

Minister Group Rajshahi might get a boost in the form of their premier all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin's return in their Bangabandhu T20 Cup encounter against Gemcon Khulna in Mirpur today. The all-rounder, who was sidelined after an ankle injury last month ahead of the five-team tournament, did bowling and batting practice at the BCB Academy Ground yesterday and the Rajshahi team management remains hopeful of getting his services today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## With better planning and prep, things can only get better

ATIQUE ANAM

Following the 5-0 defeat against Qatar in a World Cup qualifying fixture in Doha on Friday night, Bangladesh coach Jamie Day was quick to emphasise that the margin of defeat, despite it being the biggest of his tenure, was not an unexpected one. Instead, the coach

If we move away from the scoreline and the gulf in statistics of the two teams in this match, there is reason to be optimistic about, especially if we focus on how things were at this stage five years ago.

In the eight matches in the previous edition of the qualifiers, Bangladesh had conceded a grand total of 32 goals against two scored, with only a single point in the bag. This time with five matches

are still very much in the race for qualification for the Asian Cup in 2023 despite being bottom of Group E with a single point. The reason is that the other two teams in the group -- India and Afghanistan -- are within knocking distance.

India are just two points ahead of Bangladesh and Afghanistan only three. Bangladesh will host both these countries as well as Oman in their three remaining matches between March and June 2021. Judging by the previous performances against those two South Asian teams -- a 1-0 defeat against Afghanistan in Dushanbe and a 1-1 draw against India in Kolkata -- positive results in those matches are not unachievable.

But to achieve positive results, there needs to be proper planning and preparation, something which was not there for the Qatar match. The coach had always said that five weeks' training and practice matches against Nepal or those against lower-tier Qatari clubs were not ideal preparation. Now Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin seems to have weighed in on those views.

Talking to reporters at the BFF office yesterday, Salahuddin said he would try to convince clubs to release players one month before the next qualifying matches as he felt 10 days' preparation was not enough. He also said that he would do his best to ensure Bangladesh play against 'superior teams like Malaysia and Thailand' before facing India and Afghanistan.

With at least three months before the next qualifying fixture, the players should get back to full fitness through domestic competition and the team should be bolstered by the return of a number of key players who were missing from the game against Qatar due to injury.

If the coach's wishes are realised and the president's words are reflected in action, there is no reason not to believe that the worst of the qualifying campaign is over and things can only get better from here.



### WORLD CUP/ASIAN CUP QUALIFYING (GROUP E)

Team	P	W	D	L	G/F	G/A	PTS
Qatar	6	5	1	0	16	1	16
Oman	5	4	0	1	11	4	12
Afghanistan	5	1	1	3	2	11	4
India	5	0	3	2	3	5	3
Bangladesh	5	0	1	4	2	13	1

wanted to take the positives from the match while looking forward to what comes next.

"We'll take the positives out of today's game and we're looking forward to the next year when we play the next three games," the coach said in his post-match reaction after heaping praise on young goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico and the overall discipline and organisation of the team.

gone, four of which were away matches. Bangladesh have conceded only 13 goals against two scored. Although the men in red and green have not shown any considerable improvement in scoring goals, defensively they have been far better these days.

The defeat against Qatar may have officially ended Bangladesh's World Cup qualification chances, but they

## Fed Cup deferred by three days

SPORTS REPORTER

The Federation Cup, the football season's curtain-raising tournament, has been deferred by three days and will now start on December 22 after Sheikh Russel and trouble-hit Mukti Joddha Sangsads sought more time to prepare their squads.

"Sheikh Russel's assistant coach is involved with the national team so they sought some time to prepare their team while Mukti Joddha Sangsads are in financial trouble," said professional league committee manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansari.

It was also decided that contestants for the 2021 AFC Cup be based on the Bangladesh Premier League standings of 2018-19 season as the 2019-20 was cancelled due to pandemic.



### NEW ZEALAND ON CUSP OF VICTORY

Daryl Mitchell and Neil Wagner celebrate with Tim Southee after the latter dismissed West Indies batsman John Campbell in the first innings. New Zealand's bowlers twice ripped through the West Indies batting lineup. A relentless swing attack spearheaded by Southee, who picked up four wickets in the first innings, left the West Indies struggling for survival with only four wickets left and a 185-run deficit after the third day of the first Test in Hamilton on Saturday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## WHAT TO WATCH

### T SPORTS

Bangabandhu T20 Cup  
Dhaka vs Chattogram  
Live from 1:30 pm  
Khulna vs Rajshahi  
Live from 6:30 pm  
**SONY SIX & TEN 1**  
Australia vs India  
Second T20I  
Live from 6:00 pm

### STAR SPORTS

Live from 2:10 pm  
**STAR SPORTS 1**  
South Africa vs England  
First ODI  
Live from 2:00 pm  
**STAR SPORTS SELECT 1**  
English Premier League  
West Brom vs Crystal Palace  
Live from 1:15 am (Monday)  
**TEN 2**  
Live from 6:00 pm

Sheffield United vs  
Leicester City  
Live from 8:15 pm  
Tottenham vs Arsenal  
Live from 10:30 pm  
Liverpool vs Wolverhampton  
Wanderers  
Live from 1:15 am (Monday)  
**TEN 2**  
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)

Serie A  
Verona vs Cagliari  
Live from 5:30 pm  
AS Roma vs Sassuolo  
Live from 8:00 pm  
Crotone vs Napoli  
Live from 11:00 pm  
Sampdoria vs AC Milan  
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)

# Below-par Shakib bracing for impact

MAZHAR UDDIN



Fans were eager to see Shakib Al Hasan return to action as he made a comeback to cricket after completing a one-year ban, imposed by the ICC, on October 29 this year.

The Bangabandhu T20 Cup was thought to be the ideal platform for Shakib to announce his return and, although it was understood that the left-hander would take time to adapt and adjust after a year without competitive cricket, Gemcon Khulna snapped him up.

Many also opined that a player of Shakib's world-class calibre would not take long to find his mojo and begin putting in performances.

The top-ranked ODI all-rounder made a mark with the ball right away and although he has just picked up three wickets in five games, the left-arm er is the most economical among those who have bowled more than 10 overs in the tournament and has bowled a tight line and length consistently. That bit of venom which separates his bowling was also seen immediately as bowlers struggled to judge his flight and length.

Shakib has bowled a total of 19 overs in five matches at a miserly economy rate of 4.68, recording his best figures against Beximco Dhaka. In that game, he bowled two consecutive maidens.

Even then, neither his bowling or batting

have lived up to expectations and he has had a relatively quiet tournament so far.

Scores of 15, 12, 3, 11, and 14 belie Shakib's batting ability, which was underscored by a phenomenal performance in 2019 World Cup, where he scored 606 runs with two hundreds and five fifties. He also picked up eleven wickets to become the only cricketer in the history to score over 500 runs and bag ten wickets in a single World Cup campaign.

However, he has remained off-colour with the bat in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup and, despite being able to start the innings with a lot of promise, he has been prone to soft dismissals. Among his five dismissals, four were after Shakib tried to play over the top and mistimed it for a simple catch.

Shakib even opened the innings twice in this tournament, perhaps for the first time in his career. There was a sense that he has been holding himself back and not being able to express with the bat. Or perhaps it is magnified because Shakib has never gone this long without making an impact.

The charismatic cricketer, who is known for his extraordinary preparation, is desperate to return to his best and it was learned that Shakib had already asked for footage of his batting to assess his mistakes.

As Shakib mentioned during the World Cup in 2019, he needs a kick to fire. Perhaps he is waiting for that kick within himself and that might be today when his side faces Minister Rajshahi.



In this long journey, all our achievements belong to distinguished Landowners, Customers, Suppliers, Contractors and every individual of SEL family. On this auspicious day of ours, we express heartiest gratitude, warm felicitation and best wishes to all involved in our mission.



**SEL** SINCE 1983

**The Structural Engineers Ltd.**

SEL Centre, 29, West Panthapath, Dhaka-1205

Phone: 9116572, e-mail: info@sel.com.bd, [www.sel.com.bd](http://www.sel.com.bd)

