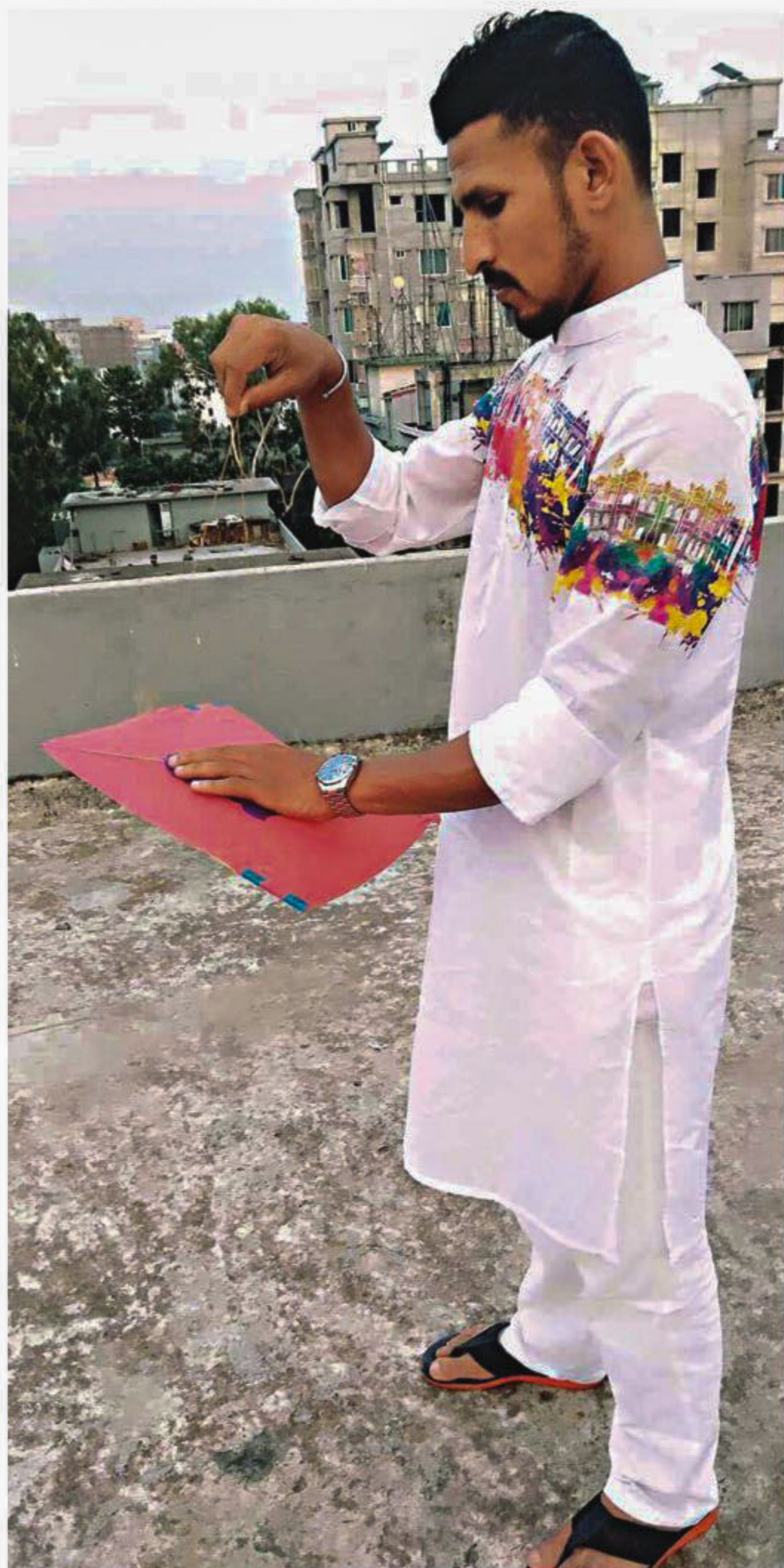


SPORT



Cricketers' Pahela Baishakh

Cricketers, like the rest of the nation, joined in the festivities and celebrated Pahela Baishakh on April 14. Soumya Sarkar (L) was decked out in traditional clothing and enjoyed a day at home with family, while Mushfiqur Rahim (C) took to the streets in a procession celebrating the Bangla New Year. Nasir Hossain also stuck to tradition as he is pictured here preparing to fly a kite. The New Year brings with it a sense of renewal. Soumya has recovered his form after a long lean patch, while Test skipper Mushfiqur always knows that there are high expectations on his shoulders. Nasir has been in excellent form as well and he will be hoping to reap the rewards of that in the coming year.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Mabia named best lifter

SPORTS REPORTER

South Asian Games gold medallist Mubia Akter Simanta was named the weightlifter of the year yesterday, the Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation (BWF) announced while celebrating the Bengali New Year at the National Sports Council.

Simanta has also been given a monthly stipend worth Tk 15,000 for next six months after RAK Group came forward to assist the gold winner, who created a national record in 63kg category in the recently-concluded national weightlifting championship.

"I am really happy with cash incentive and such initiatives will encourage others to do better in future," said an ecstatic Simanta.

BWF president president Major General Abul Hossain, who is also the director general of Border Guard Bangladesh, announced cash awards for each gold winner of the national weightlifting championship.

Swimmers' hunt to end in May

SPORTS REPORTER

The six-month talent hunt programme titled 'Bangladesh in search of the best swimmer', organized by the Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) in collaboration with Bangladesh Navy, will come to an end in the last week of next month in the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The programme got underway on May 19 last year, with the hopes of completing it within six months, but it has taken the game's governing body almost a year.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to be present on the concluding day of the talent hunt programme on May 24," said BSF general secretary MB Saif Mollah after a BSF executive meeting yesterday.

He added that about Tk60 lakh would be distributed among the winners.

It was also decided at the meeting to hold the National Swimming Championship in November after completing the junior national championship in September.

The BSF also provided better accommodation for the six swimmers who have been preparing for Islamic Solidarity Games.

'Want to play all 3 formats' No Shakib-Fizz showdown

SPORTS REPORTER

It was the end of October last year and Mehedi Hasan had just taken a record 19 wickets in two Tests against England. It was the best start made by a debutant in a two-match Test series and the next question was obvious.

Would Mehedi find himself a spot in the ODI format for Bangladesh? It was a question that Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha had answered with a wry smile.

"Let's not jump too quickly. Bowling in Tests and ODIs are two different arts. I don't think he will play ODI cricket very soon," was what Hathurusingha had told The Daily Star after the England series.

Fast forward a couple of months, and surprisingly enough Mehedi was included in the ODI squad for the New Zealand series. He did not get a chance to play against New Zealand, but a series later he featured in all the ODIs against Sri Lanka. He did brilliantly,

scalping four wickets and scoring a half-century in the only game that he got a chance to bat in.

His performance in the ODIs compelled the team management to give him a T20I debut in the same series as well. It's quite clear, that in a span of



MEHEDI HASAN

six months, the team management's views on Mehedi has changed quite a bit.

From initially planning to use him as a Test specialist, Mehedi has gone on to

break into all formats. He has even found himself a spot in the Caribbean Premier League, which is scheduled to take place later this year.

As a player, Mehedi does not want to be categorised. To him, each of these formats provide different challenges, and the more challenges he overcomes, the better player he becomes.

"As a cricketer, I want to experience everything. I have never thought of myself as a Test specialist or One-day or T20 player. I want to play all three formats regularly and I want to play each format according to its merit. I am preparing myself for that," Mehedi told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur during training yesterday.

"I enjoy challenges because that brings the best out of me. When there's no challenge, I can't perform. It feels good whenever there is an obstacle, because once I overcome that I become a better player. When I play outside and try to adjust to the wickets over there, I automatically improve," he added.

Kolkata defeat Hyderabad by 17 runs

STAR SPORT DESK

The build-up to the match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad yesterday -- which Kolkata won by 17 runs -- was dominated by discussions in Bangladesh of the Tigers' finest, Mustafizur Rahman and Shakib Al Hasan, facing off against one another in a memorable encounter.

However, that excitement turned into disappointment as fans of the duo were jolted by the news that both players were left out of their respective teams.

Shakib Al Hasan has not played in a single one of Kolkata's matches so far, although it was expected that the all-rounder would come into the side for today's match, especially with Chris Woakes' performances being well below-par. Meanwhile, Mustafizur was replaced by Australian pacer Moises Henriques, who gave away 26 runs in two overs yesterday.

Mustafizur, who joined his team late, played in Hyderabad's last match -- a four-

wicket defeat against the Mumbai Indians -- where he conceded 34 runs in 2.4 overs for no wickets.

In the match itself, Kolkata rode on Robin Uthappa's half-century and spinners' contribution to secure the win over the defending champions and climb to top spot in the table.

Defending 173, the spin trio of Kuldeep Yadav, Sunil Narine and Yusuf Pathan gave vital breakthroughs to dent the chase of the Sunrisers and hand the team its second successive win at home.

For the Sunrisers, who began their campaign with back-to-back victories at home, this was their second defeat on the trot. David Warner and Shikhar Dhawan gave Sunrisers a flying start with 45 from six overs but Pathan turned it around by removing the Indian.

Brought in place of Piyush Chawla, chinaman Kuldeep then made his presence felt. He along with Narine accounted for 22 dot balls in the middle overs to put the brakes in their chase.

Fakirerpool appeal to skip season

SPORTS REPORTER

Fakirerpool Young Men's Club, who were promoted to the Bangladesh Premier League after clinching the Bangladesh Championship League title, sought to skip the upcoming season citing the club's financial and organising problems, the professional football league committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) revealed yesterday after the Motijheel-based club applied to the game's governing body in writing.

"Young Men's Club want to skip this season for financial and organising problems, but they want to play the top-tier football league from next season," said BFF senior vice president Abdus Salam Murshed.

"Emergency executive committee will decide it on Tuesday," said Salam, also informing that season's curtain-raising tournament would start with 12 teams from May 12 if Young Men's Club pull out of the season.

It was also decided to start the Bangladesh Premier League from June 12.

Abahani leave for Bangalore today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani will leave for India today to play their third fixture of the AFC Cup against JSW Bengaluru FC. The Sky Blues are hoping to put up a better show this time around than they had against Mohun Bagan earlier this month.

The five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions lie at the bottom of their four-team group with two successive defeats from as many matches while Bengaluru FC, AFC Cup's last editions runners-up, are on top with two wins, one being over Mohun Bagan and the other over Maziya SRC.

Ever since the start of the AFC Cup, a second-tier club competition in Asia, the Dhanmondi-based outfit have had difficulties performing due to the departure of five players and other injury issues plaguing the side. In addition, defender Samad Yussif was left out due to visa complications.

However, it seems that Croatian coach Drago Mamic is more concerned about his side's collective performance rather than the overall result, especially after the 1-3 loss to Mohun Bagan, another Indian outfit.

"We will be playing against the defending champions of India and also finalists of the last AFC Cup. We know everything about this club [Bengaluru] but we must take care about our performance, to be better than last time," said Mamic yesterday, emphasising on the need to perform consistently throughout the match.

"We played very a good match against Mohun Bagan in the first half and that was an improvement but we must start thinking about how to prolong this performance to be very good for more than only one half."

Mamic believes that playing with only two foreign players, as opposed to the four Bengaluru FC will field, is a big problem and added that his side, who have better physical fitness than before, are in a race against time to achieve competition worthy form.

Mamic also has few options to shuffle his squad and so is opting for solid defence when they face Bengaluru.

"We can't go there like favourites and promise somebody that we are going there for win because it will be ridiculous in my opinion," Mamic said. "I think everybody who is thinking rationally must know at the moment that Bengaluru is a better team than us. We must play something which can ensure defence."

The match is set to be held on April 18 at Sree Kanteerava Stadium, Bangalore.



Kolkata Knight Riders batsman Robin Uthappa scored a 39-ball 68, smacking five fours and four sixes, to spearhead his team's effort against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP