



The Bangladesh contingent, led by swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila, march down the athletics track of the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu during the opening ceremony of the 13th South Asian Games yesterday.

## Spikers eye bronze after semi defeat to Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu



Bangladesh went down fighting in a straight-sets defeat against Pakistan in the second semifinal of the men's volleyball event of the 13th South Asian Games at the Tripureshwar Covered Hall in Kathmandu yesterday.

Alipour Arozi's men started the match poorly, losing the first set by a 25-15 margin before putting up a better show with a 25-21 defeat in the second set. The men in red and green gave Pakistan, one of the title-contenders, a run for their money in the third set, but eventually lost that too by 26-24 points.

While Bangladesh will still have another chance for a medal, something that the volleyball team never managed in the Games' history, when they take on Sri Lanka in the bronze-medal deciding match today.

"Our boys were fearful of Pakistan and lost the first set poorly. But they did put up a fight, but without any result," Arozi told reporters after the match.

"I would have been happy with a result, winning a set maybe. I hope we will win some sets against Sri Lanka," the Iranian coach added.

However, the match against Sri Lanka will not be much easier as the islanders gave defending champions India a fight in a 3-1 sets defeat in the first semifinal yesterday.

Bangladesh captain Horoshit Biswas was confident, though, about not passing up a second chance to win a medal.

"We will have a team meeting tonight where we will discuss our strategy and the mistakes from the last game. We will have to fight for the medal and we will do our best," Horoshit said.

## Riyad to be fit for start of BBPL?

SPORTS REPORTER



Mahmudullah Riyad, who is undergoing a rehabilitation programme after suffering a hamstring injury on the tour of India, is expected to be fit for the start of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL), which begins December 11.

The experienced batsman had to hobble off the field after scoring 39 on the second day of the second Test in Kolkata last month and was unable to take any further part in the match.

It was later revealed that the 33-year-old had a Grade 1 hamstring injury, which would take at least 14 days to heal.

The cricketer is expected to start running from tomorrow and if he does not face any problems during the running session, he is expected to start batting.

"He had an ultra-sonogram today [Sunday] and there is no sign of a severe injury. Before returning to competitive cricket he will need to pass a fitness test but with the way he is improving, I don't think that will be a problem for him," a member of the BCB medical committee said yesterday. "Mahmudullah is under the supervision of national team physio Julian Calefatto and is set to start light running within the next two days."

Meanwhile, pace bowler Khaled Ahmed, who had undergone knee surgery and has been out of cricket for the past six months, is all set to return to bowling after completing his rehabilitation programme on December 5.

"I will bowl with low intensity from December 5 and hopefully will bowl in full rhythm from December 20. If there is any team that is willing to take me for the BPL, I am ready to play the latter stages. But I am not going to rush things because Test cricket is the most important for me and I am not willing to compromise anything for that," said Khaled.

## Scheduling controversy at the fore as booters face Bhutan today

ATIQUE ANAM from Kathmandu



As Bangladesh take on Bhutan in the opening match of the men's football event of the 13th South Asian Games in Kathmandu today, the plans and ambitions in the tournament took a backseat, overtaken by controversy surrounding very hectic scheduling of the event.

The schedule was altered at the eleventh hour following India's pull-out, with organisers turning this into a round-robin format event of five teams.

While the other teams might have heaved a sigh of relief to see the regional powerhouse not taking part, some of the coaches and players voiced their anger over the tight scheduling which will see each team play four matches in six days during the round-robin stage.

At the pre-tournament press conference at the Dasarath Rangasala yesterday, Maldives coach Petar Segrt was the most vocal about the ridiculousness of the new schedule as he felt his team were the hardest hit while 'certain other teams' were in an advantageous position.

"It is ridiculous that a team did not come and they [organisers] changed the format. They should have kept the original schedule and given 3-0 wins to the other teams for the matches against India, which is the FIFA and AFC norm," the German said.

"I cannot risk the health of my players. In the absence of India and in case we opt out, it is easy to see which teams will go

to the final. It is clear who wants to be champions," said Segrt, whose charges will have to play matches on consecutive days twice unlike hosts Nepal and the other favourites Bangladesh, who will have to play matches on consecutive days only once.

Sri Lanka coach Paneer Ali, whose team are in a similar situation like Maldives, was equally vocal against the new schedule.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day, who was more concerned about today's game against Bhutan, was no less forgiving in his assessment of the situation.

"It's a schedule I have never seen before and I hope I will never see in future. It's a ridiculous set of games in a short space of time for players' welfare. I don't agree with it. I think it's wrong but we have to get on with that," Day said, adding that the players' welfare was of most importance to him while hinting that he might have to shuffle his playing eleven drastically in a bid to save legs and not risk injuries.

On the aspect of the challenge of facing Bhutan, whom Bangladesh beat comfortably twice in friendly matches in Dhaka recently, the coach was of the

opinion that they will have to work hard to win.

"I think it was not easy games against Bhutan last month rather we played very well. May be that day the condition of the Dhaka pitch helped us more than Bhutan. It's going to be a tough game tomorrow because they have a good chance to do well here because of the altitude," Day said. "However, it's about us and how we perform on the matchday. If we perform as well as we possibly can, we have good chance to do well in the competition."

Bangladesh, the champions of the 1999 and 2010 editions, came to Nepal on November 27, without having any preparation camp at home and had issues with altitude and the cold in Kathmandu. But skipper Jamal Bhuiyan, one of the three senior players in the side along with defender Yeasin Khan and striker Nabib Newaz Jibon, was looking forward to a positive outcome.

"Hopefully we can do something good in this tournament. The schedule is a little bit tight but we have to live with that. The players are adopting to it. We have to adopt to play in this condition," the 29-year-old midfielder said.

Following the opening match against Bhutan, which will kick off at 1:15pm (BST) today, Bangladesh will play against SAFF champions Maldives the following day. They will have a day's rest before facing Sri Lanka and two more days' rest ahead of the final group game against defending champions Nepal on November 8. The final will be held on December 10.



Bangladesh football coach Jamie Day instructs his charges during training at the APF Ground in Kathmandu yesterday, ahead of today's opening match of the South Asian Games against Bhutan.

PHOTO: BOA

## Anik fails dope test

SPORTS REPORTER



Promising left-arm pacer Qazi Anik is set to receive a suspension after failing a dope test during the National Cricket League (NCL), chief selector Minhajul Abedin, who is also head of the NCL technical committee, confirmed yesterday.

Anik, who represented Dhaka Metropolis in the NCL, tested positive for banned substances during the dope test and was withdrawn from the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) players' draft as well.

"We have been informed by the medical team that he tested positive in the dope test during the

NCL and for that reason we decided he would play no further part in the NCL. We also decided not to include his name in the BBPL players draft.

"However, we are still waiting for the full report from the medical committee and will only take a decision after receiving it. He was a part of some of our programmes but we have decided not to include him in our structure until we get the full report," Minhajul told reporters yesterday.

According to the bylaws, any cricketer failing the dope test can get a ban between two and five years. Anik was part of the Bangladesh Under-19 team in the last edition of ICC Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand and the left-arm seamer was rated as one of the brightest prospects.

## Suspended one-year ban for Shahid

SPORTS REPORTER



Out of favour national pacer Mohammad Shahid has been handed a suspended one-year ban by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for violating the code of conduct in the recently-concluded National Cricket League (NCL).

Shahid will be eligible to play during this period but the cricketer will be under the scanner and if he has any further troubles with regards to disciplinary issues in the future, the ban will be activated immediately.

The 31-year-old was implicated in an incident involving another national discard, pacer Shahadat Hossain, and young off-spinner Arafat Sunny Jr. The fallout from that incident saw the BCB last month ban Shahdat for five years, with two of those years suspended. Shahid was mentioned in the match officials' report for starting the incident.

The BCB disciplinary committee called both Shahid and Arafat to the hearing and the latter was also handed a suspended one-year sentence after being found guilty of a level 2 offence for provoking Shahadat. "Both of them [Shahid and Arafat]

committed level two offences and were handed suspended sentences. Although they are not banned immediately, the committee will monitor their on and off field activities. If they are guilty of another offence, the ban will be activated immediately," a BCB official said yesterday.

According to the official who was part of the hearing, Shahadat called Arafat on two occasions on the field and when he did not respond, the pacer lost his temper.

It was learnt that Shahid first pushed Arafat and screamed: "Why don't you listen to your elder brother". That made Shahadat angry and he started slapping his teammate.

Meanwhile, Shahadat's prayer for a full hearing was granted by the BCB but they did not lessen the punishment as he was found guilty of a level 4 offence. He was also fined Tk 3,00,000.

Shahadat, who has played 38 Tests, 51 ODIs and six T20Is, has been out of favour since his arrest in 2015 for assaulting his domestic help, which led to a temporary suspension.

On the other hand, Shahid made his Test debut in 2015 and played five Tests, picking up as many wickets. The cricketer also played a T20I in 2016, which was his last international match.

## BPL match timings changed

SPORTS REPORTER

The start times of matches of the upcoming Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League have been changed.

The first match of the day on a weekday will now begin at 1:30 pm instead of 12:30 pm while the second match will start from 7:00 pm instead of 5:20 pm. The timings for Friday fixtures remained the same with the first match beginning at 2:00 pm and the second match at 7:00 pm. Saturday match timings were also changed to weekday timings.

The BPL will this time be held in five phases, with the tournament beginning in Dhaka before moving to Chattogram. The third phase will see the tournament return to Dhaka before Sylhet will host the fourth phase. The final phase, which includes the qualifiers and the final, will take place in Dhaka.

The opening ceremony will take place on December 8 before the tournament commences with the first match on December 11 between Chattogram Challengers and Sylhet Thunder at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

This season, the tournament will be a special edition with the BCB staging it on their own accord without the involvement of the franchises and naming it the Bangabandhu BPL in celebration of the 100th birth anniversary of father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.



Nazmul Hossain Shanto, the captain of the Bangladesh team that will play in the SA Games T20 event, boards a bus for the airport ahead of their departure for Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED