



Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim (R) shares a light moment with opener Tamim Iqbal (2nd from L) during a gym session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

## 'Afghanistan will be a big challenge'

SPORTS REPORTER



Afghanistan are currently ranked eighth while Bangladesh sit in 10th position in the ICC T20I team rankings. Many may have reservation about the T20I rankings, but there is some truth in the standings as Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim endorsed it by saying: "Afghanistan are a dangerous team in T20 cricket. In this format they are very challenging."

Where does the biggest challenge lie for the Tigers?

One of Bangladesh's finest bats-

men, Mushfiqur rightly identified that it would be a huge challenge for the batsmen to handle Afghanistan's two quality spinners -- leg-spinner Rashid Khan and off-spinner Mueeb Ur Rahman -- in the three-match T20I series in Dehradun from June 3, especially as there is concern over the Bangladesh batsmen's ability to negotiate quality spin bowling.

"Rashid Khan is a world-class bowler. Except in one match, it was not possible to take him for more than six-seven runs an over in the ongoing IPL. And not only Rashid Khan; they also have Mueeb who bowls with the new ball," Mushfiqur told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in

Mirpur yesterday.

He emphasised on good planning in order to negotiate the bowlers. "It will be challenging for us. Personally, I am working on a few things like what kind of shot I need to play to score runs against them. T20 is a format where you cannot be cautious against any particular bowler; we have to draw up a good plan so that we can take some calculated risks. I am confident in our team as we have high-quality cricketers in the side. I am hopeful that it will be a good series if we can click."

Mushfiqur was not too concerned with the hot and humid weather in Dehradun. "I don't think it will be an issue because we played well

under such conditions in Sri Lanka. If we could adjust to the conditions in Sri Lanka, why not in Dehradun?"

"Yes, there is a reason to be concerned about the unknown ground and the unknown pitch, which may be a challenge for us but there will be a practice match and it will be good for us if we can adjust to the conditions quickly."

He however wanted to take inspiration from their last T20I performance in Sri Lanka.

"The way we played our last series in Sri Lanka [the run to the Nidahas Trophy final] will give us confidence. It was important to beat Sri Lanka on their home soil and play good cricket against India," he said.

## An understanding not quite mutual

STAR SPORT DESK



The Australian cricket board, through a spokesman, finally announced yesterday that Bangladesh's scheduled tour of the country in August-September this year will not happen. It was a day after news filtered through that the tour, part of the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) Future Tours Programme (FTP), would be called off. Cricket Australia (CA) had told the Bangladesh Cricket Board earlier this year that they were unwilling to host the Tigers for the two Tests and three ODIs and they left a counterproposal from the BCB unanswered.

However, in making the official announcement, CA managed to further muddy the waters of a negotiation process that was murky in the best of times.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury had said on Wednesday, when ESPNcricinfo reported that the tour was scrapped, that the BCB were not aware of any such decision. Yesterday, a report on CA's official website -- cricket.com.au -- spoke of a T20I tri-series in Australia in late 2019 that will involve Bangladesh and the spin seemed to be that it was somehow in lieu of the scrapped 2018 tour of Australia.

A CA spokesman was quoted as saying: "The window allocated in the ICC FTP for Bangladesh to tour Australia in August this year has been postponed, by mutual agreement by both Cricket Australia and the Bangladesh Cricket Board."

The CA's machinations seemed to catch Chowdhury unaware once again yesterday; the spokesman's claim of 'mutual understanding' puzzled him. "CA had communicated with us and said that the [2018] tour would not be possible for certain reasons. We have an understanding of their reasoning but that does not equate to mutual understanding."

"I want to stress that an alternative proposal [to play only ODIs] was made and we had not gotten a reply. If they take this as mutual understanding, I do not agree," Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

It seems from Chowdhury's words that the BCB believed, not without ample justification, that since CA were yet to respond to the counterproposal the tour negotiations were ongoing, albeit with little urgency from CA.

Leaving that aside, the shakiest claim of the cricket.com.au report and the CA spokesman was that the 2019 T20I tri-series was part of the negotiations for the 2018 tour. It is common knowledge that a new post-2019 FTP is being negotiated independent of the current one.

"Both countries agreed to postponing that tour to be better aligned ahead of the ICC World T20 in 2020 in Australia," said the CA spokesman.

"We are discussing regarding the future FTP. It has nothing to do with the current FTP," Chowdhury said.

In a final example of the CA's muddled thinking, the article said that the board refuted ESPNcricinfo's quote of chief executive James Sutherland that 'the huge cost to play up there [northern regions] and getting broadcasters and what have you to pick it up, just makes it [Bangladesh tour] difficult' and that there were in fact no economic considerations behind scrapping the tour.

The article also sought to justify the cancellation by citing India's recent rejection of the day-night Test in their upcoming Australian tour, as if to show that plans change on cricket tours. It however only serves to highlight CA's condescension towards the BCB -- India's tour is still taking place with the agreed number of matches but CA had to kowtow to the demands of a more powerful board, while they seemed to have chosen to make much bigger decisions unilaterally when it came to the less powerful BCB.

### SCHOOL CRICKET

## The coin's reign continues

SPORTS REPORTER



When your fate is decided solely by luck, the very thing that was a stroke of fortune just two days earlier can come back to bite you. That is exactly what happened to Chittagong's Sunshine Grammar School in the Prime Bank National School Cricket Championship yesterday. Sunshine rode on the luck of the toss to reach the semifinals after their quarterfinal against Glory School and College was washed out at the Moulvibazar District Stadium. Yesterday they saw the other side of the coin as their semifinal match against Govt. Jubilee High School of Sunamganj could not be completed even on the reserve day at the same venue and the latter moved on to the final because the coin landed in their favour.

The match started on Wednesday and shifted to the reserve day with Govt. Jubilee making 152 for five in 31 overs before rain stopped the match. Earlier in the tournament, two of the quarterfinals were also decided by the toss at the same venue following persistent rain. In



PHOTO: COLLECTED

In a tournament that has seen many matches decided by a coin toss, Bogra Police Lines School and College players celebrate an outright win over Chehel Gazi Shishu Niketon School & College in the National School Cricket Championship semifinal in Tangail yesterday.

Sunday's final, Govt. Jubilee High School will meet Bogra's Police Lines School and College, who qualified for the final with a five-wicket win over Dinaipur's Chehel Gazi Shishu Niketon School & College in a rain-interrupted match at the Tangail District Stadium.

In the 21-over-a-side match, Chehel scored only 45 runs for two wickets in

their allotted overs and Police Lines reached the target with seven overs and five wickets in hand.

The final was originally scheduled to take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, but due to an unfit outfield the final will now take place at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on May 13.

### Mariner keep up the heat

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Mariner Young's Club kept the heat on leaders Abahani with a 6-0 win over Ajax SC in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The defending champions had little trouble dispatching Ajax, thanks to a four-goal haul from veteran Mamunur Rahman Chayan.

The defender opened the scoring in the seventh minute before doubling the lead two minutes later, both goals coming from penalty corners. Chayan completed his hat-trick from another PC on the half-hour mark before bagging his fourth in 42 minutes. Hasin Rahman and Hasan Jubayer Niloy scored the other two goals.

The win took them to 12 points from four matches, with Abahani leading the table on 15 points from five matches.

## Farashganj in final

SPORTS REPORTER



Farashganj Sporting Club moved into the final of the Under-18 Club Cup football tournament with a 5-4 win in sudden death against Brothers Union in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 90 minutes of regulation time and 30 minutes of time added on failed to find a decisive goal despite the game being very open and full of attacking display. Both sides scored four of their first attempts in the shootout, which took the penalties into sudden death where Mohammad Imran of Brothers Union hit the post before Mohammad Aslam of Farashganj made no mistake to take Farashganj into the final.

Earlier, the regulation time was a story of two halves as Brothers Union started the match brightly and made numerous attacks on their opposition's defence, with Amlan Rahman's effort from the middle of the box, which hit the post, the closest to an opening goal.

Farashganj changed their strategy in the second half, and came out all guns blazing. Brothers goalkeeper Mohammed Mohiuddin produced a brilliant save to deny Masum Miah's shot from the right corner of the box in the 73rd minute.

Brothers striker Aslam wasted a brilliant opportunity in the 11th minute of extra-time when he found Farashganj goalkeeper Sajibul Islam in a one-on-one position, but his shot from the top of the box hit the post.

Abahani will take on Arambagh Krira Sangha in the second semifinal today while the final will be played on Sunday.

### Tigresses aiming for improvement

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's team will play their fourth ODI against their South African counterparts at the Diamond Oval in Kimberley today. The Tigresses will be hoping to avoid another heavy defeat after losing the third ODI by nine wickets.

In the last match only two Bangladesh batters reached double digits as the Tigresses were bundled out for a meagre 71. South Africa chased down the target in 14.2 overs for the loss of just one wicket to clinch the five match ODI series 3-0.

### Pant special goes in vain

STAR SPORT DESK

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had an excellent outing with the ball for Sunrisers Hyderabad and teammates Kane Williamson and Shikhar Dhawan matched his performance as they defeated Delhi Daredevils by a nine wickets in an IPL match yesterday.

Delhi reached 16 for no loss at the end of the third over before Shakib was introduced and the left-arm made an instant impact. He had Prithvi Shaw caught at cover before bowling a peach of a delivery the next ball to remove Jason Roy. The ball floated in but spun away violently, taking an edge to the keeper.

However, despite his marauding form, Shakib was unable to stop Rishabh Pant, who constantly caught the Delhi bowlers with their pants down. He plundered 15 boundaries and seven sixes to rack up an incredible 63-ball 128. He even took Shakib for 12 runs in an over, bringing the Bangladeshis' figures down to two for 27 from his four overs. After the exchange, Hyderabad came out all guns blazing and ended the match almost anticlimactically. Shikhar Dhawan smashed a 50-ball 92 featuring nine fours and four sixes while captain Kane Williamson hit a 53-ball 83 with eight fours and two sixes as the Sunrisers won with seven balls to spare.

## Munir Hossain no more

SPORTS REPORTER

Retired FIFA referee and former general secretary of the Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation Munir Hossain breathed his last at a hospital in the capital at around 6:30am yesterday. He was 84.

Munir was suffering from prostatism for quite some time and was admitted at the hospital for the last 12 days. He left behind two daughters, one son and a host of well wishers.

He was laid to rest at the Gopibagh Graveyard after his last namaz-e-zanaja at the Maniknagar Jam-e- Masjid after Asr prayers.

After his football career was cut short due to injury, Munir became a first class referee in 1968. He was one of the first four referees from the country to get a FIFA international badge in 1974.

Munir conducted a host of local and international matches including the Asian Youth Football Championships in Kuwait and Iran and Kings Cup in Thailand.

Later on, he established himself as a successful sports organiser, getting involved with the Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation in various scopes over a period of 26 years.

He became the federation's general secretary in 1988 and acted in that role over different terms till 2004. He was also the technical committee chairman of the Asian Kabaddi Federation from 1988 to 2004.

Veteran kabaddi coach Abdul Jalil expressed his sorrow at the departure of Munir.

"Munir Bhai took the federation's charge in various terms and he tried to run it even facing many obstacles," Jalil said. "We have lost a great sports organiser."

Ibrahim Nesar, deputy chairman of the referees' committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation, said Munir was a role model for referees due to his strong personality.

"He was a fearless referee and we learnt a lot from him," Nesar said. "He had strong personality which forced footballers to obey his instructions."

### IRELAND'S DEBUT TEST

## Porterfield toasts past players

REUTERS, Dublin



Ireland captain William Porterfield hailed the contributions made by the team's former players as they prepare to make their Test debut against Pakistan in Malahide on Friday.

Ireland will become the first team to debut in the longest format of the game since Bangladesh in 2000, after being awarded full member status last June along with Afghanistan.

"It is a massive occasion for everyone involved in Irish cricket," Porterfield told reporters.

"For the 11 lads who will take the pitch, it will be a fantastic occasion for them and their families but we have to also remember everything that has gone before in Irish cricket in terms of getting us to this stage, over the years."

"You've got a lot of past players -- some of them are here with us, some aren't, but we have to remember and recognise what they have done to get us to this stage."

Ed Joyce, who could become one of the sport's oldest Test debutants at 39, said the chance of taking the field in Test whites was still a "pinch me moment" for him.

"I'm in the 14. Hopefully I make the



Ireland's historic first Test squad pose for a photograph at the Malahide ground in Dublin yesterday, ahead of their debut Test against Pakistan starting today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

final XI. It'll be an incredible feeling," he told BBC.

"I played my first game a long time ago, 20 years ago, so to get to this point, where we're on the verge of our first Test, is a great feeling, I can't wait."

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed backed Ireland to take their experience from limited-overs matches and thrive in the Test format.

"It is a privilege to be a part of this historic Test match and all of us are really looking forward to it," the 30-year-old said.

"Ireland players feature prominently in the ICC ODI (one-day internationals) and T20I (Twenty20 internationals) player rankings, and I am confident that in due course they will also make their mark in the Test rankings."