

## ICL-ers back

### BCB announces preliminary squad for tri-series

**Cricket**

SPORTS REPORTER

Four ICL-returnees got the national call-up when the selectors picked twenty-six players for the preliminary camp of the India-Bangladesh-Sri Lanka tri-series, which will start from January 4 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Opener Shahriar Nafees, middle order batsman Aftab Ahmed, all-rounder Alok Kapali and wicketkeeper Dhiman Ghosh, the players who had signed up for the unapproved Indian Cricket League (ICL) in September last year have now been reinstated to the side.

The players had initially received a ten-year ban but got amnesty from the board last June, and have now been included in the long list.

The board at that point also made it clear that the players would not be considered for selection in any international match until December 31 this year but chief selector Rafiqul Alam said that there was a reason to pick up the players before the completion of the cooling period.

"You know, we have a tri-nation series

#### PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Abdur Razzak, Shahadat Hossain, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Syed Rasel, Zunaed Siddiqui, Mehrab Hossain, Rokibul Hassan, Mahmudullah Riyad, Enamul Haque, Nazmul Hossain, Nayeem Islam, Imrul Kayes, Mahbubul Alam, Rubel Hossain, Sahagir Hossain, Dollar Mahmud, Shafiqul Islam, Robiul Islam, Shahriar Nafees, Aftab Ahmed, Alok Kapali and Dhiman Ghosh.

from the first week of January, so we should take them now if we want to play them in the series. On the other hand we have a busy international schedule for the next six months and that's why we thought that they should get the opportunity to improve their fitness," explained Rafiqul adding that these selected player's performance in the ongoing Premier Division Cricket League was not unsatisfactory.

The ICL-bound players had a lot of complaints against this selection panel and blamed them for taking such a risky decision to sign for the unapproved Indian competition.

"For the national interest we can do anything," was the response of chief selector when reminded of the bitter comments against them.

Captain and the country's leading paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has also

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PHOTO: STAR

ONE LAST HURDLE TO CROSS: Maldives players get through a fitness drill at the BUET ground yesterday, ahead of their Bangabandhu Sixth SAFF Championship final against India at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

#### FINAL TODAY

## Maldives start favourites

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Maldives will be hoping for a repeat of their feat in the last edition when they take on India in the final of the Bangabandhu Sixth SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Maldives lifted their first-ever regional title in the last edition after a last-gasp goal from Naseer Mukhtar helped them beat India 1-0 in Colombo.

Maldives are once again considered the favourites in the battle for supremacy in the South Asian region and the islanders are kept ahead not only because they are going to face a youthful Indian side that they have already beaten 2-0 in the group stage.

Maldives are firm favourites as the islanders have progressed to the final with a commendable performance thumping Sri Lanka 5-1 in the semifinal despite having started slowly in their first match against Nepal, who held them to 1-1 draw. Maldives captain Ashfaq Ali is the

nucleus of the islanders' attack with Ahmed Thoriq and Fazeel Ibrahim almost getting the back of their opponents' nets in every match and Maldives having already struck 11 goals in four matches they have played so far, but Maldives' Hungarian coach Urbanvi Istvan Bela, however, doesn't like to think them as favourites in the final.

"We played one game against them in the group stage and that was interesting, but it is not going to be the same game and it's going to be a tough match as both teams will want to win the game," Istavan said.

"India is an organised team and I had earlier said that the two teams are completely different and there is no reason to talk about their age which does not have any impact on the game."

"We will try to control the game from

the beginning and expect our strikers to avail the chances that they get and I hope everybody will enjoy the game like the match against Sri Lanka," said Bela.

Maldives, however, will miss their key player Fazeel Ibrahim, who struck twice against Sri Lanka, due to injury and it was a big blow for Bela.

"I don't think Fazeel will play. You saw him playing on the left; how many chances he (Fazeel) created in the previous matches and we will definitely miss him, but I believe we have enough individuals to create chances and hopefully the boys will avail those chances in tomorrow's match."

Nevertheless, Maldives will have to face a stiff challenge from the Indian backline, which allowed their goalkeeper to concede only two goals in four matches and the Maldives coach believes everyone have their own strategy on how to break the opponents' backline.

Indian coach Sukhvinder Singh also echoed the same sentiment of his counterpart saying: "Our previous defeat to Maldives in the group match, even a

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## Still no answers

SPORTS REPORTER

The booters after surrendering meekly against India in the semifinal of the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship passed a sleepless night on Friday and tried to discover the reasons behind their poor individual performances, but they hardly got any satisfactory answers.

"There is nothing more to talk about the game and we totally failed against India though we had a plan to press the opponents from the word go, but it boomeranged and pressure got better of us and no player could play his natural game," said Bangladesh captain-cum-goalkeeper Aminul Haque, who, however, had no explanation for the complete failure of the whole team.

Aminul's deputy Wali Faisal was more disappointed with his own show and can't forgive his individual performance.

"Whom will I blame for? I myself could not play well and that is the truth. All the players are mentally shattered after a listless performance, much to the disappointment of a capacity home-crowd," said Wali adding that they had a sleepless night after going down to India.

The Mohammedan defender, however, tried to find out reasons behind Bangladesh's poor

performance against a youthful Indian side.

"Maybe we failed to put on full concentration on the game, thinking that we were going to play the final with a victory over India and such kind of thinking might have hampered our focus," said the leftback, who was hardly seen in his usual overlapping approach in the match.

Wali, however, was in the dark on how all players performed poorly together at the same time.

"To be honest, one can't always perform, but it is beyond me how all the players failed to perform in a match," said a stunned Wali.

Midfielder Zahed Parvez Chowdhury also had no satisfactory answers.

"After the game, we had a discussion amongst us, but we could not find out any reason why it happened."

Like the post-match briefing on Friday, Bangladesh's interim coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo found no answers on his boys' poor show despite having held a discussion with them.

"After returning to the hotel, I talked with the players and the replies were that they could not play well throughout the game," said Shantoo during their check out from the Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel last morning.

The former Bangladesh goalkeeper, however, tried to find out reasons behind the

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## India level series

SPORTS REPORTER

Virender Sehwag hit a blistering 64 and left-handed Yuvraj Singh joined the party with a typically aggressive unbeaten fifty as India won the second Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka by six wickets in Mohali yesterday.

With this win India drew level the two-match series at 1-1.

Set to score 207 to win, the home side completed the highest run-chase in T20 cricket with five balls to spare and for the loss of four wickets.

Yuvraj, who hit the winning runs a massive six over midwicket, remained unbeaten on 60 off 25 balls that included four more sixes and three boundaries.

Sehwag clubbed three sixes and seven fours in his 36-ball knock. Captain MS Dhoni also

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**BTV & ESPN**

Bangabandhu SAFF Championship

FINAL

Maldives v India

Live from 7:00pm

**TEN Sports**

New Zealand v Pakistan

Third Test, Day 3

Live from 6:00am

**ESPN**

English Premier League

Liverpool v Arsenal

Live from 10:00pm

**SuperSport7**

Primera Liga

Ossasuna v Mallorca

Live from 2:00am (Monday)

**SuperSport3**

Primera Liga

Atletico Madrid v Villarreal

Live from 1:00am (Monday)

Sporting v Sevilla

Live from 3:00am (Monday)

## Exciting tie at Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER



League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The match reached a climax when Abahani required nine runs from the last over with the last pair at the crease. Number eleven Shuvashish Roy then cut pacer Shafiqul Islam to the fence leaving his team needing to score two runs from the last two balls. They managed a cheeky single to level the score off the penultimate ball to electrify some Abahani supporters at Mirpur. And the pair went for another single off the last ball after Arafat Sunny played an on-drive but only saw Mushfiqur Rahim shatter their hopes to gain full points.

Abahani now has a three points gap with leaders Mohammedan.

It was however Shafiqul Islam who celebrated his first time national call-up with a scintillating all-round show. The young man smashed an

unbeaten 55 off 50 balls with three fours and four big sixes batting at number ten as Biman put up a decent total of 173 in 42 overs. He then picked up two wickets, that of Imrul Kayes (67) and Rony Talukdar (1) to become man-of-the-match.

Nobody had expected it could be an exciting game after Biman scored 173, but the disciplined bowling from the Biman bowlers and some senseless dismissals of Abahani batsmen made sure of the second tied game in the competition after the Gazi Tank and Partex match in the first round.

Left-handed opener Imrul top scored with 67 but he was the culprit by letting his team down. Imrul unnecessarily went for a big one against Shafiqul when all that was needed was for him to carry the innings. He only reached at the safe hands of Sri Lankan Hasanta Fernando at mid on.

Nasir Hossain, the second best scorer with 33 batting at number seven, made the same mistake and this time the bowler was spinner Elias Sunny. Abahani fell in big trouble when Shakib Al Hasan lobbed the ball to Tushar Imran off spinner Sharifullah as they tottered at 38-3.

Some rescue act came from Pakistani all-rounder Abdul Razzaq but he was bowled by

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## Manu chef de mission for SA Games

SPORTS REPORTER

Mizanur Rahman Manu, vice president of Bangladesh Olympic Association, has been nominated the chef de mission of the Bangladesh contingent for the upcoming South Asian Games next year.

Manu would also look after

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## Winter Bridge

SPORTS REPORTER

Grameenphone Winter Bridge Carnival will start on the 15th of December at the National Sports Council Tower. The tournament will be organised by Dhaka Metropolitan Bridge Association (DBMA) and sponsored by Grameenphone Limited. Interested teams, pairs and individuals have been asked to register their entries with DBA.



PHOTO: STAR

IN CASE THERE IS A SHOOTOUT: Indian booters practice penalty kicks during a training at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on the eve of their SAFF Championship final against holders Maldives today.

## MSC stretch lead

SPORTS REPORTER



On a day when defending champions Abahani dropped points playing out a tie against high-flying Biman, league-leaders Mohammedan extended their lead brushing aside Victoria in a one-sided match in the Super League stage of the Ispahani Tea Premier Division Cricket League yesterday.

Mohammedan's victory at Fatullah came by 8 wickets which puts them firmly in the drivers' seat for claiming the title, three points above nearest chasers Abahani and five clear of Biman. It was another day of curtailed matches as fog played foul in most parts of the country. Fatullah's match was reduced to 37-over-a-side which started at midday. Mohammedan skipper Khaled Masud, on winning the toss, had no qualms about opting to field first to take obvious advantage of seaming conditions in overcast weather. And his bowlers didn't let him down. They bowled tidily to make Victoria batsmen work hard for their runs. Only two Victoria batsmen batted with some authority while the others failed to negotiate with Mohammedan spinners. Kamrul Islam top-scored with 33, but his run-out put paid to

their hopes of posting a big score. Mohammedan's veteran all-rounder Foysal Hossain was the wrecker-in-chief taking three important wickets, including the precious one of Victoria skipper Mohammad Sharif who scored a quick-fire 31 to lead his side to a decent score of 141 before they were all out in 36.5 overs.

141 might be a decent score, but not one that would deter a star-studded Mohammedan from coasting. Mohammedan's opening batsmen Shamsur Rahman and Mohammad Ashraful provided the perfect launching pad, both scoring half centuries. Shamsur Rahman was the more attacking of the two as he struck six boundaries and an over-boundary to score 51 off 56 balls. He, however, couldn't finish the job on his own and got bowled out by Tariqul Islam with the team's score on 99. His opening partner Mohammad Ashraful, though, played a patient knock scoring his fifty off 87 deliveries. Tariqul got another scalp when he dismissed Navedul Hasan cheaply, but Ashraful held firm and stuck in with former Bangladesh opener Nafees Iqbal to guide the side for the rest of the chase. Ashraful ended unbeaten on 56 while Nafees was not out on 24 as Mohammedan completed the chase in 30.4 overs, scripting a

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**Did U Know?**

Billy Jean King is the tennis champion of the most singles, doubles and mixed doubles titles, with a total of 20 wins.



**Bangabandhu SAFF Championship FINAL**  
Maldives v India (7:00pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium  
**Premier Super League**  
Kalabagan v CCS  
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium



PHOTO: TIGERCRIKET.COM

Bangladesh Biman paceman Shafiqul Islam sends down a delivery during his side's Premier Super League match against Abahani at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. Shafiqul, who has been outstanding in the league, celebrated his maiden call-up in the national team with a virtuoso all-round show against Abahani in a dramatic tie.