



Mohammedan players limber up for a practice session at the club's ground in Motijheel yesterday afternoon. The Black and Whites are preparing for the Modhumoti Bank Independence Cup football tournament final against Feni Soccer Club tomorrow at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

## A Feni fairytale

SPORTS REPORTER



Since their debut in the professional circuit in 2009 there was hardly anything to write about Feni Soccer Club. They were the favourite punching bags in any tournament and a struggler in the Bangladesh Premier League, where they are currently holding the unenviable last position in the 10-team table.

But, the no-hopers from Feni staged a dramatic turnaround in what has so far been a fairytale Modhumoti Bank Independence Cup football tournament for them.

And when they lock horns with Mohammedan in Saturday's final they will be a win away from creating a small piece of history. It has so far been an amazing journey for the non-descript Feni boys, who are still struggling to find a good

place to stay and wake up every morning unsure of where they will train for the day. Presently staying at the dormitory of the Kamalapur Stadium, a place designed for a team that has not enough money to afford a decent hotel, they embark on rickshaw everyday in search of a field to train. Despite the lack of proper training facilities, Feni produced a brilliant performance to make it to the final, a first for them in any major domestic event.

The question is: how it is possible for a cash-starved Feni, who had nine straight winless League matches before taking part in the Independence Cup?

Obviously it was because of their Gambian coach Omar K Sise, who took the risk of bringing in four compatriots at his own expense in a desperate attempt to pull Feni out of the relegation zone in the Bangladesh Premier League. It was

gathered that Sise paid the airfare for Kabba Jobe, Landing Darboe, Ismaila Jagne and Alex, going against suggestions from the team officials to recruit players available in Dhaka.

Sise's gamble paid off and much to the relief of Feni's cash-starved officials, who found a perfect stage to judge those players before signing them for the League, their performance dispatched holders Sheikh Russel and Brothers from the tournament.

Now, the club is dreaming of making a history nobody dreamt of before the start of the tournament.

"None of us believed that we were going to make it to the final when our coach told us about the players he had flown in but we started to believe it when they came in the training on the first day," said captain Akbar Hossain Ridon at the dormitory yesterday.

"Our target was to reach the final which we have already achieved. Now we are dreaming of clinching the title and today (Thursday) the coach told us to keep faith in ourselves," said Ridon, who wants to keep his record of scoring at least one goal against Mohammedan in each season.

Ridon also wished to get that goal against Mohammedan tomorrow.

Central stopper Abu Sufian Zahid, who has been with the team from the beginning, except for one season, said that the local players have been trying to give their hundred per cent to support the foreign players, who are far better than those who played in the first leg of the League.

Feni's entry into their maiden final also sees a lot of well-wishers communicating with the teams and offering assistance. A lot of supporters from Feni are expected to turn up at the big bowl to support them on Saturday.

## Vision 2015 is the need of the hour

NAIMUL KARIM



It is only natural that Bangladesh's recent debacle in the World Twenty20 is the freshest in public memory, but the truth is that the Tigers' downward turn in fortune has been in effect from the beginning of this year. The World Twenty20 was merely the full stop to a poorly constructed sentence, and as such has finally given way to a period of reflection following a frenzied three months of cricket.

While introspection is necessary, now is also the time for decisiveness and swift action because the Tigers' next big test, earlier described by skipper Mushfiqur Rahim as their toughest challenge, is the 2015 50-over World Cup in Australia and New Zealand only ten months away.

Placed in Pool A Bangladesh face the challenge of playing both Australia and New Zealand in their own dens. They also have to deal with England in conditions that will suit the latter. And then there are the Sri Lankans who are already on a high following their brilliant campaign.

It goes without saying that New Zealand, whitewashed in Bangladesh last year, will be a completely different proposition in their backyard as they proved with their 4-0 series drubbing of India.

Any successful plan for such a major event has to be a long-term one and with ten months to go the Tigers have in a way bound the authorities' hands as far as personnel goes. So steep has been their sudden decline that a leadership group thought invulnerable only months ago now seems utterly shaky. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hasan Papon's declaration after the World Twenty20 that he would not shy away from making major changes may sound good in theory but also runs the risk of severely destabilising the team at a highly inopportune time.

BCB must now make the best of a difficult situation and first work to restore confidence by working on the team's deficiencies -- that can be done by ensuring as much participation as possible in domestic competitions like the National Cricket League, which starts tomorrow -- and then help the players get as accustomed as possible to the conditions they will encounter.

ter.

Yes, a few changes might be in the offing. However, the current team has a number of talented players who have performed in the past and with a confidence boost can do so again in the future.

Within the given time frame any change cannot bring a drastic upturn for the batting and bowling, but help them go into the tournament with lots of runs, wickets and plenty of momentum.

Fielding and fitness -- an aspect of preparation closely intertwined with fielding performances -- are the only areas where a team can improve significantly in a relatively short period of time. There are some players who have come through a certain system that produces highly fit athletes but a majority of the others do not meet fitness standards. It is now high time that an environment be built within the national setup that imposes rigorous levels of fitness. That will have knock-on effects on batting and bowling as well, because greater fitness results in an ability to concentrate for

longer periods. As far as the fielding goes, no measure should be overlooked to bring about change because Bangladesh's performances in this department have been a cry for help -- even if someone like Jonty Rhodes has to be brought in, the board must pursue the

matter.

Bangladesh coach Shane Jurgensen earlier this year said that he wanted the board to send a team to Australia in September, right after Bangladesh's tour of the West Indies, to play a few pre-season games against some of the local sides in order to help them get used to the conditions.

While that no doubt will be an important proposal, another aspect that the board can look into is preparing some wickets in Bangladesh to simulate conditions in Australia and New Zealand. It can help improve Bangladesh's struggling pace department, which is expected to be the dominant force on seaming, bouncy tracks.

With so much to do and such little time, it is going to be a challenge for BCB's cricket operations committee, headed by Akram Khan, to formulate an appropriate structure.

While it may seem as though the players and the management have just come out of a rush of cricket, the ground reality is that the clock for the 2015 World Cup has already started ticking and every move that

## Test pathway for Associates

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The ICC in its two-day board meeting held in Dubai, which ended yesterday, introduced the concept of an ICC Test Challenge, where the winners of the Intercontinental Cup will get a pathway towards playing Test cricket. It also declared that the format for the ICC World Twenty20 in 2016, to be held in India, will follow a similar format to that of the recent World Twenty20.

According to a press release sent from the ICC, the Test Challenge will be played between the 10th-ranked team -- as per the ICC Test team rankings on 31 December 2017, or at the conclusion of any series in progress at that time -- and the champion of the ICC Intercontinental Cup, a longer

version tournament among the non-Test sides.

The next Intercontinental Cup is scheduled to take place in between 2015 to 2017. Therefore, the inaugural Challenge is expected to take place in 2018.

With Bangladesh currently ranked number 10, they have a little more than three years to improve their rankings in order to avoid participating in this contest. It has not yet been confirmed whether defeat in this contest will lead to a demotion for the 10th-ranked side or whether the new team will join the Test fold as the 11th member.

The other decision that the board had come to concerned the format of the next ICC World Twenty20. Like the just-concluded World Twenty20 the top eight Full Members, as per the Reliance ICC T20I Team Rankings as of

30 April 2014, will automatically qualify for the second round, while the ninth and 10th-ranked Full Members will get automatic places in the first round.

The six qualifiers will progress from the 14-team ICC World Twenty20 Qualifier 2015, which will be staged in Ireland and Scotland from 9 July to 2 August 2015 during which a total of 51 matches will be played.

Bangladesh's current ranking means that they will have to play the first round yet again. Zimbabwe, who are currently ranked 13th on the list, will have to play the qualifiers. Ireland, who are currently ranked ninth will not have to play the qualifying round and can directly play the first round.

Since the cut-off mark for the rankings is April 30, the possibility of changes in the rankings is very slim.



Sri Lanka's World Cup-winning T20 cricket team members watch parliamentary proceedings as legislators move a resolution congratulating them at the Sri Lankan Parliament in Colombo on Wednesday. The country's legislators invited the team to the parliament building for a ceremony to celebrate their victory over India in the ICC World Twenty20 final in Dhaka on April 6.

PHOTO: AFP

## ICC praises Bangladesh

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The ICC Board, during its two-day meeting in Dubai, thanked the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for the successful staging of the ICC World Twenty20 and praised the Bangladesh government, security agencies and the general public for their contributions and support.

ICC President Alan Isaac said: "The ICC World Twenty20 Bangladesh 2014 was an extremely successful event which was thoroughly enjoyed by the players, officials, spectators and media. A lot of credit must be given to the BCB and the ICC team for putting up a memorable show."

## India coming in June

SPORTS REPORTER



Further progress with regards to India's ODI tour of Bangladesh in June was made during the ICC's two-day board meeting in Dubai. While a tour in Bangladesh this June as per the Future Tours Programme was always on the cards, a re-confirmation was received in Dubai.

According to a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official, the two boards had been discussing the dates for a while now and there have also been talks about a possible addition of Test matches. In Dubai, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the BCB had exchanged dates upon which there will be further negotiations. The three ODIs, however, have a good chance of taking place in the second week of June.

Speaking to The Daily Star over the phone, BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury

said, "The tour is definitely on. The BCCI has confirmed it. We had a fruitful discussion at the sidelines of the ICC's board meeting and they have submitted their dates. We will have to finalise them," he said.

The BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon also had separate meetings with the BCCI with regards to the other bilateral tours. The president is reportedly pushing for a Test in Kolkata this year, an issue which could have been on his agenda.

While India has played a number of ODIs in Bangladesh in various tournaments, the last time they played a bilateral ODI series was back in 2007, immediately after the World Cup in which India lost to the Tigers and exited early. After the mega tournament, Bangladesh lost the three-match ODI series 2-0. The last time India played a bilateral Test series against Bangladesh was in 2010 when they won a two-match Test series 2-0.

So far India have played 16 ODIs in Bangladesh and won 14 of them.

AFP, London



South African star sprinter Oscar Pistorius has gone from being a hero to a devil, Reeva Steenkamp's mother June said in a British newspaper interview published Thursday.

She told the Daily Mirror she is obsessed with watching Pistorius's every move in the Pretoria courtroom where he is being tried for the killing of her daughter, a law graduate, model and aspiring actress, on Valentine's Day in 2013.

Prosecutors say the 27-year-old Paralympian and Olympian deliberately shot Steenkamp in the early hours of Valentine's Day after the couple had a fight. He says he shot her by accident through a locked

bathroom door after mistaking her for an intruder.

"I look at Oscar the whole time, to see how he is coping, how he is behaving. I'm obsessed with looking at him, it's just instinctive, I can't explain it," June Steenkamp told the British tabloid.

"I keep thinking: 'let me see how he's taking this'. He has been very dramatic, the vomiting and crying."

"I think he's just about keeping himself together. I don't know whether he's acting."

June has never met Pistorius. The double amputee did not acknowledge her on the first day of the trial but did eventually look at her and say good morning.

"My presence unnerves him, I'm sure of it. He's answerable to me," she said.

"He must see me there in the court,

he must feel my eyes boring into him, I think it makes a lot of difference.

"I do look at him too much, maybe. I like to see how he is reacting. I can see him very clearly, even without my glasses -- he's the only one I can see, he's right in front of me."

"He has an aggressive persona, he's used to having people adore him, so it must be pretty different for him now."

"He's been spoilt by other people, that's why he struts around and looks superior."

"He's gone from hero to devil."

June, who has remained stone-faced throughout much of the testimony during the trial, said she does not want to cry in court but when she returns to her hotel room each day "I start crying out, crying all the tears and pain I've held inside."

She said that particular images

seen during the trial would remain with her until her dying day.

The 67-year-old said attending the trial was "hell" but she was "compelled to be there". Her husband Barry is also determined to attend but has been too ill so far after suffering a stroke.

She said she did not care whether the Paralympics multiple gold medalist was convicted or not.

"He has to stand up to what he's done and -- if he has to -- pay for it," she told the newspaper.

"What difference is it going to make to me if he goes to prison for 25 years or is allowed to walk free?"

"I'm not a person who wants to punish him. I want my daughter back, but it's never going to happen."

"She was the most wonderful, beautiful person, inside and out, and she was everything to Barry and me -- our lives are destroyed."