

Nazmul Hossain Shanto (3rd from L), taking part in fitness training with the Bangladesh preliminary squad in Mirpur yesterday, has proven himself to be one of the brightest young prospects in domestic cricket and a viable candidate to be Tamim Iqbal's long-term opening partner.

PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

BPL set to be deferred

SPORTS REPORTER



The sixth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) will very likely be deferred to early 2019 because it is likely to clash with the general elections, which is tentatively set to be held in December 2018, the Bangladesh

Cricket Board informed. The BPL was originally scheduled to be held in October-November this year, according to a recent statement from BCB president Nazmul Hassan.

"We are seriously thinking of deferring the BPL because it is likely to clash with the general elections," said BPL governing council member-secretary IH Mallick yesterday. "We are planning to host the tournament in January because in the time leading up to the elections it will be difficult to ensure security for the matches in three venues and all of the players in the seven franchises. We have not yet finalised anything but we will decide within a week. We also cannot rule out the possibility of hosting the BPL in December."

In the event that the BPL is held in January 2019, Zimbabwe's planned full tour of Bangladesh slated for January-February next year will be affected. It is not yet certain whether the tour will be brought forward to December 2018 or be held after the BPL in 2019.

Since the first edition of the BPL in 2012, there had been one other instance of the domestic T20 tournament not being held, when the 2014 edition was cancelled due to the spot-fixing scandal.

Nazmul the answer to the opening dilemma

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The Bangladesh team management's biggest concern heading into the new season, which will begin in June with the upcoming three-

match T20I series against Afghanistan, is finding a stable opening partner for Tamim Iqbal in all three formats.

A lack of consistent performances from Tamim's opening partners -- a role that has been occupied by Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Liton Das, Anamul Haque, Mohammad Mithun and even Zakir Hasan -- has seen the team management shuffle with a number of options. However, none of them have impressed and with the new season approaching it will be interesting to see whether they will opt for a fresh alternative.

Bangladesh have played 14 T20Is since 2017 with a combination of five different opening pairs. Among the 19 ODIs in that period, six opening combinations were tried while four permutations featured in 11 Tests.

Yet, the selectors have been unable to solve the puzzle of who to partner Tamim, but perhaps young batsman Nazmul Hossain Shanto -- who is in the preliminary squad for the Afghanistan series and the tour of West

MSC wallop

Wanderers

Indies following it -- is the missing included as a last-minute replacement. piece.

The left-hander, who made his Test debut on a tour of New Zealand last year, showed glimpses of his talent in the testing conditions after he was

OPENING COMBINATIONS **SINCE JANUARY 2017**

Tests	
Combination	Inni
Tamim Iqbal-Imrul Kayes	7
Tamim Iqbal-Soumya Sarkar	12
Liton Das-Imrul Kayes	1
Imrul Kayes-Soumya Sarkar	2
ODIs	

Tamim Iqbal-Soumya Sarkar Imrul Kayes-Liton Das Tamim Iqbal-Imrul Kayes Imrul Kayes-Soumya Sarkar Tamim Igbal-Anamul Haque Tamim Igbal- Md. Mithun

Combination Tamim Igbal-Imrul Kayes Tamim Iqbal-Soumya Sarkar Imrul Kayes-Soumya Sarkar

Tamim Igbal-Liton Das

Combination Matches

> T20Is Matches

Zakir Hasan-Soumya Sarkar

The 19-year-old has matured a lot since his debut, showing his class on the domestic front and finishing as the leading run-getter in the Dhaka Premier League this year with 749 runs from 16 games at a healthy average of 57.61. His impressive haul featured four hundreds and the youngster has his eyes on the merrygo-round opening slot in the national team.

"I have understood a lot since playing my first Test. I learned how to play longer version cricket and tried to implement that in the domestic circuit. So far no one has been able to cement their place alongside Tamim bhai. I am not saying that I will be able to secure the opening slot, but my intention is to perform consistently," Nazmul told the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Nazmul said that he had worked on his batting strike rate and was looking for consistency in order to cement his place in all the three formats for the Tigers in the future.

"I have realised during the age-level days that I should focus on my strike rate to keep up with the international level and I tried to work on that during the domestic leagues," he added.

New role just a start

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The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said on Monday night that former South African opener and India's 2011 World Cup-winning coach Gary Kirsten's appointment as a consultant is in the final stages.

While speaking at an event to honour Bangladesh's former coach Gordon Greenidge at a hotel in Dhaka on Monday, BCB president Nazmul Hassan informed that Kirsten is already working for the board.

"He is already working for us. Kirsten will help us work out which coaches will work in what specific roles, and that includes the head coach role of the national side," the president said of Kirsten, whose likely role will be director of coaching.

"We will hand over a list of new coaches to him. He will also hand us a list of his own. We will then sit down with him to discuss the coaching roles for Bangladesh cricket," he said.

That raised questions about the unprecedented nature of a foreigner helping shortlist Bangladesh's coaching staff, but it was learned yesterday that Kirsten's role will be deeper and similar to the one he performed initially for India, who he coached from 2008 to 2011.

The BCB had initially wanted to give Kirsten a position as director of cricket, similar to the one performed by Andrew Strauss for the England and Wales Cricket Board. However Kirsten, who is currently in the tour of West Indies in July-August.

India as the coach of IPL outfit Royal Challengers Bangalore, was unwilling to take on such an extensive role as he thought that his various coaching commitments and need for family time would not leave enough time for a director of cricket role.

He however sent a counterproposal stating that he come to Bangladesh and talk to the game's various stakeholders -- the board, players, different standing committees, other coaches, etc. -- to identify their demands and make recommendations to the board accordingly. He may come to Bangladesh on May 21 after the conclusion

of his IPL duties to sit with the concerned parties.

That is the role the president was presumably talking about and Kirsten's recommendations will likely include names of coaches who he thinks may fit Bangladesh's cricketing needs. It was also learned that the BCB are eager to start a relationship with him and the current offer for Kirsten is likely to extend to the 2019 World Cup.

GARY KIRSTEN The position of Bangladesh's head coach has been vacant since Chandika Hathurusingha resigned last November following the disastrous tour of South Africa. The BCB president informed that the board shortlisted three names for the Tigers' head coach role. The three shortlisted coaches are from Australia, South Africa and England.

> He also said that it was likely that Bangladesh would not have a head coach for the Afghanistan series next month, but there may well be a new coach appointed before

in August

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The South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) is going to organise another under-15 Women's Championship in August, just seven months after the previous edition of the tournament concluded in Dhaka.

"Bhutan have been awarded the rights to host the next U-15 Women's Championship from August 9-18 as the championship will be a preparatory tournament for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers, which are supposed to take place in September," said SAFF general secretary Anwarul

Defending champions Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Maldives confirmed their participation while India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are expected to do so today, the deadline for registration.

Haque Helal yesterday.

Mahfuza made WC ambassador

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahfuza Akter Kiran, executive committee member of the Bangladesh Football Federation and FIFA, has been appointed as the goodwill ambassador for Ekaterinburg Stadium, one of twelve venues of the upcoming FIFA World Cup to be held in Russia from June 14.

Apart from serving as the goodwill ambassador, Kiran will also be working as a FIFA observer across all the venues which will host this World Cup's matches.

KKR stay in the hunt for playoffs

PП, Kolkata

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav starred with an impressive four-wicket spell as he set up Kolkata Knight Riders to a comfortable sixwicket win over Rajasthan Royals in their Indian Premier League match on Tuesday.

Rajasthan were bowled out for 142 from 19 overs after being sent into bat.

KKR chased down the small target with two overs to spare with Chris Lynn topscoring with a 42-ball 45 while skipper Dinesh Karthik remaining not out on 41 off 31 deliveries. Karthik took his side home with a six as KKR reached 145 for 4 in 18 overs.

With the win, KKR kept themselves in the hunt for a

Roca however, is aware of that fact and is determined not to allow a repeat. "The match won't be easy as we lost a

Abahani take on Bengaluru SPORTS REPORTER

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Mohammedan SC notched their biggest victory of the ongoing Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League when the Black and Whites imposed a massive 13-3 defeat on Dhaka Wanderers Club at

the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. Mohammedan's previous best margin of victory was 11-1 against Bangladesh Police Club in just the last match and in yesterday's encounter it seemed as though they did not want to take their foot off the throttle as Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Rabbi Salehin and Indian Gurjindar Singh shared all 13 goals among them.

With seven straight wins, Mohammedan are on top of the 12-team table with 21 points, six ahead of Abahani and Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, who have however played two matches less than the league leaders.

Though Dhaka Wanderers put up competitive performances against Wari Club, Sadharan Bima, Ajax SC, Azad SC and Victoria SC, they were helpless against Mohammedan, who dominated the first-half 7-1 thanks to a hattrick from national team captain Rasel. Gurjindar completed his hattrick in the second

half before he added three more while Rabbi Salehin also struck a hattrick. Mohammad Maksudur, Zahid Hossain and

Tahmik Haque struck one goal apiece to reduce the margin for Wanderers Club.

In the day's other match, Sonali Bank defeated Azad SC 4-0 with Prosenjit Roy ad Deen Islam Emon scoring two goals each.

Ireland Test debut ends in defeat

AFP, Dublin

Ireland's debut in Test ended in a five-wicket defeat as Pakistan debutant Imamul Haq hit an unbeaten 74 at Malahide on Tuesday.

Set a seemingly modest 160 to win on the last day, Pakistan collapsed to 14 for 3, having made Ireland followon earlier in the match.

Imamul saw the tourists to victory with a total of 160 for five.

Together with Babar Azam (59) he kept Ireland at bay during a fourthwicket partnership of 126.

Earlier, Ireland were dismissed for 339 in their second innings.

Kevin O'Brien, who on Monday became the first Ireland batsman to score a Test hundred, fell to his first ball on Tuesday.

SCORES IN BRIEF Pakistan: First innings 310 for 9 decl

Ireland: First innings 130 Ireland: Second innings 339 Pakistan: Second innings 160 for 5 (Imamul 74 not out, Azam 59; Murtagh 2-55) Result: Pakistan won by five wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Kevin O'Brien.

AFC CUP

Though Abahani are still smarting from their 1-5 drubbing at the hands of New Radiant Club of Maldives, the Bangladesh premier league champions hope to restore some pride

when they take on Indian Super League runners-up Bengaluru FC in their last Group E encounter of the AFC Cup today.

The match will get underway at 7:15pm under floodlights at Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Abahani were heading in the right direction, in terms of overall performance, until the fourth match of the competition as the Sky Blues inexplicably produced an embarrassing result in the following fixture, the 1-5 loss against New Radiant.

Bengaluru are behind New Radiant on the points table despite having an equal 12 points. Therefore, the Indian outfit will need an outright win over Abahani to advance to the next round unless New Radiant drop points against Aizawl FC in their encounter at Guwahati today.

Following their 0-1 defeat to a second sting Bengaluru side in the away leg, where Bengaluru's Spanish coach Albert Roca rested his entire starting eleven, the hosts might find it difficult to make a comeback as Roca is expected to field a full strength squad, which includes three Spaniards, one Australian and India's star striker Sunil Chhetri.



Coaches and captains of visiting Bengaluru FC and hosts Abahani pose for photographs at the BFF House yesterday ahead of today's AFC Cup match. PHOTO: STAR

"Actually we don't have anything to ers' mentality which is very important say, rather we will demonstrate on the when you face a team like Bengaluru FC. pitch, especially where we stand now," said Abahani coach Saiful Bari Titu at the pre-match conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"We had a chance till the fifth match, that result is still hurting me. Losing 1-5 is not justified. Now it is a tough task to bounce back from that defeat and we are working on that by brining a bit tactical changes," continued Titu, who will surely miss the services Nigerian defender Alison Udoka and striker Sunday Chizoba, during today's match.

"To stage a comeback performance is difficult due to the suspension of three crucial players. We will bank on the play-

Abahani are not a side to lose 1-5," opined the former national footballer. Titu's charges can take some inspiration from the previous edition though,

where they beat Bengaluru 2-0 in Dhaka.

game here before. We would just like to qualify for the next round but it depends on us and we will be trying to do our job to win tomorrow," Roca said. "It is important to be focused. Though Abahani have no option to qualify and I'm sure they will be professional and do

their best."

play-offs spot with 14 points.