



FIFA President Gianni Infantino (top C) poses for a photograph at the BFF Astroturf with children from a number of schools in the capital during his visit to Bangladesh yesterday. The 49-year-old Swiss urged for further investment in the country's football, which he feels has promise.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'FIFA has concrete plans for Bangladesh'

SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA president Gianni Infantino urged the Bangladesh government and business houses to invest in football more, especially on youth and women's football where he feels Bangladesh has enormous opportunities. The chief of world football's governing body said that he did not expect the overwhelming reception and interest showed by the locals, stating that he was reassured that football is the number one sport in the country as it is in the world.

The 49-year-old Swiss said this while speaking at a crowded press meet at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel before his departure for Laos, ending a busy day after having arrived with his entourage early in the morning.

"I am surprised. I really didn't expect this. I thought I'd come into a country which knows a bit about football, but didn't care much about the FIFA president coming. But I find the country is living football. I feel a positive energy about football here. I'll go back with ideas and you will see the result," Infantino, wearing the Bangladesh national team's No. 10 jersey, said hinting that his team had concrete plans regarding Bangladesh and South Asia.

Infantino, who took the hot seat at world football's governing body in 2016 before being elected for a fresh term earlier

Does anyone understand cricket in this room? Only one? How many countries play cricket? 10? 12? When you play with 10 or 12 countries, it is easy to go up the table. But 211 countries play football and that is why it is so competitive and so popular.

GIANNI INFANTINO
FIFA PRESIDENT

this year, said he saw encouraging signs for Bangladesh football, especially at age-group level and women's football.

"Bangladesh had an excellent result against India in a 1-1 draw two days ago. There are excellent results in age-group football -- not only in girls' football but also in boys' football. I know Jamal [Bhuiyan], I know the Bangladeshi-origin kid who plays in England with an Afro hairdo [Hamza Chaudhury]. Here you have Kazi [Salahuddin]. These are living legends who make us dream," the FIFA boss added.

While holding the FIFA ball which was used at the final of this year's Women's World Cup in France, Infantino said that Bangladesh has great potential and opportunity in women's football. "Since

women's football is not as competitive as men's football, I feel there is opportunity for countries like Bangladesh, who are already doing well at age-group level, to do better. We have concrete plans for Bangladesh which we discussed at the meeting at the BFF. We had a great meeting with the Prime Minister for about an hour. We urge the government and the business houses to invest more in football. Our philosophy is play more and invest more."

The FIFA president also said that since he took office, football's apex body has been moving from a Euro-centric vision to a more global one, with a proposed 48-team Men's World Cup, an increase in number of teams in the Women's World Cup part of his vision to integrate more countries into premier football competitions.

Infantino also reiterated his faith that the Qatar World Cup in 2022 will be the best one ever, while asserting that racism is a threat to football and society that his organisation is determined to eradicate.

The Swiss also had a cheeky reply when asked about his plans for football to compete against cricket in popularity.

"I don't think cricket is the most popular sport here, but football is. Does anyone understand cricket in this room? Only one?" Infantino asked, setting off a round of laughter. "How many countries play cricket? 10? 12? When you play with 10 or 12 countries, it is easy to go up the

table. But 211 countries play football and that is why it is so competitive and so popular."

The FIFA boss came here from Mongolia with an entourage which included, among others, former French striker Youri Djorkaeff, a member of France's World Cup winning team in 1998.

The press conference was attended, among others, by BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, FIFA member Mahfuza Akter Kiron, BFF executive committee members and FIFA officials.

Infantino had earlier paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office in the morning before meeting BFF executive committee members. According to the PM's press secretary Ihsanul Karim who briefed reporters after the meeting, the premier said during the meeting that her government is constructing 492 mini-stadiums at sub-district level across the country to promote sports.

At the BFF executive committee meeting, most members were present except for Badal Roy and Mohiuddin Ahmed, the two vice-presidents who had levelled allegations of financial irregularities against the BFF recently. A reliable source informed that the two vice-presidents were not included in BFF's list of delegates that visited the PMO with the FIFA president.

Infantino and his entourage left Dhaka for Laos in the afternoon

BCB ring in changes to T20 squad

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced a squad with a startling few alterations for the upcoming three-match T20I series in India slated to begin on November 3.

Left-arm off-spinner Arafat Sunny and pacer Al-Amin Hossain, who last featured for the Tigers in any format back in the 2016 World Twenty20 tournament, were both included in the squad.

The experienced trio of Sabbir Rahman, Taijul Islam and Rubel Hossain were all dropped alongside youngster Nazmul Hossain Shanto. All four had featured in the tri-series at home involving Afghanistan and Zimbabwe in September. Meanwhile, Soumya Sarkar, who was dropped from the recent tri-series squad following the first two matches due to lack of form, was surprisingly handed yet another opportunity.

Leg-spinner Aminul Islam Biplob and Naim Sheikh were retained but Sheikh Mahedi Hasan and Yasin Arafat Mishu did not make the cut. Bangladesh will also be bolstered by the return of Tamim Iqbal, who sat out the home series to work on his fitness and recover lost form.



AL-AMIN HOSSAIN



ARAFAT SUNNY

According to BCB chief selector Minhazul Abedin, the team think-tank rung in the changes with an emphasis on experience and fitness in mind.

"T20 is a format where we have to experiment. That's why there were so many changes. Since India is a tough series, we preferred some experienced players and that is why Arafat Sunny and Al-Amin were brought back into the lineup," Minhazul told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We have brought Al-Amin back after a long time as we are struggling with injuries and fitness of the pace bowlers.

"Al-Amin's has shown good fitness. He bowled well in the NCL and in the last BPL. He also performed well in the T20 World Cup in India. We wanted to give him another opportunity and see what he can do.

"Sunny is an experienced campaigner. He bowled well in a few domestic tournaments and he has the experience. We feel that his experience could be handy in pressure situations," the chief selector concluded.

SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Tamim Iqbal Khan, Liton Kumer Das, Soumya Sarkar, Naim Sheikh, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Afif Hossain, Mosaddek Hossain Saikat, Aminul Islam Biplob, Arafat Sunny, Mohammad Saifuddin, Al-Amin Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shafiqul Islam.

BPL to be 'trial' for Mehedi, Saif keep on firing

SPORTS REPORTER

The seventh edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) has already stirred up a lot of controversies and undergone many changes. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had previously announced that this edition of the BPL would not feature franchises and would be solely arranged by the board itself. The BCB yesterday held a meeting in Mirpur, where they discussed various issues regarding the upcoming BPL.

ON THE START DATE: There was a lot of talk regarding the start of BPL 7 and whether it would even take place at all this year. However, after yesterday's meeting, BCB president Nazmul Hassan confirmed that the board are making preparations to start the domestic T20 League as previously decided, on December 6.

"We do not have any intentions to change the actual date of the BPL. We have a Pakistan tour just after the BPL and keeping that in mind, we need to finish it on time. At best the tournament might be delayed for a day or two but we are taking preparations for it to start on December 6," said Nazmul.

The BCB president also confirmed that the players draft for the BPL will be held on November 12.

ON PLAYERS AND COACHES: Nazmul informed that a total of 393 players are registered for the upcoming BPL while the BCB has already received applications from 38 foreign coaches. Although the BCB earlier said that the BPL teams will only have foreign coaches, Nazmul said that even local coaches could be considered.

"There are seven teams. Now if all the teams have foreign coaches or not it will depend on sponsors," continued Nazmul.

ON PLAYERS' FEES: Although Nazmul did not confirm the exact range for players' fees but he did mention that the fees will decrease slightly. "It will not be like the previous years as the BCB is arranging the tournament, it will be a bit less [fees]," he said.

ON SEEING THIS BPL WITH A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE: As per Nazmul, this BPL will be seen as a 'trial' for the 2021 T20 World Cup in India.

"If there is a local leg-spinner in any squad then the teams must play them. We will also try to take foreign fast bowlers who bowl above 140 kmph. Basically this BPL is just preparation. It was a different case in the last World Cup but now we are making a long term plan. When will we have the trial for the 2021 World Cup? We could not do any trials before the last one but now we want to try new players here."



NAZMUL HASSAN

SPORTS REPORTER



Mehedi Hasan Miraz shone with the ball in his first National Cricket League game of the season for Khulna Division, bagging four wickets to help bundle out Rajshahi Division for 261 on the first day of the second-round game at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

The 21-year-old, who excelled with his off spin on Bangladesh A's recent tour of Sri Lanka, immediately made an impact as he ended up with figures of four for 38 from 21.3 overs.

After being asked to bat Rajshahi were unable build meaningful partnerships, with Junaid Siddique's 51 being the top score. Almost all the batsmen got starts but were unable to capitalize with the likes of Mushfiqur Rahim (24) and Nazmul Hossain Shanto (23) dismissed in the twenties.

Apart from Mehedi, two of Bangladesh's fast bowlers in Mustafizur Rahman and Rubel Hossain bagged two wickets each.

In the other Tier-1 game in Chattogram, Saif

NCL coaches replaced

SPORTS REPORTER

Jahangir Alam and Masud Parvez Rajon, the local coaches of Dhaka Division and Rangpur Division respectively, were replaced after being summoned by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan yesterday for not fielding leg-spinners in the ongoing National Cricket League.

Dhaka coach Jahangir was replaced by Md Selim while Rangpur coach Rajon was replaced by Jafrul Ehsan.

Jubair Hossain Likhon, who plays for Dhaka, was not named in the playing eleven despite being in the squad while Rishad Hossain of Rangpur was not even named in the squad for the second round.

"We have summoned the coaches to explain why they did not play them [the two leg-spinners]. They must answer. Why would they not play them even after being instructed?" a furious BCB president Nazmul told the media yesterday.



SAIF HASSAN ... 120 rtd hurt

Hassan -- having recently scored a century in Sri Lanka for Bangladesh A -- continued his fine run and smashed another ton to get Dhaka Division off to a good start against Rangpur at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Dhaka ended the day on 314 for four.

Saif however retired hurt after scoring 120 off 173 balls, which included 13 fours and three sixes, because of cramps. Opener Rony Talukdar and Raqibul Hasan also struck fifties, while Sohrwardi Shuvo picked up two wickets for Rangpur.

Away in Bogura, much like in the first round, Mahmudullah Riyad was instrumental with the bat for Dhaka Metropolis but it was not enough for his side as none of his teammates contributed significantly as they were bundled out for just 246 runs by Sylhet Division at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium.

After being asked to bat, Dhaka Metro were in a spot of bother on 83 for 4 with medium pacer Rejaur Rahman removing openers Mohammad Naim and Rakim Ahmed early.

Mahmudullah top-scored with 63 off 108 balls, striking eight fours, before he became Rejaur's third victim. Shahidul Islam struck a fifty at the end to help Dhaka to go past the 200 mark.

Rejaur remained the pick of the bowlers for Sylhet as he ended up with four wickets for 75 while left-arm spinner Enamul Haque and leg-spinner Alok Kapali bagged two wickets each.

In reply, Sylhet ended the day on five for one, lost opener Imtiaz Hossain for a duck off the bowling of Abu Hider.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Chattogram made a steady start and posted 261 for four after the first day against Barishal yesterday.

Tamim out of 2nd round

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal sat out the second round of the National Cricket League due to experiencing some pain in his rib cage yesterday. Tamim, who even went to Fatullah to play for Chattogram against Barishal, had to return after he felt some pain in his rib cage as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) physician suggested that he rest for two days.

The 30-year-old will be examined again on Saturday, after which it will be known whether or not the injury is a serious one.

Irfan Shukkur and Pinak Ghosh put on a 54-run opening stand before the latter became the first of two victims of left-arm spinner Monir Hossain after scoring 19. Skipper Mominul Haque continued his poor run, being trapped leg before for 15 by Mohammad Ashraful while Tasamul Haque also departed cheaply for 28.

But it was Yasir Ali, making a comeback to the side after failing a fitness test previously, who held the ship together alongside Mahidul Islam as the pair added an unbeaten 117 runs for the fifth wicket. Yasir and Mahidul will resume the second day on 68 and 69 runs respectively.

SCORES IN BRIEF

CHATTOTGRAM V BARISHAL
CHATTOTGRAM: 261 for 4 in 90 overs (Mahidul Islam 69 not out, Yasir Ali 68 not out; Monir 2-70)
DHAKA V RANGPUR
DHAKA: 314 for 4 in 90 overs (Saif Hassan 120 retired hurt, Rony Talukdar 65; Sohrwardi 2-80)
RAJSHAH V KHULNA
RAJSHAH: 261 all-out in 85.3 overs (Junaid Siddique 51; Mehedi Hasan 4-38, Rubel Hossain 2-51, Mustafizur 2-64)
SYLHET V DHAKA METROPOLIS
DHAKA: 246 all-out in 83.4 overs (Mahmudullah 63, Shahidul 54; Rejaur 4-75, Enamul Haque 2-52)
SYLHET: First innings 5 for 1 (Enamul 4 not out; Abu Hider 1-4) trails by 241 runs