

What to WATCH

SONY ESPN
South Africa v Sri Lanka
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 2:00pm

TEN 1
West Indies v England
Second ODI
Live from 9:00pm

TEN 2
Serie A
AC Milan v Empoli
Live from 1:30am (Saturday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
English Premier League
West Ham v Fulham
Live from 1:45am (Saturday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
English Premier League
Cardiff v Watford
Live from 1:45am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League (Football)
Sheikh Russel v Abahani
Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Sylhet District Stadium, Sylhet
Mohammedan v Sheikh Jamal
Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka

A FLAWED VERSION OF 2016

AL-AMIN

Bangladesh lost their three-match ODI series 3-0 against New Zealand. The home team completed the series sweep with an 88-run thrashing of the Tigers in the final fixture at Dunedin on Wednesday.

Just over two years ago, the Tigers suffered an identical 3-0 ODI series defeat against the Kiwis.

It will not be a futile exercise to have a comparative analysis of the two series losses when considering Bangladesh's primary goal of doing well away from home, especially in conditions more suited to pace than spin.

Soul-searching may be also imperative, considering Bangladesh's ambition of going one notch higher in the England World Cup in June-July this year after securing a maiden quarterfinal berth in the 2015 World Cup.

Two years ago, Bangladesh's series in New Zealand was widely described as a series of missed opportunities. The Tigers did lose their opening leg of the series -- three ODIs -- 3-0, but not without putting up a fight in every game.

It started at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Boxing Day in 2016 and ended with a double-header at Nelson's Saxton Oval before the New Year.

New Zealand plundered 341 for nine in the opening game at Christchurch. Bangladesh's response was equally spectacular and, had Mushfiqur Rahim not retired with a dislocated shoulder, the chase could have been a close one. Bangladesh scored 264 before being bowled out in 44.5 overs.

The Tigers were only to be blamed for losing the second game in Nelson where they bowled the home side out for 251 and then saw a second-wicket stand between Sabbir Rahman and Imrul Kayes taking the score to 105 in 22.5 overs. After the departure of Sabbir for 38, the Tigers



Unlike in 2016, the Tigers did not even come to the party this time around as they crumbled to a series sweep against New Zealand with two eight-wicket losses and an 88-run defeat against the hosts.

lost their way against the innocuous off-spin of New Zealand captain Kane Williamson.

In the third game at Saxton Oval two days later, opener Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes produced 101 runs before a middle-order slump saw them finish on 236 for nine. The Kiwis recovered from 16 for two to eventually win the game by eight wickets.

Still, the stats hardly reflect how closely the Tigers fought against New Zealand in their first visit in seven years and with a side that featured many first-timers in such challenging conditions. The intensity was also maintained in the subsequent three-match T20I and the two-match Test series.

The Kiwis are almost invincible on home turf. India's recent ODI



series win against them is an exception. For Bangladesh the conditions were as hostile two years ago as they were in the latest series.

The advantage this time was that they were playing against the same set of players they encountered last time and on the back of two wins against the Black Caps -- including the famous triumph at Cardiff in the Champions Trophy -- on neutral ground.

But in all the three games -- at Napier and Christchurch where they lost by eight-wickets followed by the Dunedin mauling -- they were nowhere near what they did on their previous visit, let alone living up to their growing profile as a very competitive side in the ODI format of the game.

A simple statistic depicts how badly the top-order performed in



Mushfiqur Rahim perfectly captures the mood of the Bangladesh top order during their three-match ODI series against New Zealand. The highest the first five batsmen managed to take the total to was a paltry 93 runs.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

get enough time to cool off after the hectic Bangladesh Premier League.

When Bangladesh toured New Zealand last time, it was planned well in advance, including a camp in Australia before the tour that helped a lot. Every player tried to execute a definite game plan crafted by a knowledgeable coach.

But this time around, the team, with a noticeable change in backroom staff, not only headed to New Zealand a little jaded but more importantly with blank minds. It was evident in the three games. Three of the five senior players, who formed the core of the team and shaped its recent successes, misfired.

Opener Tamim Iqbal failed in all the three games, as did wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur. The approach of the two seasoned campaigners sadly was not corrective against a well thought out plan by the opposition. Mushfiqur was dismissed twice while trying to cut too close to his body while Tamim's decision to work the

ball to the inside did not work. Both were dismissed in the third game playing rash shots, with Tamim charging down the wicket off the very first over and edging to the slip while Mushfiqur top-edged a forced pull shot.

The cameras briefly zoomed in on the duo in the Bangladesh dressing room during the third ODI and it appeared that Tamim was trying to pacify Mushfiqur, who seemed very disappointed by something.

Mahmudhlla Riyad was as disappointing as he was in New Zealand two years ago. Only skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza bowled intelligently in a disjointed side that missed the services of all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan due to injury.

The junior members of the team were a cause for concern last time. This time two of them -- Sabbir Rahman and Mohammad Mithun -- performed very well.

The Tigers will enter the more demanding three-match Test series later this week with a refreshing memory of the last visit -- a brilliantly fought first Test at Wellington on the back of a magnificent double hundred by Shakib and a superb 150-odd by Mushfiqur.

They appeared in their final game -- the second Test -- at Christchurch with a real crisis of even fielding a playing eleven after so many injuries. Even after that the Tigers showed character and fighting spirit in defeat at that time.

Unfortunately, that character, cohesion and sort of mentoring has so far been missed in this series rather than the quality they possessed.

with 16, 14 and 13 points respectively.

At the Sylhet District Stadium, the popular Sky Blues will look to extend their winning streak in today's encounter with hosts Sheikh Russel KC, who have struggled to maintain consistency following draws against Saif SC and Sheikh Jamal DC in their last three matches.

The home side will definitely be aiming to decrease the points difference with Abahani as well as Bashundhara Kings by beating the league leaders. However, Sheikh Russel won only thrice -- 2011, 2012 and 2015 -- out of their 21 professional football league meetings with the Dhanmondi-based outfit.

At the Bangabandhu National Stadium, a struggling Mohammedan SC will hope to take inspiration from a goalless draw against Chittagong Abahani when they square off against Sheikh Jamal DC for the 16th time in the league's history.

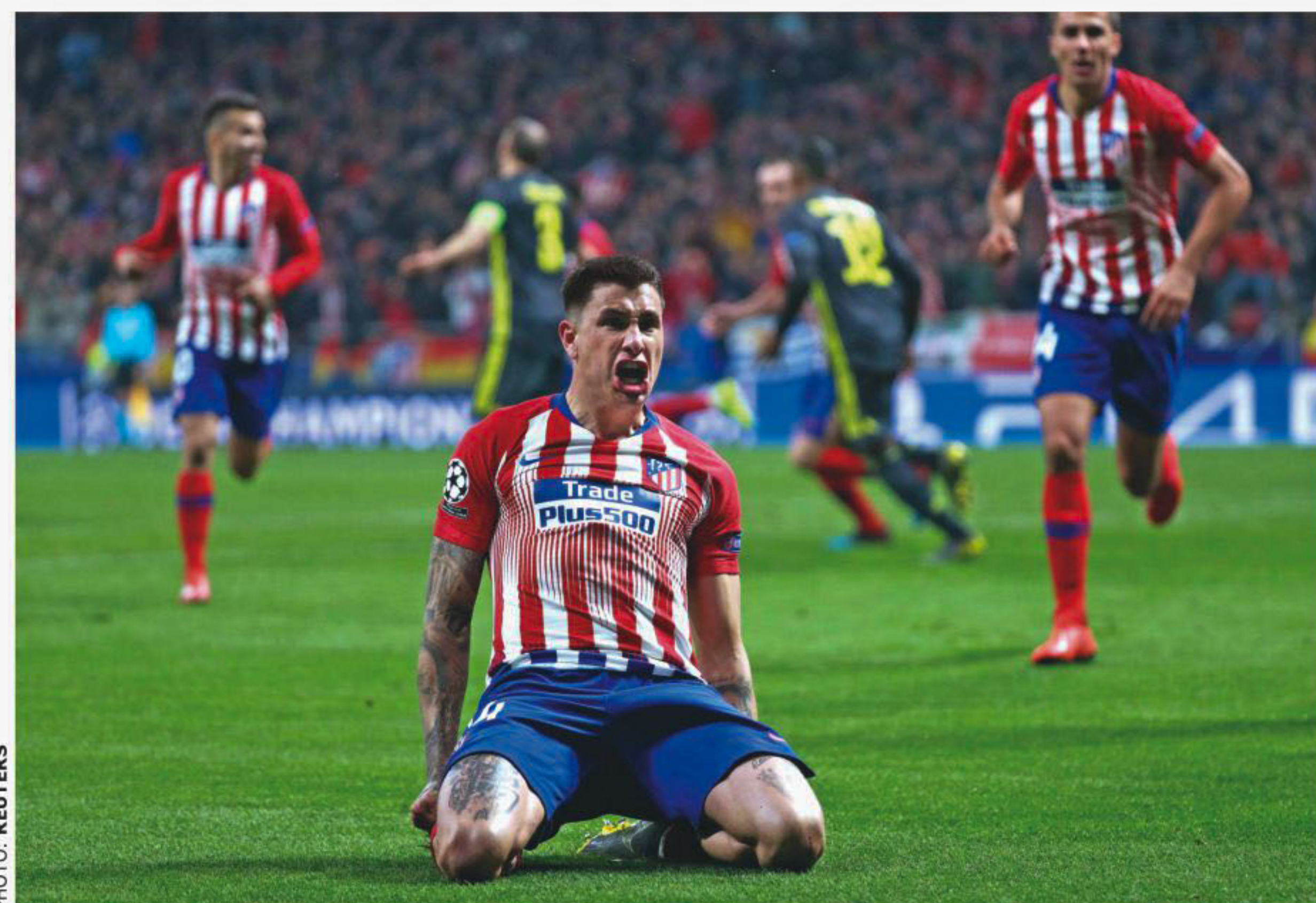
However, their past history is not exactly encouraging for the Black and Whites as they beat Sheikh Jamal only once in 2016, suffering defeats in 10 of their 15 previous meetings with the Dhanmondi giants.

Newcomers Bashundhara Kings will host youthful Arambagh KS in Nilphamari on Sunday after title contenders Saif SC take on visiting Chittagong Abahani tomorrow.

SANE 'SORRY' FOR STUNNING FREE-KICK

Leroy Sane admits feeling 'sorry' for his stunning free-kick against ex-club Schalke which helped 10-man Manchester City seal a dramatic 3-2 away win in the Champions League. City were in trouble at 2-1 down in the last 16, first-leg tie, playing with 10 men after Nicolas Otamendi was sent off on 68 minutes. The Germany winger, a product of Schalke's academy who left for City in 2016, came off the bench and smashed home a free-kick to equalise on 85 minutes in Gelsenkirchen. Raheem Sterling then tapped home City's superb winner on 90 minute, after a brilliant long-range pass from goalkeeper Ederson, to seal victory. "Yeah, I was a bit," Sane told reporters when asked if he was sorry to score against Schalke on Wednesday. "I couldn't really celebrate, of course I was pleased for my team, but to score a goal like that against my 'former love'..."

-AFP



Atletico Madrid defender Jose Gimenez is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Juventus during their Champions League Round of 16 first leg encounter at the Wanda Metropolitan Stadium on Wednesday.

Atletico stun Juventus

Man City survive Schalke scare

AGENCIES



Cristiano Ronaldo's Champions League mission with Juventus stalled on Wednesday as Atletico Madrid secured a deserved 2-0 victory from a thrilling first leg at the Wanda Metropolitan.

Ronaldo returned to the Spanish capital, where he enjoyed unprecedented success in this tournament with Real, but it was their rivals celebrating at the final whistle as goals from Jose Gimenez and Diego Godin put Atletico within sight of the quarter-finals.

"We are not through yet," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said. "There is another match to play and we know we will have to suffer."

"Fortunately we didn't concede a third," said Juventus boss Massimiliano Allegri. "Because 2-0 is a result that can be turned around. We're not dead yet."

But this was a victory that Simeone's side fully deserved. Antoine Griezmann had hit the crossbar while VAR twice intervened, correctly, in Juve's favour, cancelling a penalty for a foul on Diego Costa and then ruling out an Alvaro Morata header just before Gimenez struck.

While Juventus tried to preserve

the stalemate, Atletico were bold. Simeone introduced Morata, Thomas Lemar and Angel Correa, all around the hour-mark, and his daring paid off. "I showed balls," Simeone said.

Juve are certainly not dead and buried, particularly given Costa and Thomas Parthey will both be suspended for the return in Turin after each picked up yellow cards.

But the failure to score an away goal, and their clear inferiority in the second half does not bode well for any hopes of a comeback.

"They don't give you chances," said Allegri. "They make you play badly."

Defeat in the last 16 for either team would be unthinkable, for Atletico, who know the final will be played here, at their own stadium, on June 1, the perfect chance to wrestle the trophy off Real in the very city they share.

Meanwhile Pep Guardiola says Manchester City will not challenge for this season's Champions League title unless they learn from their dramatic 3-2 win at Schalke with 10 men on Wednesday.

"We will not go far in this competition unless we improve," said City manager Guardiola.

"At the end, the quality of (Leroy) Sane and (Raheem) Sterling made the difference.

"The result is incredibly good, but we gave the first two penalties away and the red card, so we are not ready to fight for the Champions League."

City were in real trouble at 2-1 down with 22 minutes left when Nicolas Otamendi was sent off before goals by Leroy Sane and Raheem Sterling in the last five minutes swung the last 16 tie back in their favour.

Schalke led at the break as the video assistant referee (VAR) twice intervened to award penalties, both converted by Nabil Bentaleb, cancelling out Sergio Aguero's opener in Gelsenkirchen.

Sane, who came on for the last 12 minutes, drilled home a stunning free-kick to equalise and was delighted to score against his old club having joined City from Schalke in 2016.

"I wanted to shoot from that position as I have already scored from there and the goal gave us confidence, which set us up to win," said the Germany international.

"We did not get start well, but I'm glad we won and getting three goals away is good."

City still have some work to do in the return leg on March 12 with Fernandinho, who was booked when conceding the second spot-kick, and Otamendi both suspended.



South Africa's Quinton de Kock pulls the ball during his knock of 86 runs as his team were bowled out for 222 in the first day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Port Elizabeth yesterday. Sri Lanka were 60 for 3 wickets at stumps.

PHOTO: AFP

PSG hammer Montpellier

AFP, Paris

Angel Di Maria scored a sumptuous free-kick and Kylian Mbappe was also on target as PSG continued their relentless march towards another French title by hammering Montpellier 5-1 on Wednesday.

With Neymar and Edinson Cavani still absent, Layvin Kurzawa also scored at the Parc des Princes, while two own goals completed the rout.

Florent Mollet had equalised at one point in the first half for the visitors before they crumbled in a rearranged fixture that had been postponed in early December due to disruption caused by "yellow vest" protests.

As they warm up for the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Manchester United on March 6, PSG are now 15 points clear of second-placed Lille, and still have a game in hand.

"It came down to patience, and quality, and a bit of luck as well," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel after his side maintained their perfect home record in the league this season.

BPL race resumes with 8th round

SPORTS REPORTER



Since the big-spending Bashundhara Kings' dropped points against lowly Team BJMC in the previous round, the other title aspirants will surely be looking to close the gap by posting wins in the eighth round of the Bangladesh Premier League starting today.

By the end of the seventh round, holders Abahani were still on top of the table with 18 points, however, the six-time champions have played a match more than Bashundhara Kings, Sheikh Russel KC and Saif SC, who are in second, third, and fourth position

with 16, 14 and 13 points respectively.

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Shooting team leaves today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 14-member Bangladesh shooting team is scheduled to leave for India this morning to take part in the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi.

The team, comprised of 11 shooters, -- five women and six men -- will compete in the air rifle and pistol events. However, the focus will surely be on Commonwealth Games silver medalists, Abdullah Hel Baki and Shakil Ahmed. The duo, alongside Umme Zakiya Sultana Tumpa, reached the set-mark scores, set by the Bangladesh Shooting Sports Federation, during training sessions.

"Baki and Tumpa scored 625 out of 564 in 10m air rifle events while Shakil made 580 in pistol event during the prac-

tice session, so we are hoping for something good from them," said BSSF CEO Mushtaq Waise.

Mushtaq also informed that he was a bit frustrated over the delay of a government order, forcing the BSSF to buy their travel tickets on February 22 after getting the order on Wednesday.

"We have already missed the pre-event practice session which started today [Thursday] and will also miss tomorrow [Friday] before the main competition starting from February 23 through the qualification of the women's event," Waise said.

"Actually, we can't buy air tickets until we get the confirmation from the government order. Besides, there are some technical problems for the shooters to fly with arms and ammunition."

