said that the board failed to ensure a good mixture of youth and experience and in the senior team.

Problem in domestic structure and lack of facilities also came in discussion.

"We have to introduce longer-version cricket at the age-level and as well make sure that the players get bouncy pitches at home. We can

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Participants of the CWAB organised roundtable on 'Bangladesh Cricket: The Current State of Affairs & What Should Be the Future Course of Action' at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin (C) presides over the executive committee meeting at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Gilly powers Deccan



CRICINFO, undated

The Chennai Super Kings have plenty to ponder after losing to the Deccan Chargers by seven wickets, their third successive defeat. Their top order failed again and their total of 144 was easily overhauled by Deccan, inspired by a blazing 54 by stand-in captain Adam Gilchrist. Besides struggling to come to terms with the loss of their big-hitting overseas batsmen, Chennai's bowling, which has taken only seven wickets in the last three matches, is also a cause for concern.

Deccan's bowlers exploited the helpful conditions early on to slice through the Chennai top order. Just as in the previous two matches, the batsmen floundered against the moving ball in the first over. Parthiv Patel troubles with the bat continued as he survived a close lbw call first ball, was dropped by the

bowler P Vijaykumar off the fourth, before RP Singh took a fine running catch to dismiss him sixth ball. S Anirudh, son of former India batsman Kris Srikkanth, fell soon after, miscuing a pull off RP.

Stephen Fleming was just about getting into his groove when his rasping square drive off his former New Zealand teammate Scott Styris was smartly held by Rohit Sharma at cover point. And when S Badrinath was spectacularly held at backward point by Herschelle Gibbs in the seventh over, Chennai were in shambles at 43 for 4.

Suresh Raina, who was playing fluently when the wickets were tumbling around him, and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, were again called on to rebuild the innings. There was some tidy, but not threatening bowling from Sanjay Bangar and left-arm spinner Pragyan Ojha as Chennai progressed to 82 without any hiccups. Raina unleashed some lovely straight drives while Dhoni sensibly cut out the risks and kept the ball on the ground.

However, both Raina and Dhoni

were dismissed in the space of nine balls and Chennai were in danger of being bowled out for the second game in succession. Raina once again failed to capitalise on his start, spooning a wide full toss from Bangar to cover. Dhoni had been tied down by Ojha and perished when an attempted pull took a bottom edge and ballooned off his pads to Shahid Afridi at point.

As in his previous two knocks, Albie Morkel needed to haul his team out of the hole created by top order. The crowd had been chanting for a six and there had been none till the 17th over, when a monstrous hit from Morkel sent the ball out of the stadium. Four more sixes came off the last four overs, including two in the final one by Manpreet Gony, as Chennai pushed theirscore to 145.

After a quiet start to the chase, Gibbs showed glimpses of his striking abilities, lashing Makhaya Ntini for a six over cover and a four to midwicket, before being caught-and-bowled by the impressive

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