



The Nepal team, which arrived in Dhaka on Thursday, train yesterday at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground ahead of two FIFA friendlies against Bangladesh as their three-day quarantine period ended. The matches are scheduled for November 13 and 17 at Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# 'Time for players to give back'

SPORTS REPORTER



Having mentioned the range of facilities Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has been providing the national footballers, BFF president Kazi Salahuddin wants return from the players through performance on the field.

The four-time BFF president made the statement during a press conference arranged to inform the media about the two FIFA international friendlies against Nepal, scheduled to be held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Nov 13 and 17.

Asked if the players could receive special bonus for wins, Salahuddin said, "We have always placed players on the receiving end of financial benefits, including giving allowance apart from different facilities. Today [Sunday] before coming out of home, I received a call from the coach [Jamie Day], who informed me that the players have demanded the rest of new contracts' five percent money from the clubs," Salahuddin said.



"You know how the reduction regarding the payment of Bangladesh Premier League is taking place. I will give them but they will also have to pay dividends on the ground because it is about time to give each other," added the BFF boss, who later sat with the head coach to discuss about the players' demand.

"The clubs did agree to pay more than 25 percent of new contracts earlier but Salam Murshedy has already managed to raise it to 35 percent after convincing the clubs. Today I told Jamie that I never promised to ensure 40 percent payment of new contract although I told the players

I would try my best for them. I told the coach to ask the players to be patient and concentrate entirely on the matches. I reckon I should be able to handle the issue but I need some additional time," Salahuddin told The Daily Star after the meeting with Day.

The BFF president was also surprised to learn about the demands ahead of the two international friendlies.

Salahuddin further mentioned that the players have to perform and journalists should ask the question to the players. "Everything including foreign coaches are

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being provided to them and I think time has come that the footballers perform on the ground to win matches," said the BFF president.

The BFF president also stated that two the international friendlies will be dedicated to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as part of the birth centenary of the father of the nation, instead of the four to five programmes which they unfortunately could not arrange due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, vice-president and national teams committee chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed assured that they are going to arrange the matches maintaining health guidelines of FIFA, World Health Organisation and the government.

He further informed that the Covid-19 tests of both teams have already been performed, which returned negative results. He also said both teams will undergo two more rounds of Covid-19 tests on November 10 and 14.

BFF is expected to sell around 8,000 tickets for each match and Bangladesh Television is scheduled to telecast both matches live from the venue.

## BFF wants independent venue

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin yesterday claimed that the status of the Bangabandhu National Stadium as an international football venue is in danger and it is due only to BFF's relations with the FIFA and AFC that international matches are still being allowed to be staged there.

The BFF boss said this replying to a journalist's query regarding the haphazard state of the country's premier multisport venue, which will host two FIFA friendly matches between Bangladesh and Nepal next week.

"After getting elected recently, I and my committee decided that we would go to the Prime Minister and ask for a FIFA-compliance stadium," Salahuddin said.

"I have already talked about this with a few and we will take this step maybe within one month that we get a FIFA-compliance stadium. The (international stadium) of the stadium where we are playing now can be cancelled anytime. FIFA/AFC are allowing this on the basis of our relation," said the BFF boss.

The BFF boss's concern is very valid, whether or not there is a real threat from the world football governing body over its international status, as the sporting venue hosts a myriad of non-sporting establishments and activities round the year,



posing security risk to players and spectators during matchdays.

It is quite unique that unlike other countries, most of the stadiums in our country are used for multiple purposes, accommodating business activities from small to large, attracting cross-section of people. High-profile international tournaments force authorities to keep the other establishments shut which leads them to financial losses while still not fully mitigating the security risks associated.

And then there is also the issue of continuous renovation at this aging stadium, which was built in the mid-'50s of the last century. The infrastructure has been renovated countless times at massive cost, yet facilities including capacity of floodlights and seating arrangement at galleries remain way below international standard not to mention the lack of washroom facilities.

## MESSI the supersub

AGENCIES



Lionel Messi came off the bench to score twice and lead Barcelona to a 5-2 home victory over Real Betis on Saturday, snapping a four-game winless streak in La Liga for the Catalans.

Barca's captain was surprisingly left out of the starting lineup by coach Ronald Koeman, who later explained that Messi was feeling a little discomfort after the 2-1 win over Dynamo Kyiv in mid-week and had agreed to start on the bench.

"Since yesterday we were talking about some discomfort he was feeling since the game and we decided that the best thing was to leave him on the bench in case we needed him," Koeman said.

There was however a bad news for Barca as Ansu Fati is set for several months on the sidelines after sustaining a knee injury during win over Betis.

A Barca statement said Fati, who turned 18 last month, had ruptured the internal meniscus in his left knee and that the club were currently weighing up different treatment options, without giving details on when he could expect to return.

Fati was included in the Spain squad for their upcoming fixtures against the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany but is unlikely to return to action for the rest of the year.



### BANGABANDHU T20 Cup

## Shakib among players to take fitness tests

SPORTS REPORTER



With the threat of coronavirus transmission still looming over Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is all set to host the second tournament amid the pandemic in the form of the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 Cup.

Players in the draft list for the tournament -- other than national, high performance and under-19 cricketers who played last month's BCB President's Cup -- will start appearing for mandatory fitness tests from today, which they will have to pass to take part in the tournament.

A total of 113 cricketers will give the fitness test in the next two days. According to Yakub Chowdhury Dalim, the strength and conditioning coach of the high-performance unit, the players will have to cross the 11-point benchmark for the beep test. However, he also added that senior players like Tushar Imran, Abdur Razzak and others may be given some leeway.

"We will do the beep tests of the players, dividing them into groups of 20 cricketers each. They have to pass the 11-point mark which has been kept as the benchmark. Obviously, fitness plays a huge part for players who will be returning after a long gap. Earlier we had done the yo-yo test for players of the national, high performance and the under-19 teams but for others in the draft list we will conduct the beep test. In future, we will gradually introduce the yo-yo test for everyone," said Dalim.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who returned from the US after the end of his one-year ban by the ICC for not reporting corrupt approaches from a bookie, will also appear in the fitness test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

The top-ranked ODI all-rounder was however in hot water as he attended an

inauguration of a super shop in the capital less than twelve hours since his return from the US, contrary to health safety guidelines of going into quarantine after returning from abroad, even if the returnee has a Covid-19 negative certificate. The champion all-rounder tested negative when he took the coronavirus test on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh T20 skipper Mahmudullah Riyad -- who was supposed to travel to Pakistan to take part in the Pakistan Super League playoffs for Multan Sultans -- tested positive twice for the virus and is currently in self isolation.

"I had done the test before leaving for Pakistan and I was shocked after the result came positive on November 6. So, I took another test to make sure and it came back positive again. At the moment I don't have any physical problem but I had a bit of a cold two days back. Currently, I am in home isolation," said Mahmudullah.

Tigers' ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal however tested negative and will travel to Pakistan tomorrow to take part in the PSL for Lahore Qalandars. Tamim is expected to take part in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup after returning from his PSL stint. The PSL final is slated for November 17.

Earlier the BCB confirmed the five teams for the Bangabandhu T20 Cup with the players' draft scheduled to take place on November 12. The board had also finalised the gradings of the players in four grades -- A, B, C and D. Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman are in grade A and will receive Taka 15 lakh each.

Since Mahmudullah tested positive, the board is yet to announce any replacement for him in grade A.

There are 20 players in Grade B, who will receive Tk 10 lakh each, and grade C has 25 cricketers who will receive Tk 6 lakh each while young cricketers in grade D will get Tk four lakh each.



Lazio substitute Felipe Caicedo celebrates his stoppage-time goal with coach Simone Inzaghi as his strike earned a 1-1 draw at home to Juventus in Serie A yesterday after Cristiano Ronaldo, who was taken off in the second half after appearing to hurt his ankle, had given the champions a first-half lead.

PHOTO: REUTERS

**FIRST ROUND: MATCH 6**

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