



Striker Nabib Newaz Jibon (C) was probably trying to replicate his acrobatic second goal against Bhutan as Jamal Bhuiyan (L) and Sohel Rana egged him on during yesterday's practice session at the BFF artificial turf.

PHOTO: STAR

BCB backs down on fitness

National Cricket League to start from October 10

SPORTS REPORTER



Over the past few days, fitness requirements for players wishing to participate in the domestic league has been a much-discussed issue and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) seemed to have taken a hard line, saying that players would need to score at least 11 in the beep test in order to participate in the 21st National Cricket League (NCL).

However, during a press conference yesterday in Mirpur where BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury announced that the country's oldest first-class competition would start from October 10, it emerged that the BCB had already softened the stance adopted just last Friday.

"There was a meeting regarding the upcoming NCL; we will start the league from October 10 and we also took some other decisions regarding the league. The general secretaries of different divisions were present

at the meeting and we took some decisions that will help to increase the competitiveness of the tournament," Nizamuddin said yesterday.

However, the soundbite of increasing competitiveness rang hollow when Nizamuddin hinted that BCB's implementation of fitness requirements will be more relaxed than it originally appeared.

"The target for the players has been set to score 11 in the beep test. We are giving priority to fitness. But now, if the selectors want to consider players in a different way, they can," the BCB CEO revealed.

A number of senior players who have been out of the national side for a while have had issues regarding the newly-prescribed fitness level and it now seems that the BCB will make exceptions for some players.

Selector Habibul Bashir also said that they would consider some players even if they fail to meet the mark.

"We tried to set a standard [for fitness]. Last time it was nine and now it is 11. I think all of them are professional

cricketers and everyone should maintain a good fitness level. But if the performance cannot score 11 in the beep test, then we might consider them. However, we are not setting any benchmark for it. [If anyone fails] we will decide upon a score that they would have to meet for to be considered," said Bashir.

The relaxed attitude also extended to another of BCB's supposed tenets -- the participation of national players in the domestic league. BCB president Nazmul Hassan had earlier mentioned that the board will make it mandatory for the national team players to participate in the domestic leagues. However, Nizamuddin's statement regarding it gives a different vibe.

"The board will try to ensure participation of national players in the NCL. It is expected that they will at least play the first and second rounds," said Nizamuddin.

The CEO also mentioned that the board will stress on creating sporting wickets and also informed that match fees of players may also increase for this edition of NCL.

Transfers begin amid uncertainty

ANISUR RAHMAN

The players' transfers window for top-flight football -- the Bangladesh Premier League -- opens today with some lightweights in financial trouble in the wake of recent crackdown on clubs' gambling.

On September 18, Rab busted six casinos at the Club Para and put some of the clubs under lock and key while arresting a couple of the club high-ups. Some other top officials went into hiding to avoid detention, leaving club committees in trouble regarding forming of football squad for the upcoming season.

Though the top performing clubs have not been affected due to support from the directors or direct contribution from patrons, some lightweights have been in a tight spot as they bank on money earned from gambling boards, housie and casinos.

Rab discovered casinos at seven sporting clubs, out of which Arambagh, Muktiyoddha Sangsad and Mohammedan ply their trade in top-flight football. Chittagong Abahani, another outfit of the Bangladesh Premier League, were found operating gambling at the club premises.

Now Arambagh, Muktiyoddha Sangsad and Mohammedan are in a tight spot regarding roping players for the next season due to financial constraints.

"I can't say what is going on in the players' transfer for Arambagh after the disaster [casino scandal] because the club president and general secretary are not in the country. General secretary [Yakub Ali] is

supposed to return from India, where he is having treatment, within a couple of days. After that we can understand what is in store for Arambagh," said vice-president Izaz Mohammad Jahangir.

"We have a target of forming a team to surprise all and we have already paid token money, 10 to 20 percent of total payment, to the players. However, under changed circumstances, we have

Under changed circumstances, we have got a primary idea that it won't be possible for Arambagh to form a strong squad, instead we will have to sit with high-profile players in a bid to release them.

Izaz Mohammad Jahangir
Arambagh KS vice-president

got a primary idea that it won't be possible for Arambagh to form a strong squad, instead we will have to sit with high-profile players in a bid to release them," said former general secretary adding that they need at least Tk 2 crore to form a team to survive in top-flight football.

Muktiyoddha Sangsad is likely to face more problem than Arambagh as the freedom fighters' side rely more on 'gambling board' from where the club reportedly earns approximately Tk 3.5

crore per year.

Zahirul Islam, the government's administrator of Muktiyoddha Sangsad Council, could not be reached for updates on transfers, but an official on condition of anonymity said that the club is in deep trouble to form a squad.

"Some players alleged that their cheques bounced from the bank because no money from the gambling boards has been deposited to the bank. The club needs Tk 5 crore to form a mediocre side and most of the money comes from the gambling board," said the official adding that he does not know what would happen in the transfer window.

Mohammedan's football manager Amirul Islam Babu said they are observing the situation and waiting for directives from the board of directors and old organisers, who have started coming back to the club.

"We are in confusion after the arrest of Lokman bhai because we were asked to complete the contracts for next season by the first week of October. We haven't been contacted yet and we don't know who will take responsibility for the transfers," said Atiqur Rahman Meshu, who is supposed to play for Mohammedan next season.

Chittagong Abahani vice-president Tarafder Ruhul Amin claimed that the club has no financial problem to form squad as the club is not involved with gambling.

He, however, said that the clubs' association would sit to discuss the matter and request Bangladesh Football Federation to extend the transfers' window following the financial trouble.



Saif Sporting Club captain Emon Molla (R) and NoFel SC skipper Johnny Chandra Shil pose with the trophy during a pre-match presser at the BFF house yesterday, the eve of their Walton Under-18 Football Tournament final at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur today.

PHOTO: STAR

Pakistan take 1-0 lead

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan rode on a brilliant century from Babar Azam and fast bowler Usman Shinwari's five wickets to beat Sri Lanka by 67 runs in the second day-night international yesterday as Karachi staged its first ODI in a decade.

Azam, currently one of the best batsmen in limited overs cricket, smashed a solid 105-ball 115 to lift Pakistan to 305 for seven after the home team won the toss and batted.

Shinwari then knocked off the top-order in figures of five for 51 as the visitors -- depleted by the withdrawal of 10 top players who refused to tour over security fears -- were bowled out for 238 in 46.5 overs.

The win gives Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the three-match series with the first ODI rained off in Karachi on Friday. The third and final match is also set for the same

venue on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka were down and out at 28 for five before youngsters Shehan Jayasuriya and Dasun Shanaka staged a fightback during their record 177-run stand -- an ODI record for this wicket for Sri Lanka.

Jayasuriya missed his maiden hundred by four runs while Shanaka notched his highest ODI score of 68, but both fell in the space of three balls to surrender the fight.

Jayasuriya hit seven boundaries and a six in his 107-ball knock while Shanaka had six fours and two sixes in his 80 balls.

The match marked the first ODI cricket to be played in Karachi since the same two teams played here in January 2009, on the tour when the visitors' bus was attacked by terrorists in Lahore.

International cricket remained suspended in Pakistan for six years before Zimbabwe became the first team to play here in 2015.



Pakistan batsman Babar Azam celebrates his century in the second ODI against Sri Lanka in Karachi yesterday. Pakistan won the match by 67 runs.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Rohit set to open against SA

AGENCIES, Visakhapatnam

Limited-overs batting stalwart Rohit Sharma will have another chance to resurrect his stop-start Test career, but this time as an opener, when India kick off their three-match home series against South Africa at Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, looking for a record-breaking win.

Victory in the three-match series would see India break the record of 10 straight home series wins they currently hold with Australia.

Sharma has not been a Test regular, however. The last of his 27 Test caps since 2013 was in Australia last year.

He now has a new chance, replacing the out-of-form Lokesh Rahul, as the opening positions remain a problem for India.

"He has worked so hard and if he gets an opportunity, I am sure he will do well," vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane said of Sharma. "We all know the quality he has. He is simply special."

With regular opener Prithvi Shaw, who is currently serving a doping ban, not available for selection, Rohit is all set to walk out to open the innings with Mayank Agarwal in his 28th Test for India.

"We want to give Rohit Sharma an opportunity to open the innings in Tests," chief selector MSK Prasad had said after naming India's 15-member squad for the series.

While opening is the only shaky spot in an otherwise settled Indian batting order, the top-ranked Test side in the world were dealt a body blow when their pace bowling ace Jasprit Bumrah was ruled out of the series with a stress fracture in his back.

India will also have to choose between experienced wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha, who was recalled after being out injured for more than a year, and the young Rishabh Pant for the wicketkeeper's role.

The onus will be on India's slow bowlers to deliver the goods on spin-friendly tracks for the hosts with off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and his left-arm colleague Ravindra Jadeja expected to inflict maximum damage on the South Africa batsmen.

SHORT CORNER

Draw likely after SL A's strong reply

Sri Lanka A replied responded well with the bat as the home side rode on Sangeeth Cooray's hundred to end the third day on 204 for two, 156 runs behind Bangladesh A's first innings total of 360 in Hambantota yesterday.

After a washout on the first day reduced the four-day game to a three-day affair, the strong batting from both sides meant that the game was heading for a likely draw.

Resuming the third day on 270 for six, apart from Mehedi Hasan Miraz's 57 none of the Bangladesh batsmen were able to make an impact. Soumya Sarkar scored 24 as the visitors were eventually bundled out after adding 90 runs to their overnight total.

Ramesh Mendis and Asitha Fernando bagged three wickets each for the bowling side. In reply, Sri Lanka A lost their first wicket early when pacer Ebadot Hossain removed Pathum Nissanka for 14 but Sangeeth, along with Kamindu Mendis, added 165 runs for the second wicket.

Sangeeth was dismissed by Mehedi after scoring 104 off 151 balls, which included 15 fours, while Mendis remained unbeaten on 79.

--Sports Reporter

Shakib's Tridents in playoffs

Shakib Al Hasan's Barbados Tridents ensured a spot in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) playoffs with a 24-run win over St Lucia Zouks at the Kensington Oval in Barbados yesterday.

Shakib, playing his second match for the Tridents this season, contributed with both bat and ball.

Electing to bat, Tridents lost Alex Hales in the very first over before Shakib came to the crease and notched a 62-run second-wicket partnership with Johnson Charles. The 32-year-old scored a 21-ball 22 before departing in the ninth over. However, Charles's 36-ball 47 and an unbeaten 28-ball 27 from Justin Greaves helped the Tridents post 141 for six.

After the exchange, a team high of 17-ball 25 came from Colin Ingram as Zouks were bundled out for 117 in 18.4 overs. Shakib returned economical figures of one for 20 while Hayden Walsh was the pick of the bowlers for

the Tridents, returning figures of four for 26.

--Sports Reporter

India Women's A team to arrive tomorrow

India Women's A team will arrive in Bangladesh tomorrow to take part in a three-match one-day and three-match T20 series. All three one-dayers will take place at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, with the first game scheduled for October 4, followed by the second and third matches on October 6 and 8 respectively. The T20 series will be played at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar from October 11.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has announced a 15-member Bangladesh A team. Shaila Sharmin will lead the hosts, with the selectors including quite a few players from the national side.

SQUAD: Shaila Sharmin (Captain), Nuzhat Tumpa, Sanjida Islam, Sharmin Akter, Ritu Moni, Murshida Khatun, Rumana Ahmed, Nigar Sultana, Fahima Khatun, Nahida Akhter, Khadiza-Tul-Kubra, Suraya Azim, Puja Chakraborty, Sobhana Mostary, Fargana Hoque

--Sports Reporter

Asia Cup In Pakistan BCCI must decide by June 2020

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has set a June 2020 deadline for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to confirm its participation in the Asia Cup scheduled for September 2020.

"We need to see if India agrees to come to Pakistan for the Asia Cup. There is still some time till next year's September but by June, we have to know where we are going with this and if it can't be hosted here because of a lack of involvement of India," PCB CEO Wasim Khan said.

However the final decision to shift the tournament will be Asian Cricket Council's prerogative. "But that is a decision for the Asian Cricket Council and ICC to make. We are ready to have India in the Asia Cup," Khan said.

---Agencies