

# SPORT

## Fed Cup from June 10

SPORTS REPORTER

The professional football league committee yesterday decided to start the Federation Cup from June 10 with the participation of 12 teams of the top-tier professional league.

"The Federation Cup will start from June 10 and the Bangladesh Premier League will get underway from July 15," Bangladesh Football Federation's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy informed, adding that they are determined to start the Federation Cup on schedule this time.

"We have taken this decision with consent from participating clubs as the representatives of all clubs, except for Mohammedan SC, were present at the meeting," said Murshedy, who is also the chairman of the league committee.

The committee had earlier declared a tentative starting date for the Federation Cup as May 15, but later postponed it as only three clubs gave their consent to take part, thanks to the decision of releasing national footballers from the ongoing camp to the respective clubs on only match-days.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag informed that the 12 participating teams will be split into four groups for the round-robin matches before top teams of each group advance to the quarterfinals. The final is likely to be held on June 30.

# What ails Soumya?

BISHWAJIT ROY



He scored 10, 1, 20, 21, 84, 0 and 17 in the seven Dhaka Premier League matches he played so far for Legends of Rugganj. In March this year the elegant left-hander made 15, 20, 12, 0, 1, 21 and 6 in the ICC WorldTwenty20 in India. In November last year the batsman from Satkhira could manage only 177 runs in 12 matches while playing for Rangpur Riders in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Soumya Sarkar scored his last hundred on May 24 during the four-day Bangladesh Cricket League match after his masterful unbeaten 127 against Pakistan in April 22 at Mirpur last year. In other words, he has spent an entire year -- during which he has played 76 matches -- without any three-figure score at any level. After the last hundred however, the 23-year-old played two magnificent knocks of 88 not out and 90 in July last year in Mirpur and Chittagong against South Africa.

Unfortunately, his batting slide started soon after his last two ODI innings against South Africa. Many had hoped that his 84 against Abahani at Mirpur on May 9 might have given him the much-needed confidence but he is yet to prove it right.

The left-hander enthralled cricket lovers in a very short period of time with his fearless batting and eye-catching stroke-play in international cricket and there is no doubt about his talent.

So what has actually been going wrong in his batting?

Nazmul Abedin Fahim, the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) national game development manager, and Mohammad



Salahuddin, former assistant coach of the Bangladesh national team and currently guiding Gazi Group Cricketers in the Dhaka Premier League, are two personalities in local cricket to whom the country's leading cricketers go for advice in hard times.

Both Fahim and Salahuddin agree that Soumya has very little problem with his technique.

"No doubt he has got the talent. But he is still young and I think he is short of knowledge or experience regarding what a batsman needs to do when going through

tough times. I think he is trying to do many things and often changes his approach to run away from the problem but in my opinion it will not help him, but rather deepen his problem," observed Fahim.

"The failures in batting have disturbed him. At a very young stage he got success in international cricket, which brought huge changes to his life and then, when he suddenly faced problems he could not understand what he needed to do. In my opinion, he just forgot his routine. When you go through a bad time, you must go back to your basics

and maintain the natural routine rather than trying many different things," he added.

He also advised the batsman to try to spend some time at the middle. "Right now he desperately needs confidence in his batting and to bring it back he would need to spend as much time as possible in the middle to play a big knock and must avoid improvisation, instead playing his natural shots and playing to his strengths."

"I am not worried about whether he can score a hundred or not but my main concern is whether Soumya can bat like Soumya," he continued.

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-Nazmul Abedin Fahim

batsman to play to his strengths.

"See, even the world's greatest batsmen have some weakness in their technique... that's a different issue. Actually in my opinion Soumya has very little problem with his technique; rather Shakib [Shakib Al Hasan who has recently taken advice from Salahuddin to regain his batting rhythm in the IPL] has problems with his technique. It's all about the mental issue regarding Soumya's long bad patch," said Salahuddin.

"He has now retreated into a shell and I can tell you his current

defensive approach will not help him at all. He must play to his strengths. Continuous failures have somehow dented his confidence to play his natural game. So he can escape his current problems if Soumya plays like Soumya. His batting problem actually deepened when he failed to bat according to the conditions during the last BPL where bowlers got movement and swing," he added.

A person connected to domestic cricket describing himself as a well-wisher of Soumya and who wished to remain anonymous, thought that Soumya needs someone close to him to get him working hard enough to recover his best form. "He needs someone to give him a shot of reality. For example, it is known that Soumya does not like playing off-spin, and domestic captains are exploiting this weakness. If domestic captains can exploit this weakness international teams will exploit it even more."

Soumya's current coach at Rugganj Khaled Masud also echoed the two experts' opinions. "Soumya proved his calibre and there is no doubt about his talent. He is our national asset. I am closely following him and I don't think he has any problem in his technique. He scored runs against quality bowling in international cricket, so many think it should be easier for him when it comes to domestic cricket but cricket is a mind game and you must develop yourself tactically also."

"I am sure he will get back his rhythm soon in his batting," he added.

The sooner the left-hander gets back to his natural form the better it will be, especially for the national team because if his bad patch continues there may well be a crisis in the opening slot.

## Kohli to sit out Zim tour

AGENCIES, Mumbai

India's lead batsman Virat Kohli has been rested from the limited-overs series against Zimbabwe, scheduled from June 11 to 20, along with Murali Vijay and Ashish Nehra, who is due to undergo a surgery. Meanwhile rookie Mumbai pacer Shardul Thakur was the lone new face in India's Test squad for the tour of West Indies in mid-July, when Kohli will return as Test skipper.

A second-string team led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni was picked by the selectors for the limited-overs series in Zimbabwe, here on Monday.

The 24-year-old right-arm medium pacer was a surprise pick in the 17-member squad with the selectors reposing their faith in the line-up that had played the last Test series against South Africa at home.

Varun Aaron, who was part of the team during the series against South Africa, was dropped with a fit-again Mohammed Shami returning to the squad which will have Ajinkya Rahane as its new vice-captain.

The team, to be led by Virat Kohli, also had no place for veterans such as Gautam Gambhir, Harbhajan Singh and Yuvraj Singh despite their decent performances in the ongoing Indian Premier League. The tour of West Indies comprises four Tests in mid-July but the exact dates for the series are yet to be formalised.

# Top spot up for grabs

## DPL resumes after 5-day break

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With four more rounds to go before the Super League stage of the Dhaka Premier League, things are getting pretty intense. The league will begin today after a five-day break. At the moment, the top eight teams are separated by just two points.

The top six will make it through to the Super League while the bottom three will battle it out to avoid relegation.

At the moment, Mushfiqur Rahim's Mohammedan Sporting Club are on top of the table with 10 points. They will take on Sabbir Rahman's Prime Bank Cricket Club, who have eight points, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

A win for Mushfiqur's side will keep them at the top, but if Prime Bank win the game, then things will get a lot tighter at the top of the table with the defending

champions reaching 10 points.

Nasir Hossain's Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club, who also have 10 points, will take on bottom-placed Kalabagan Cricket Academy at Fatullah today. It will be a good chance for Prime Doleshwar to extend their lead and be in a more powerful position ahead of the Super League. A win for them and a loss for Mohammedan will make Doleshwar the new league leaders.

"The game will be very important for us because we have a chance to go to the top. The ones who stay ahead before the Super League, they have a good chance of being champions, so we really want to get these points," Nasir told reporters yesterday at Mirpur.

A brilliant performance from Kalabagan CA skipper Mahmudul Hasan gave the side their first win of the tournament in the last round by beating Abahani. However, with just two points from seven games, it is not

enough. They need to hit form in order to avoid relegation and will hope Mahmudul's inspiration in the last game spreads throughout the team.

At the BKSP today, ninth-placed Abahani will take on fifth-placed Gazi Group Cricketers. With four more games to go, Tamim Iqbal's Abahani just have six points. They will need to win at least their next two games in order to stay in contention for the Super League. For a team filled with so many experienced players, it will be a shocker if they do not finish in the top six.

Gazi Group, the newcomers with eight points currently, have done well so far riding on the likes of Anamul Haque and the young Mahedi Hasan. If they can win tomorrow's game, not only will they spoil Abahani's party, but they will have a chance to climb to at least third place with 10 points.

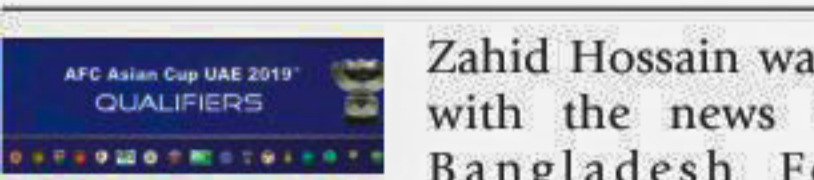


A focused Rakibul Hasan dives to his right during catching practice at Mirpur yesterday. His side, Prime Doleshwar, will need to show a similar level of concentration today, during their Dhaka Premier League game, if they want to go to the top of the table.

PHOTO: STAR

# Zahid unavailable for Tajikistan tie

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Zahid Hossain was ecstatic with the news that the Bangladesh Football Federation on Sunday lifted his one-year ban, but the talented winger however was unhappy about the fact that he would not be able to join the national team's camp for next month's Asian Cup qualifiers against Tajikistan owing to his father's illness.

"It is good news for me, but I can't join the ongoing national camp as I will fly with my father to Mumbai on Wednesday for his treatment. Please pray for my father, who is suffering from lung cancer which is at the initial stage," Zahid said, further hoping he would be available in the matches against Bhutan in September-October, provided Bangladesh lose the two-legged tie against Tajikistan.

Zahid was the only person out of four suspended footballers who admitted to his wrongdoings in front of the BFF inquiry which was formed to look into the failure of the national team in the SAFF Suzuki Cup and the Bangabandhu Gold Cup. BFF had earlier lifted suspension on Mamunul Islam and Sohel Rana. Defender Yeasin Khan, who was handed a six-month suspension, decided not to appeal for lifting of suspension.

Even though Zahid missed all the eight matches of the Asian Cup and World Cup Qualifiers, he played in the SAFF Suzuki Cup in India and played two matches of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup before being ousted from the squad due to allegations of having liquor in his hotel room.

Meanwhile, the ongoing camp of the national team has been reduced to 27 players after defender Mohammad Linkon and Kesto Kumar Bose complained of shoulder and groin pain respectively while goalkeeper Mazharul Islam Himel left the camp with fever two days ago.



# Stokes out for up to 6 weeks

AFP, Leeds

England all-rounder Ben Stokes is facing several weeks on the sidelines after being ruled out of the second Test against Sri Lanka with a knee injury.

Stokes has been replaced in England's 12-man squad by Warwickshire all-rounder Chris Woakes.

Durham star Stokes jarred his left knee during England's crushing innings and 88-run win in the first Test at Headingley.

He will now miss the second of the three-match series, which starts at his Chester-le-Street home ground on Friday.

The 24-year-old, who is due to see a specialist on Tuesday, could be out of action for as long as six weeks.

# Sexism row was 'just a little fun': Gayle

AFP, London

West Indies star Chris Gayle has insisted controversial comments he made to a female television reporter earlier this year were "just a little fun" as he turned on critics including

Andrew Flintoff and Ian Chappell.

Gayle, 36, came under fire for asking Australian broadcaster Mel McLaughlin out on a date in a live television interview during a Big Bash Twenty20 game in January.

"I wanted to see your eyes for the first time, hopefully we can win this game and then we can have a drink after as well," said star batsman Gayle, before adding: "Don't blush, baby."

Chappell and Flintoff, former captains of Australia and England respectively, were among those to criticise Gayle's conduct.

But Gayle, in an extract from his autobiography published in The Times on Monday, said of his remarks during the Melbourne Renegades' match

against Hobart Hurricanes: "I meant it as a joke. I meant it as a little fun."

"I didn't mean to be disrespectful and I didn't mean it to be taken serious."

"Channel 10's commentary team could be heard laughing in the background... but someone above them clearly decided to step in, and a throwaway comment in a fun format escalates and blows up and within hours it has turned into a major international incident."

Flintoff responded on Twitter by saying Gayle had made himself look a "bit of a chop".

But Gayle, in his autobiography, said: "The only chop Freddie (Flintoff) knows is when he used to bowl short to me and I would chop him past backward point for four."

As for Chappell, Gayle said: "Ian Chappell, calling for me to be banned worldwide, a man who was once convicted of unlawful assault in the West Indies for punching a cricket official."

"Ian Chappell, how can you ban the Universe Boss? You'd have to ban cricket itself."

