

Asia Cup now set in stone

Matches to be held at Fatullah and Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER

 With the uncertainty regarding security set aside, it is now time to start the countdown to the start of the cricket festivity in the country.

This was the dominant sentiment when Syed Ashraful Haq, the chief executive officer of Asian Cricket Council (ACC), announced the fixture of the Asia Cup in an official press meet at a local hotel yesterday to bury all the doubts over hosting the tournament in the country.

The eleven-match extravaganza will kick off with the match between Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, where five matches will take place. The remaining round-robin league matches and the final will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

By releasing the schedule, the ACC yesterday made it clear that all five nations including Pakistan will take part in the competition and this put an end to all the speculation about Pakistan's participation. But the question still lingered about what the course of action would be if Pakistan does eventually withdraw. Haq however pointed to past instances when the tournament went ahead even without the participation of a team like India, so the tournament will take place as per schedule even if any team pulls out at the last moment.

"The Asia Cup takes place even if someone doesn't take part. The Asia Cup will go on if Pakistan do not come. In 1986 India did not come for the Asia Cup in Dhaka and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka took part while in 1991 Pakistan did not go to India but India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka took part. But I am hundred per cent certain that all five nations will play the tournament," said a confident Haq.

Recalling at least five big occasions in the past when cricket united the



SYED ASHRAFUL HAQ

ASIA CUP 2014 SCHEDULE

February 25:	Pakistan v Sri Lanka at Fatullah
February 26:	Bangladesh v India at Fatullah
February 27:	Afghanistan v Pakistan at Fatullah
February 28:	India v Sri Lanka at Fatullah
March 1:	Bangladesh v Afghanistan at Fatullah
March 2:	India v Pakistan at Mirpur
March 3:	Afghanistan v Sri Lanka at Mirpur
March 4:	Bangladesh v Pakistan at Mirpur
March 5:	Afghanistan v India at Mirpur
March 6:	Bangladesh v Sri Lanka at Mirpur

PRIZE MONEY

Total:	260,000 dollars
Winners:	60,000 dollars
Runners-up:	30,000 dollars
Man of the Match (Final):	7,500 dollars
Player of the Series:	12,500 dollars
Group Match Winners:	10,000 dollars

nation Haq expressed his optimism that the nation will unite again to revel in international cricket in the coming days. He believes that the people are eagerly waiting to enjoy the home series against Sri Lanka which will be followed by the Asia Cup and the ICC

World Twenty20.

Under the circumstances, Haq saw no reason to focus on the security issue with the prevailing situation and informed that the BNP assured him of full support during the coming events.

"The country will need support from all the political parties and I hope it will come automatically. I got the official assurance from the authorised spokesman of BNP about their full support during the coming events. I have been here for the last three days and I don't see any problems anywhere," said Haq in a crowded press briefing. He was unwilling however to disclose the name of the BNP spokesman.

If it is an opportunity for the Tigers, the finalists in the last edition, to showcase their steady progress, then one must also look forward to see whether Afghanistan make their first appearance in the regional event a memorable one.

Haq warned that it would not be a surprise if newcomers Afghanistan conjured some upsets during the Asia Cup.

"Bangladesh were finalists on the last occasion and their development as a cricketing nation is significantly due to the support and encouragement of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the first few Asia Cups. Now we at the Asian Cricket Council are all delighted by the emergence of Afghanistan as a competitive cricketing nation. We have seen from their performances in ODIs against Australia and Pakistan and in the last two World Twenty20s how capable they are. Again, as a development body, the support of the senior nations for the Asia Cup makes the revenues generated by it fund development across all our non-Test playing members, of which Afghanistan is currently the most successful," he said in his glowing assessment of Afghanistan.

All the matches will be day-night affairs with a 2pm start and Haq said that it was not possible to allocate a

play the second round matches of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) starting from tomorrow.

The selected members of the Test team will check in to the team hotel on January 24. The first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will start at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on January 27.

SQUAD

Mushfiqur Rahim, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shamsur Rahman, Tamim Iqbal, Muktar Ali, Shohag Gazi, Rubel Hossain, Anamul Haque, Shabir Rahman, Shakib Al Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Nasir Hossain, Nazmul Hossain, Elias Sunny, Junaid Siddiqui, Ziaur Rahman, Arafat Sunny, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mohammad Mithun, Jahurul Islam, Alauddin Babu, Shafiqul Islam, Shuvashis Roy, Abdur Razzak, Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Taijul Islam,

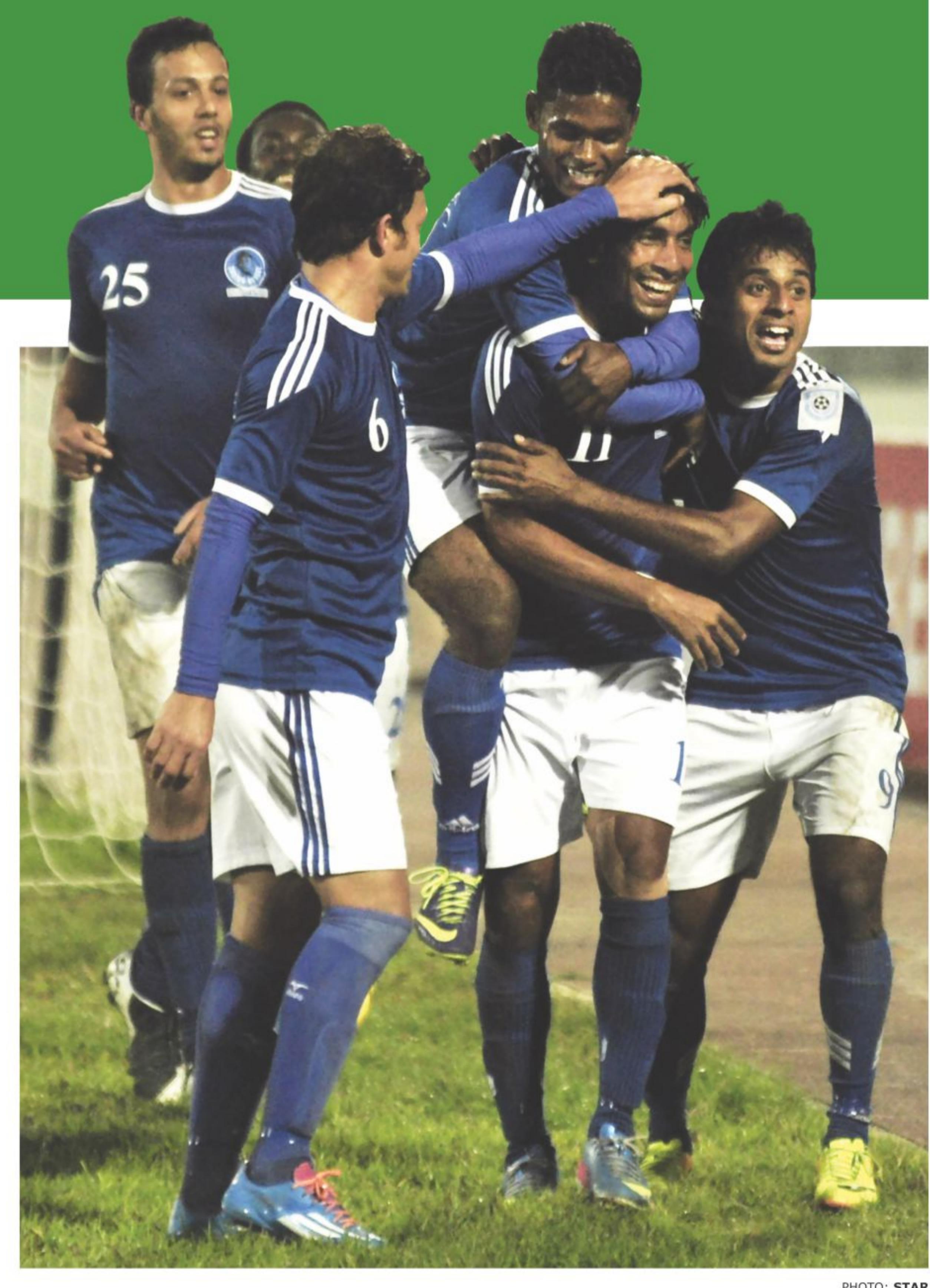


PHOTO: STAR

Sheikh Russel winger Shakil Ahmed (C) is the toast of his teammates after his goal gave them the lead in their Bangladesh Premier League match against Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Holders back on track

SPORTS REPORTER



Holders Sheikh Russel KC returned to winning ways in the Bangladesh Premier League when last season's treble-winners notched a 2-0 win over Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After the barren first half, fit-again winger Shakil Ahmed and Moroccan hitman Youness Roux scored one goal apiece to help Sheikh Russel join leaders Sheikh Jamal DC on nine points, but the latter have played a match less than Sheikh Russel's four.

Coming into the match on the back of a disappointing 1-0 loss to Brothers Union, Sheikh Russel put up a much-improved performance with their unconventional formation of 3-3-1-3. The formation helped them establish control of the midfield like in the previous match and they found the back of the opponent's net as early as the fifth minute but the strike from Roux was ruled off-side and the goal disallowed.

Sheikh Russel however maintained their dominance over lowly Feni Soccer and created two more scoring chances but on both occasions Roux failed to convert from inside the danger zone as they were forced to end the first half on a stalemate.

After resumption, Sheikh Russel stepped up the attack against Feni, who had all but one of their men playing defence, and succeeded in breaking the backline in the 78th minute when Mithun Chowdhury, the hat-trick man in the league's first match, ran down the right flank to whip a well-judged cross for Shakil -- back after missing two matches due to injury -- who headed it home from point blank distance.

It was again Mithun, playing behind three forwards, who fed Roux inside the danger zone from the right and the Moroccan striker tapped it into the open post to ensure Sheikh Russel's third win in four matches.

"We needed this victory before our next match against Federation Cup runners-up Muktijodha Sangsad and I think the win will boost the boys in the next match," said Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque.

Maruful said that the match was difficult for them as the opponents played ultra-defensively and stuck to their own half but that the boys overcame the hurdle after implementing his strategy on the pitch properly.

MSC STILL AWAY
Hockey league from Saturday

SPORTS REPORTER

The Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League gets underway tomorrow at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium without the participation of popular club Mohommamed SC for the first time after the Liberation.

Mohommamed along with three more clubs -- Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Bangladesh SC and Wari Club -- are keeping away from hockey activities in protest of the current executive committee of the ruling federation after they pulled out of the season's curtain-raising Club Cup tournament.

"We have tried a lot to bring them in the league but they did not come forward. That's why the league of 2013 is being held in 2014," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation vice-president Abdur Rashid Shikdar at a press conference yesterday.

Rashid, also general secretary of Usha KC, said that they would be trying to hold another league in this year.

On the opening day, Club Cup champions Usha KC will take on Dhaka Wanderers Club while Abahani will face Azad SC.

After the completion of the first phase of the league,

Watton allowed to take rest

AFP, Sydney

All-rounder Shane Watson will take a much-needed break from two upcoming one-day internationals against England, Cricket Australia said Thursday.

The 32-year-old rediscovered his batting touch during the Ashes series and has been key to Australia's latest success.

He is scheduled to play in Friday's second ODI in Brisbane but was out for a duck in the first match which Australia won in Melbourne on Sunday. He also failed to take a wicket and went for 36 runs in his five overs.

30-man squad named

SPORTS REPORTER

 The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 30-member initial squad for the ICC World Twenty20 to be held in Bangladesh in March-April yesterday, the last date of submission.

The Faruque Ahmed-led selection panel picked all the recent performers like young Shabbir Rahman and the out-of-favour Forhad Reza in the long list.

The selectors' main challenge however will be to form the squad for the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka, who will arrive in Dhaka to play two Tests, three ODIs and two T20Is.

A 15-member squad for the two-match Test series is likely to be announced on January 21 or 22. The national players will get another chance to get some longer-version practice before the series when they

play the second round matches of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) starting from tomorrow.

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SL kept quiet by Pak spin

AFP, Sharjah

Sri Lanka fought hard against Pakistani spinners led by Saeed Ajmal to reach 220-5 at close on the opening day of the third Test in Sharjah on Thursday.

Ajmal took 2-62 to leave Sri Lanka struggling at 166-5 before Angelo Mathews (24) and Prasanna Jayawardene (28) saw off the day with a 54-run unfinished stand on a spin-friendly Sharjah stadium pitch.

Pakistan had to rue a dropped catch by paceman Mohammad Talha when Mathews had not scored

while a leg-before decision against Prasanna was turned down on referral -- two lapses which denied Pakistan the chance to take full control.

Pakistan took the second new ball after 87 overs with Sri Lanka on 206-5 but Mathews, who hit a career best 157 not out and alongwith Prasanna helped Sri Lanka to salvage a draw in the first Test in Abu Dhabi, batted sensibly.

Sri Lanka leads the three-match series 1-0 after winning the second match in Dubai by nine wickets. The first Test ended in a draw.

Pakistan grabbed the key wickets of Kumar Sangakkara (52) and M. A. Jayawardene (47) on either side of tea.

Traveller Millien here

SPORTS REPORTER

Last season's treble winners Sheikh Russel Kira Chakra flew in Haitian national footballer Pascal Millien yesterday, two months after completing the registration formalities for the attacking midfielder who plays for Irish Premier League's Sligo Rovers FC.

Millien, who played 14 matches for the Haiti national team and claims to have scored four goals, has been brought in by Sheikh Russel in a bid to make up for the loss of inspirational Haitian Sony Norde, who was the chief architect behind the club's rare treble. Sony switched to Sheikh Jamal Dhamondi Club this season.

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"I am a little late because my father was sick and I have to look after my family. Besides, I have to take care of 120 kids of my football academy in my country. That's why I had to stay home," said Millien, who watched Sheikh Russel's match against Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

"I have watched a match here for the first time and I think it is a little bit slow. Whatever it is, I have to pick up the speed and it's my game to go fast," said the 27-year-old midfielder, who first learnt about Bangladesh's football from Sony.

"Sony told me about Bangladesh. He told me that football in this part of the world is a little less competitive, whatsoever, I am looking forward to



PASCAL MILLIEN

and I am here to put in the best for my team. I don't like any comparisons, I won't compete with anybody apart from myself," said Millien.

Explaining the reason behind his decision to play in this country, Millien said, "I came here because I love travelling. I have played in America and I have played in Europe, now I have arrived here. I want to gain experience and prove myself. Sony is playing here and I have seen a number of players coming here when I was in Malaysia."

However, Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque doesn't want to judge Millien until he watches him in practice. But what he said about Millien is that the Haitian can move through both sides, an aspect that Sony lacked.