

# SPORT



Goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana dives in vain during the final of the Narayanganj District Commissioner Gold Cup at the Narayanganj Municipality Stadium yesterday in front of the dignitaries' stand. Rana was one of 12 national team players who participated in the match on the eve of joining the national team's camp without obtaining any permission from the game's governing body. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Booters for hire

12 national team players go for hire the day before joining camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Twelve players of the Bangladesh national football team yesterday set an example of utter disregard towards commitment and dedication for the game by taking part in a local match in Narayanganj on the eve of joining the national team's camp for the Bangabandhu International Gold Cup.

The 12 players, including midfielder Mamunul Islam who recently expressed his intention of giving up captaincy following the team's humiliating performance in the SAFF Cup, played in the final of the Narayanganj District Commissioner Gold Cup Football Tournament in presence of a full-house crowd and dignitaries at the Narayanganj Municipality Stadium.

Mamunul played for the Narayanganj Sadar team where he had Ashraful Islam Rana, Wali Faisal, Topu Barman, Hemanta Vincent Biswas, Sohel Rana and Mithun Chowdhury - all part of the current national team - and fringe players as his teammates. The opposition team, Ruppangj Upazila, featured Shahidul Alam Sohel, Yeasin Khan, Yeamin Ahmed Chowdhury Munna, Zahid Hasan Emily and Shakhwat Hossain Rony as national team players, apart from many fringe and local players.

Ruppangj won the final, which was witnessed by dignitaries such as Selim Osman MP, Shamim Osman MP, Hosne Ara Babli MP and district sports association's general secretary Tanvir Ahmed Titu.

Mamunul, when contacted over phone later in the evening, claimed that they were requested by a political leader to take part in the match, but



MAMUNUL ISLAM

felt they did not commit any crime or condemnable act by participating.

"When a big political figure requests us, we cannot say no. I played only to respect his request, not for money," Mamunul said. "And what wrong have we done by playing? We are not bound by the BFF at the moment. We are supposed to report tomorrow [Monday] and whatever we do before that time shouldn't be anyone else's concern."

"I rather believe that playing this match will help us as we won't need any more warm-ups. Everyone was in the midst of football and no injuries occurred," claimed Mamunul, who has a history of inciting the ire of game's governing body with scornful comments about being mistreated on number of occasions.

It has been learnt that only Mithun, who was freshly drafted into the 23-member squad for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup on Saturday night, had played in the tournament from the beginning while the others played only in the final match, which came a day after the announcement of the squad.

This is, however, not the first time



ZAHID HASAN EMILY

that the national team players have committed such transgressions. Forwards Emily and Mithun had previously served five-match domestic bans as well as monetary punishments for playing a match for hire hours before leaving for Beirut for a World Cup prequalifying match against Lebanon in 2011. Midfielder Hemanta was handed a suspended sentence of one year in October last year for playing in an exhibition match in his hometown of Dinajpur while on leave from the national team due to illness.

The instance of the moral decadence of the booters didn't go down well with former players as well as the game's governing body. Mohammad Sujon, a former national defender who acted as an adjudicator in yesterday's match, spoke of his surprise.

"I myself was very surprised. How could the senior players come to play in a game like this at such a time? This is a poor example set by the players," said Sujon.

Newly appointed manager of the Bangladesh team, Iliyas Hossain, and new team leader Azmal Ahmed



HEMANTA VINCENT BISWAS

Tapon informed that neither of them were sought for any permission by the players.

"This is completely against principle because all of them know that the camp starts from tomorrow. They didn't inform me or take any permission. If we find concrete evidence, we will definitely discuss the issue and see what measures could be taken against those players," said Tapon.

Bangladesh Football Federation's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said: 'the incident was a breach of guidelines set for the professional footballers as well as a morally unacceptable behaviour by the players, who were allowed two days' leave considering their re-union with family.'

In fact the Bangladesh team, which played its last match in the disappointing SAFF Cup on December 28, had undergone recovery sessions in the following two days in Trivandrum in order to keep fitness levels up to the mark. They were even informed on their arrival in Dhaka that they would have to report to the team manager on the morning of January 4.

## Selectors submit team for Zim T20Is

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board's selection committee has submitted a 14-member squad to the board for the upcoming encounter against Zimbabwe, a series which in all likelihood is going to consist of four T20Is.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday the chairman of BCB's media wing Jalal Yunus informed that both the boards had verbally agreed to a four-match T20I series.

"We are waiting for an official reply from them however they have verbally agreed to play four T20Is. We have arranged for all the matches to take place in Sylhet," said Jalal.

While the dates are yet to be finalised, it is understood that the matches will take place between January 14 and 20.

Meanwhile, the selectors following a meeting yesterday revealed that they had submitted a squad for the first two T20Is to the board yesterday and are awaiting the board's approval.

"Once the president approves the team, the coaching sessions will begin with Chandika Hathurusingha. We had earlier given a 27-member preliminary squad keeping in mind the Asia Cup and the T20

World Cup.

"Those who won't be selected will take part in the Bangladesh Cricket League which is scheduled to begin on January 11," said Minhajul Abedin, BCB selector.

According to Minhajul, the team includes a number of new players since the management is looking to find its best possible squad ahead of the ICC World Twenty20.

"There will obviously be a difference between the squad that played Zimbabwe in the last T20I and the one that will play this time. There will be a few new players because we are trying to figure out our best possible squad," said Minhajul.

"The players' performances in the upcoming series will be observed considering the World Cup ahead. We have done well in the 50-over World Cup and we really want to do well in the ICC World Twenty20 too," he added.

While the selectors didn't reveal the team since it is yet to be approved by the board president, however, there seems to be a good chance for youngsters like Abu Hider and Al-Amin Hossain to make the cut.

For starters, the duo performed quite well in the Bangladesh Premier League and in addition the more traditional frontline pacers, Taskin Ahmed and Rubel Hossain are still recovering from their injuries.

## 'Expectations higher'

SPORTS REPORTER



Jubilant scenes were in store at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday when the national cricketers regrouped after a month to attend a fitness session.

Just a few days ago these cricketers were after each other's throats in the Bangladesh Premier League and the competition was intense. Together under one roof though, with captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza overseeing proceedings, things looked a lot more cheerful.

For the next couple of days, the players will undergo a series of fitness sessions, after which the squad will be cut into 14 and Bangladesh's camp for the Zimbabwe T20Is will begin.

It's a series which, Mahmudullah Riyad reckons, can pave the way for the rest of the year for the Tigers.

"The important thing is to start well. If we can do well in the home series, then I am sure we can carry on the form in the Asia Cup and eventually the World Cup. So our first focus will be to do well in our home series and take it from there," said Riyad.

"If we can play with the same attacking mindset that we had last year, then I am sure we will get results. Our confidence levels are very high," he added.

The home series against Zimbabwe which is scheduled to begin in mid January, was initially supposed to include two Tests. However, the boards have mutually agreed to convert the tournament into a T20I series. It was a move that Mahmudullah believed would help the Tigers.



Will left-arm pacers Abu Hider (L) and Mustafizur Rahman both feature in Bangladesh's upcoming series against Zimbabwe? PHOTO: STAR

## 'Stoke-d' Eng pound SA

AFP, Cape Town



England all-rounder Ben Stokes hit a thrilling double century as he and Jonny Bairstow battered the South African bowlers into submission on the second day of the second Test at Newlands on Sunday.

Stokes slammed 258 and Bairstow made 150 not out before England declared on 629 for six. The pair shared a world Test record sixth wicket partnership of 399.

A bad day for South Africa got worse when Stiaan van Zyl was run out in the third over of their reply. South Africa were 24 for one at tea.

The left-handed Stokes thrashed 30 fours and 11 sixes in a 197-ball innings. He reached his double century off 163 balls, the second fastest in Tests behind Nathan Aspinall's 153-ball effort for New Zealand against England at Christchurch in 2001/02.

He reached 250 with a six off Kagiso Rabada to become the fastest to the mark in Tests, beating Virender Sehwag's effort for India against Sri Lanka in Mumbai in 2009 by 11 balls.

With a declaration imminent, Stokes pounded the next delivery into the stands for another six before, in trying to hit a third, he skied the ball to AB de Villiers at mid-on. De Villiers dropped it but ran out Stokes with a direct hit to the bowler's end.

The South African bowlers had no answer to a relentless assault, which started with 45 runs scored off the first four overs of the day, bowled by Morne Morkel and Chris Morris.

The left-handed Stokes needed only 12 balls to go from his overnight 74 to his third Test century, which he made off 105 deliveries with 16 fours and a six. He quickly went past his previous highest Test score, 120 against Australia at Perth two seasons ago.

The two hours before lunch yielded 196 runs despite South Africa bowling only 25 overs. Stokes made 130 of them off 74 balls, a new record for individual runs scored before lunch on any day of a Test.

In reply, South Africa finished at 141 for 2.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**  
**ENGLAND:** First innings 629 for 6 decl (Stokes 258, Bairstow 150 not out; Rabada 3-175)  
**SOUTH AFRICA:** First innings 141 for 2 (Elgar 44, Amla 64 not out; Stokes 1-20)

## India regain SAFF supremacy

SPORTS REPORTER



Sunil Chhetri's 101st minute strike proved to be the decider as India retained their South Asian supremacy with a 2-1 victory in extra time over defending champions Afghanistan in a pulsating final of the SAFF Suzuki Cup at the Greenfield Stadium in Trivandrum, Kerala yesterday.

The 31-year-old Chhetri, who now has 51 international goals to his name, scored the winner after Je Je Lalpekhlua had equalised for the hosts in the 72nd minute, just two minutes after Zubayr Amiri had given Afghanistan the lead, to take the tie to extra time.

This was the seventh title overall for India and a sweet revenge for the Blue Tigers over a side they had lost the title two years ago in Kathmandu.

India coach Stephen Constantine had opted for their strongest eleven, with Hali Charan, Lalpekhlua and Chhetri leading the forward line. Afghanistan coach Peter Segr

chose to leave top-scorer Khaibar Amani on the bench, going with captain Faysal Shayesteh up top instead. Mustafa Zazai replaced Amani while Amiri returned to

the starting line-up in place of youngster Omid Popalzay.

The match started in tentative fashion, with both teams sizing each other up without commit-

ting too many men forward. The hosts had a great chance in the 15th minute when a Hali Charan cross into the box deflected off Masih Saighani's legs to force Ovays Azizi into a reflex save. The rebound met the head of Lalpekhlua but Azizi was there again to deny him.

The opening goal came in the 70th minute, and it was the defending champions who took the lead after being on the backfoot for majority of the match. Shayesteh slid in a ball into the path of Amiri who made no mistake in finding the back of the net from inside the box.

Hosts struck right back two minutes later when a cross from the right met Chhetri's head who flicked it in behind Syed Hashemi for Lalpekhlua to level the margin.

The score stayed 1-1 after 90 minutes of entertaining end to end action, but India found the winning goal in the 101st minute when Lalpekhlua's quick free-kick found Chhetri into the box who and the India skipper slotted the ball past Azizi to make it 2-1.



A dejected Afghan defender looks on as India skipper Sunil Chhetri (C) soaks in the admiration of his teammates during the final of the SAFF Suzuki Cup at the Greenfield Stadium in Trivandrum last night. The 31-year-old's extra-time strike handed India a 2-1 victory and a seventh SAFF title. PHOTO: SAFFSUZUKICUP.COM