

## SPORT

## Ball in Papon's court

BISHWAJIT ROY

With the BCB elections approaching, the tug of war between two groups continued as the incumbent board president Nazmul Hassan Papon yet again threatened to unmask his opponents' corrupt practices. "Whatever they are saying, they are doing so to spread confusion. There are a few people who are playing ugly games and this time we have decided to stand up to them and we won't let them spoil our cricket. If someone has taken to corruption do you think that I will let them go free? Let the elections take place; after that you'll get to know everything. Their real faces will be unmasked one by one," the BCB president told reporters during his visit with the ICC inspection team to the Fatullah Cricket Stadium when his attention was drawn to recent accusations from his opponents.

The BCB boss, also a ruling party lawmaker, has already displayed courage in unearthing corruption in the BPL and his bold initiatives have garnered widespread praise. His clean image so far has led everyone to expect that he will take similarly bold steps after accusations of corruption in the construction work for the ICC Twenty20 World Cup have been made against some of his ad-hoc committee members.

Corruption issues in the board have suddenly taken centre stage of discussions

as one group has been blaming another. Specifically, questions have been raised about the construction of the Cox's Bazar Stadium, which is scheduled to host the ICC Twenty20 Women's World Cup. Needless to say, the prevailing atmosphere is harmful for the image of the game's apex body.

That brings us to the logical conclusion that now is the time for the BCB president to clear the air by disclosing all the relevant details. And the revelations should not be limited to recent allegations but also bring to the fore previous instances of corruption, if any. Why wait till the end of the elections to 'unmask' the real culprits? For the betterment of cricket he must reveal it without delay because it will only uplift his image and also avert the harm of having corrupt individuals in elected posts.

His rival candidate in the coming election and former BCB president Saber Hossain Chowdhury also raised some questions regarding the constitution and interference in the nominations of councillors. Most importantly he blamed the current board for deceiving the ICC by providing partial information about the 2012 amended constitution. So, in keeping with his clean image, it would be appropriate for the current BCB president to address every accusation rather than making wholesale comments.

Many will also expect some decisive moves from Papon to overhaul the BPL, which in his own words has become a 'pain' for Bangladesh cricket.

So, the ball is now in Papon's court.



Winger Zahid Hossain (L) curves one over the wall during the national football team's practice session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## ICC happy with BKSP, Fatullah'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon said that the ICC inspection team has had a positive response to the two alternate venues -- BKSP for Cox's Bazar and Fatullah for Sylhet -- for the ICC Twenty20 World Cup.

Speaking to reporters at Fatullah, he said: "The ICC won't have to go outside the country to look for an alternate venue. That is what I can say after both BKSP and Fatullah inspections. I feel that we have been somewhat successful with regards to these venues."

While the team is yet to visit the coastal city, they did visit the stadium in Sylhet and stated that they would wait till September before taking a final decision on the venue's participation.

Speaking on the state of the Fatullah Stadium, ICC's host liaison Chris Tetley said: "The BCB has taken efforts in upgrading the stadium. This looks like a very good facility."

## Captain collision

SPORTS REPORTER

Road accidents are a common feature in Dhaka. Almost all city-dwellers have their own 'accident tales' to narrate. But your story is bound to stand out if you accidentally bump cars with the captain of the national cricket team!

And that is what happened to one such dweller yesterday who was involved in a light collision with Mushfiqur Rahim.

Mushfiqur was on his way home from the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium when a car reportedly rear-ended his vehicle. Fortunately, no one was hurt and both lived to tell their tales. Mushfiqur, who later returned to the stadium, reportedly stated that he was fine and that he did not suffer from any injury.

## New player list for DPL

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Premier League will get a fresh list for its player transfer set for August 25. A change, due to the BPL fixing charges, has been brought in. The board will also send instructions of the player transfer today. DPL will begin on September 3.

## U-19s 'on par'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Under-19 coach Richard McInnes said that his side's performance in England was 'on par' and described the early exit from the tri-nation series as 'a part of the learning process' for the youngsters.

Of the six one-day games that they played against their English and Pakistani counterparts, they managed to beat England once and shared points in a washed-out game against Pakistan.

"I think the performance was a bit on par, considering that we played against two strong teams. The series made us aware of where our team stands. Pakistan was definitely a more experienced side, whereas England and Bangladesh were a bit similar. We can probably beat them at home," said McInnes.

The team's main problem, according to the coach, was the inability to bat for longer periods. "We are on par with our bowling and fielding, but our batting is weak and that's a trait which is similar across the U-19s, U-23s and everywhere else. We don't have players who can consistently make 80 plus scores. It's not a problem that we can fix overnight, but we'll have to keep working on it," said McInnes.

The inability of Bangladesh's players to adjust to England's seaming conditions is nothing new. Bangladesh A's ongoing struggle in England is a clear example. McInnes, just like the A team's assistant manager Nasir Ahmed Nasu, stated the need for better wickets for the players to train on at home.

"I think Bangladesh U-19s plays more longer-version cricket than the junior levels of most other countries. The big part of the issue is the wickets we play on. Guys feel under pressure when they come across wickets that are not flat or low," said McInnes.

"The one game that we won against England was perhaps an anomaly. That wicket was perhaps the best batting wicket and that suited us the most. We had similar low scores in the rest of the games," he added.

The top players from the junior side usually end up getting a berth in the main team; as a result expectations from Bangladesh U-19 are generally high. Certain members of the board therefore did not take the early exit too lightly.

McInnes, however, believed that it was too early to ring the warning bells.

"I don't think this indicates anything good or bad. I took the Under-19 team, which included the likes of Mushfiqur [Rahim] and [Shahriar Nafees] Abir in 2004 and we got beaten in the three-dayers and one-dayers and some of those guys have been proven to be reasonably successful," said McInnes.

The under 19s next project will be travelling to the West Indies next month. It is however uncertain if McInnes is going to be in charge of the team.

"If the board asks me to do it I will but my preference is to work for the academy. I have a number of plans and proposals for the academy that have been stalled for the last one year, and that needs progress," said McInnes.

## Focus on set plays

SPORTS REPORTER



Set-pieces too often play an important part in deciding the outcome of close matches in football. A cleverly taken free-kick or an intelligently swerved corner kick often results in the deadlock breaking moments in international football where open play might have failed to provide the opener. But for Bangladesh, the set-pieces hardly ever come as the rescuer. While there is a clear lack of exploiting skills of the set-pieces among our strikers, the defending against such set-pieces often become an issue of embarrassment.

With that thing in mind, the national team's Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruijff emphasized on the techniques and tactics required to successfully exploit and at the same time defend set-pieces, during a two-hour practice session, at the Bangabandhu National Stadium

yesterday.

But the coach refused to talk about the details of his plans or what sort of progress has been made and what areas make him concerned.

"I don't want to step into details. You saw the training session today, everything will be on paper and television tomorrow which is what I don't like because our opponents are also reading, looking around and collecting information."

After a brief session which was confined to passing the ball among the players, the Dutch coach took his charges to the set-piece session. Corner kicks, free-kicks from the edge of the box and free-kicks from the side of the box were used to exploit and rectify the weaknesses of the defenders. Striker Zahid Hasan Emily, Toklish Ahmed, winger Zahid Hossain and midfielder Mamunul Islam were lined up to take the free-kicks, with Zahid being more accurate

than the others. The coach later showed his defenders how to set up the wall, and what to do to the striker does not have a clear sight of the goal or does not get an easy curve over or through the wall.

The coach however said that he is overall satisfied with the progress made even though the concentration and understanding between the players is fluctuating from session to session.

"I was happy with yesterday's practice, but not with today's. There were lapses in concentration today during the first part of the practice. Then when we trained on set-pieces, things were satisfactory. There have been ups and downs in training," De Kruijff said.

"We are doing a lot, we are working very hard and trying to give the players all the necessary information. But there are areas that need to be improved for sure," added De Kruijff.

## Nadal up to No. 2

AFP, Cincinnati



Rafael Nadal won the Cincinnati Masters for the first time on Sunday, his ninth title of 2013 lifting him to number two in the world and stamping him a US Open favourite.

The fourth-seeded Spaniard, whose season didn't start until February when he returned from a seven-month injury absence, proved again the eight-time French Open champion is back in peak form after his shock first round exit at Wimbledon.

He beat unseeded American John Isner 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/3) to add the Cincinnati crown to the Montreal Masters title he won a week before, his first ever back-to-back hardcourt trophies.

Nadal said that winning back-to-back Masters 1000 titles was uniquely demanding.

"We play from the first round against the best players in the world, the top 50 players.

In other tournaments, you can have good draws, here you cannot.

"Winning back to back tournaments is difficult because the courts are not exactly the same, the weather conditions are not exactly the same.

"You test your body and your tennis to the limit. You need to be 100 percent focused during the two weeks and playing every day."

Victoria Azarenka toppled world No. 1 Serena Williams 2-6, 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) to claim the Cincinnati WTA title and establish herself as a contender for the US Open.

The two-and-a-half-hour epic featured multiple momentum shifts after Azarenka, the second seed from Belarus, began the afternoon with two double faults to lose the opening set in under 30 minutes.

She managed to steady herself and held on to beat the top-seeded Williams for only the third time in 15 matches. It was her second victory over the American this year, after a triumph in the final at Doha.

## ASIA CUP HOCKEY

## Target is 6th place

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have set their sights on a sixth place finish in the upcoming AHF Asia Cup in a bid to qualify directly for the next edition of the Asia Cup. The national hockey team will leave for Malaysia tomorrow to take part in the ninth edition of the tournament.

The team outlined this target at the official press conference at the Air Forces' Falcon Hall with director of coaching staff, Pakistani Naveed Alam vowing to finish sixth in the eight-nation tournament where India, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Oman and Chinese Taipei, split into two pools, will play the group-stage matches.

After the brilliant performance in the World Hockey League (Round-2) in India last February, the weight of expectation on the national hockey team has risen. The question now is whether the national side can produce another brilliant result in the Asia Cup in which Bangladesh' best result was a fifth place finish in 1985.

There is a bright chance for Bangladesh to finish sixth in the Asia Cup this time after China pulled out of the tournament following their debacle in the World Hockey League (Round-2) where they suffered a 2-3 defeat to Bangladesh.

And there has been a question about whether Bangladesh could upset any of top five -- India, Korea, Pakistan, Japan and Malaysia -- to finish above the expected sixth position?

"Our target is to finish sixth in the tournament, so that we can avoid the qualifying phase of the next Asia Cup and play directly the final phase," said Naveed. "Nevertheless, India and South Korea are stronger opponents in our Pool B. But, we will be trying to play against them on the basis of counter attacks and the results may be different if the boys can show their passion during the games."

Bangladesh will start their campaign on August 25 facing against Korea before playing against Oman on August 26. They will play their last group match against India on August 28.

The crisis of the inter-club players' transfers might have demoralised the players but captain Mamunur Rahman Chayan believes the incident outside the field would not hamper their performance any more.

"After the announcement of the final squad, we have talked among ourselves and all are ready to give our hundred percent effort to bring some glory for the nation," said penalty-corner specialist Chayan.

BHF president Air Marshal Enamul Bari, general secretary Rahmatullah and sponsor South East Bank chairman Alamgir Kabir were among others present on the occasion.



Rafael Nadal takes his customary bite out of the Cincinnati Masters winner's trophy after defeating John Isner in the final at the Lindner Family Tennis Centre in Ohio on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## B'ball team win

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh basketball team defeated Iraq by 18-13 points in the three-on-three basketball event of the 2nd Youth Asian Games in Nanjing, China yesterday. The team had earlier lost by their opening match against Iran by 15-16 points on Sunday.

Meanwhile, shooter Risatul Islam performed admirably yet failed to make it to the eight-man final shootout in the 10m Air Rifle event of the 2nd Youth Asian Games in Nanjing, China yesterday. Risatul scored a total of 611 points in qualifying to finish 12th among 40 participants. The other Bangladeshi participant Hasanul Banna Akash scored 605 points to finish 21st.