

Rubel comes in for Shahid

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Bangladesh pacer Rubel Hossain has replaced the injured Mohammad Shahid in the 22-member preliminary squad for the New Zealand series. Rubel will therefore travel with the team to Australia next week in order to prepare for Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand.

Shahid had injured his right knee during the Bangladesh Premier League on November 27. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sports physician had then said that Shahid had sustained an ACL injury. The medical team observed Shahid for the last two weeks and provided a report to the selectors that did not go in his favour. As per the current scenario Shahid might also have to undergo a surgery in the near future.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin said yesterday that they decided on Rubel because of his experience and also because he had regularly touched the 140 km/h mark during the BPL.

"It came down to either Rubel or [Kamrul Islam] Rabbi. At the moment Rubel is bowling better. He has better fitness levels and has improved a lot. That's why we decided to select him.

"Rubel did play well in the World Cup in New Zealand and Australia last year but that was a long time ago. Hopefully he can do well again. It's good to have another experienced bowler in the squad. There is after all no substitute for experience," said Minhajul.

The BCB will announce the 15-member ODI squad on December 21. The series will begin on December 26.

The decision to include Rubel was taken in a meeting that took place at the BCB headquarters yesterday afternoon. The selectors, along with the medical team, were present at the meeting.

A wide array of issues was discussed including the fitness concerns of Tanveer Haider, Mustafizur Rahman and Ebadat Hossain. All three players have been deemed fit.



Squash tourney takes off

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The Energypac Victory Day Squash Tournament got underway at Navy and Gulshan Club squash courts on Sunday with a total of 12 teams vying for the title.

State minister for youth and sports Biren Sikder inaugurated the meet where Bangladesh Squash Rackets Federation president Muhammad Faruk Khan, assistant chief of naval staff Rear Admiral Arshadul Abedin, CEO of Energypac Engineering Ltd engineer Rabiul Alam and BSRF general secretary Sohel Hamid were among others present.

The champions will be awarded Tk 50,000 while the runners-up and third-place finishers will be given Tk 30,000 and Tk 20,000 respectively, as stated on a press release yesterday.

The participating teams are: Bangladesh Army Green, Bangladesh Army Red, Bangladesh Navy, Gulshan Club, Dhaka Club, Uttara Club, Officers Club, Chittagong Club, Olympic Group, Dhaka University Club, American Club and Oshin Group.

Saif SC stay on top

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Saif Sporting Club came from behind to play out a 1-1 draw against T&T Club in the first match of the second phase of the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Milon Barman put T&T Club ahead in the 18th minute before Matin Mia levelled the margin in the 22nd minute to keep Saif SC on the top of the eight-team table with 14 points from eight matches. T&T Club were second from last with six points from eight matches.

JFA U-14 C'SHIP

Teams off to a flyer

SPORTS REPORTER

Thakurgaon and Satkhira made winning starts in the final round of the JFA U-14 Women's National Championship at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Thakurgaon handed a 3-0 defeat to Khagrachari, thanks to a treble from Aduri Munni while Satkhira blanked Kusthia 4-0 riding on a hat-trick from Parvin Sultana.

ASIAN AIRGUN C'SHIP

Bangladesh take silver

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh grabbed the silver medal of the 10m Air Rifle (Junior) men's team event in the 9th Asian Airgun championship in Tehran, Iran yesterday.

The Bangladesh contingent, comprised of three shooters – Rabbi Hasan Munna, Robiul Islam and Risalatul Islam – collectively scored 1860 points to secure silver as hosts Iran took the gold medal with a score of 1865.4 points while China contented themselves with a bronze medal, tallying 1857.8 points.

Bangladesh provided stiff challenge to hosts Iran as they fought neck and neck till the close of the fourth series, with each series featuring 10 shots each from three shooters.

Iran led the way with just 0.1 point as they scored 1240.1 against Bangladesh's 1240 at the close of the fourth series but Bangladesh fell behind in the next series after scoring 309.4 against Iran's 312.3 and failed to recover in the sixth and final series ensuring a second-place finish.

Later, Rabbi Hasan, who moved into the finals of individual 10m Air Rifle Men Junior event with a score of 624.6 points, finished fifth among eight shooters. Rabbi scored 148.8 points.

'Need time to shape the team'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh women's cricket team returned home yesterday after participating in the Women's Twenty20 Asia Cup with a task in hand -- to look deep into their performance in the regional tournament in order to set a plan for future improvements.

The team is now enjoying better facilities than it did in the past. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) appointed former England all-rounder David Capel as coach of the women's cricket team before the tournament. The team performance however did not reflect the support they have been receiving from the board, which is why many have queried whether the team was better off when the resources were less.

"I would request everyone to show patience towards the players, coach and support staff. This team needs some time and I hope you will see the result within a very short time," said selector Athar Ali upon his return with

the team.

"True, I had expected better results from this team but unfortunately our batting didn't click. Batting is the area where we need to do much work for better results. There were some positive performances in the competition but as a team we didn't perform well,



ATHAR ALI

although we left no stone unturned in preparation," he continued.

Bangladesh lost to Sri Lanka by seven wickets which drew flak as they earlier played two matches against the Lankans and won both matches. "It is very difficult to judge any team in the T20 format. Just one good catch changed the whole

scenario of the match. On the other hand, India and Pakistan were a much better side than us."

Bangladesh also lost to India by 64 runs and Pakistan by nine wickets and they only won against Thailand by 35 runs and Nepal by 92 runs.

The team's next assignment is at home as they will play five ODIs against their South African counterparts and will then travel to Sri Lanka to play the ICC World Cup qualifiers in February.

Athar however emphasised the need for more domestic games.

"It takes time to pick up the right combination. We have international matches but what we need is more domestic cricket for the women's cricketers. They have hardly got the opportunity to play domestic cricket whereas India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are in a better position in this regard," he opined.

"Our men's team also went through such a critical stage but gradually they found their feet in international cricket and I am hopeful the women's team will also follow the path of the men's team," he added.



Rajshahi Kings skipper Darren Sammy (L) and Chittagong Vikings captain Tamim Iqbal have a chat during practice in Mirpur yesterday. The situation will probably not be as friendly when they face off today afternoon in the first eliminator of the Bangladesh Premier League.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

And then there were four

BPL gets to the business end as playoffs begin

SPORTS REPORTER



42 matches and one month later the Bangladesh Premier League's fourth season has finally come to its final leg. It probably did not garner much fanfare in the initial stages, thanks to Bangladesh's Test win against England – deemed by many as their biggest achievement in cricket – days before the start of the competition.

However, as the tournament progressed, it drew plenty of fans. Some good performances from the local players and a number of close matches have brought the BPL alive and with four games to go, it promises to provide a nail-biting finish.

The first game today, the eliminator, will be played between Tamim Iqbal's Chittagong Vikings and Darren Sammy's Rajshahi Kings. While the former are definitely a more powerful team on paper, the latter have the momentum and it could go right down to the wire.

The last time these two teams met, the Kings unleashed Afif Hossain, the Bangladesh under-19 vice-captain. The youngster scalped five wickets and proved to be the main difference between the two teams.

The Kings will hope that their bowlers can put up a similar performance today. While they have a strong batting order, they will hope they can dismiss Tamim Iqbal and Chris Gayle early in the game. The two left-handers were dismissed early in the last game and the Vikings struggled.

Chittagong have a more balanced team. They will however hope Gayle can come to the party.

"I actually don't feel sad that Gayle hasn't scored as high as we wanted him to so far. That's because I know that at any point of time he will play an innings so strong that it will make the game one-sided. I hope it comes in the next two games," Tamim told reporters following their practice session yesterday.

On a similar note, Rajshahi will

hope that key batsman Sabbir Rahman regains form and plays an innings akin to the century that he scored earlier in the tournament against Barisal Bulls.

The loser of this game will be eliminated, while the winner will play the loser of the first qualifier, which will take place in the evening between Shakib Al Hasan's Dhaka Dynamites and Mahmudullah Riyad's Khulna Titans.

The Titans did beat Dhaka quite comfortably in the last game, but the fact remains that the Dynamites did not play their full-strength team. They also bowled seven wides and erred in line during that game on a number of occasions.

It could be a completely different scenario when the Dynamites field Andre Russel, DJ Bravo and Evin Lewis. These are three players who can singlehandedly change the fate of a T20 game.

On paper, Mahmudullah's side are clearly the weaker team. However,

they have beaten Dhaka twice in this tournament and they will take plenty of encouragement from that.

The key for Khulna will be their batsmen. While their bowlers such as Shafiul Islam, Junaid Khan and Mosharraf Hossain have consistently performed well throughout the tournament, their batsmen have struggled. They have depended too much on Mahmudullah Riyad and have paid the price.

Titans coach Stuart Law has already given his players the message and told them that other players apart from Riyad will need to step up.

If Khulna's players can put up a good score, things could get interesting with their decent bowling attack. Mahmudullah reached the finals of the tournament last season at the helm of Barisal Bulls and suffered an excruciating loss to Comilla Victorians in an intense finish.

He will hope he can get another shot at the championship by winning today.

Maxwell may miss again

Aus-NZ 2nd ODI today

REUTERS, Sydney

Controversial all-rounder Glenn Maxwell could still find himself on the outer in Australia's second one-day international against New Zealand on Tuesday.

Darren Lehmann's embattled side coasted to a 68-run victory against the visitors in the first game in Sydney on Sunday, with captain Steve Smith scoring 164 and combining in a 127-run partnership with all-rounder Travis Head (52).

Maxwell, however, was not selected for the game and was fined by the team for comments he made beforehand to express how "painful" it had been for him to bat behind wicketkeeper Wade for Victoria.

The team's performance on Sunday, ending a five-match losing streak in the one-day format, probably meant that Maxwell could again find himself on the outer, which Head suggested.

"When you win like we did yesterday, I'm not expecting it to change too much," Head told reporters in Canberra on Monday. "(But) it's not my job to do that. I get told where I'm put and try to perform."

Head said despite his own role in the victory and having played 13 of the side's 16 one-dayers since his debut against West Indies in June, he was taking nothing for granted, especially since he and Maxwell were both off-spinning all-rounders.

Feni Soccer earn a draw

SPORTS REPORTER



Feni Soccer Club came from behind to hold Rahmatganj MFS to a 1-1 draw in their JB Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque

Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Nigerian forward Uche Felix cancelled out a 55th minute strike from Rahmatganj substitute Didarul Alam in the 61st minute to secure Feni Soccer a valuable point in their bid to avoid relegation. Despite their fifth draw from 18 matches, Feni Soccer are at the bottom of the table, alongside Uttar Baridhara Club, with 14 points each while Rahmatganj moved to fourth position with 27 points from 18 outings.

The tie was important for Rahmatganj, who after being derailed from the title race, needed to improve their position in the final standings. However, it was more crucial for Feni Soccer, who were at the bottom of the table ahead of this match, with only five games to go.

Feni Soccer played comparatively better yesterday and found an early chance to take the lead but Ghanaian striker Twum Frank squandered the opportunity in the ninth minute, allowing Rahmatganj to draw first blood 10 minutes into the second half through Didarul, who tapped in a low cross from Siyo Zunapio.

Rahmatganj had two more opportunities to double the margin within the next two minutes but long-range drives from Saddam Hossain and Didarul narrowly missed the target before Felix equalised from a set-piece from the edge of the box.

Feni Soccer could have left the field with a victory had Imu not been denied by goalkeeper Masum in the 82nd minute and if Frank hadn't floated one over the crosspiece from inside the box four minutes from time.



Sponsors, officials and participants inaugurate the BMW Golf Cup at the Kurmitola Golf Club recently. Three winners from the event will have the opportunity to take part in the international finals in Dubai next year.

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