



The return of experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim will be a sweet dilemma for the team management against New Zealand as the in-form wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan Sohan has set himself into a vibrant rhythm with solid performances during the Zimbabwe and Australia series. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Arambagh demoted to first div; Brothers cleared

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League outfit Arambagh Krira Sangha have been demoted to the third-tier for their involvement in live betting, spot fixing, match manipulation and online betting in three BPL matches while Brothers Union, another club which under investigation, have been cleared of the allegations.

Besides, 14 footballers of Arambagh including two foreign recruits -- Smith Bradie Christian of Australia and Chizoba Christopher Lyikwobe of Nigeria -- have been suspended from all footballing activities for various terms ranging from two to five years.

The club's former president Minhazul Islam, former team manager Mohammad Gowhor Jahangir Rusho, assistant team manager Mohammad Arif Hossain and fitness trainer Maidul Islam Sheikh of India were handed life-time ban from

the BPL. They considered an exemplary punishment to demote the club two tiers from the top-tier league," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said. "The committee did not find any information, evidence or voice records incriminating Brothers Union, which is why the club was cleared of the allegations."

Arambagh, who had collected only one point from the 12 matches of the first leg in the league, eventually ended up with eight points and finished 12th among 13 teams. Brothers were the other relegated side, having finished bottom of the table with seven points.

Although there had been allegations of match-fixing against clubs in the top-tier club football in the past, no club had previously been relegated by the BFF. Some officials and players, however, were slapped with fines and bans on some of those occasions.

This time, though, the fate of Arambagh looked sealed, provided the allegations were proven, since the investigation



football while the team's physio Sanjoy Bose of India and game analyst Azizul Sheikh of India were banned for 10 years.

The club will have to play in the first division for two years without the option of promotion at the end of first year. The club has also been fined Tk 500,000 lakh, to be paid within one month.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Disciplinary Committee of Bangladesh Football Federation on Thursday, following a six-month long investigation, started in February over a tip-off by Asian the Football Confederation (AFC) regarding five BPL matches -- Arambagh KS vs Abahani, Arambagh KS vs Sheikh Russel, Arambagh KS vs Mohammedan, Brothers Union vs Bashundhara Kings and Brothers Union vs Abahani.

"The Disciplinary Committee did not consider the present status of Arambagh KS, which was already relegated to Bangladesh Championship League from

had started at the behest of the AFC. The continental body, which monitors professional leagues of different countries through third party, had asked the BFF to investigate the suspicious matches. Except for the Nigerian footballer, the fixed-match identification committee reached almost every alleged player, official or coaching staff either face-to-face or through virtual platform.

The BFF will send the decisions to the AFC and will seek imposition of continental punishment on the foreign nationals involved.

Former national team captain-turned-coach Golam Sarwar Tipu thinks that the punishment is exemplary.

"It is understandable that BFF took the decision in light of AFC regulations and I think they did the right thing by demoting Arambagh," Tipu said. "I think online or spot betting will be checked now and the clubs will be aware of being involved in such heinous activities."

## 'IMPORTANT TO MAKE NURUL FEEL HE IS PART OF THE TEAM'

SPORTS REPORTER



As experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim returns for the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand, the Tigers think-tank are facing a rather sweet problem as they wonder how to accommodate another wicketkeeper-batsman, Nurul Hasan Sohan, who impressed many on his comeback to international cricket.

Nurul returned to the shortest format after over four years in Zimbabwe in July this year after Mushfiqur was forced to return home before the T20I series. The 27-year-old grabbed the opportunity with both hands and continued that by performing especially well against Australia in the five-match T20I series earlier this month.

Known as one of the best glovemen in the country, Nurul remained a livewire behind the stumps and was also able to play a few handy knocks late down the order with the bat.

However, Mushfiqur's return means that Nurul will have to expectedly make way for the proven campaigner considering the balance of the playing eleven.

Since Nurul has been enjoying something of a purple patch, it will be important for the team

Nurul needs to play more and perform to make an impact. Definitely, it is a sweet problem that will also put Mushfiqur under some sort of pressure, which is the kind of healthy competition every team wants to have. I will hope this thing will replicate in the ODI format too where specialization is important for the betterment of Bangladesh cricket in the coming days.

NAZMUL ABEDEEN FAHIM

management to make sure the cricketer does not feel excluded. What will be crucial is how the Bangladesh team tackles this sweet dilemma and makes the most of it.

"Mushfiqur has played a lot more than Nurul and I think it is very obvious for him to make way for the senior player when he is available. I think for someone like Nurul it is important to create spots intentionally as they might get demotivated if they are dropped despite impressing with their performances. It is important that these players are not fit in accidentally but that room is made

for them in the coming days," prominent coach and mentor to many national cricketers Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told The Daily Star.

There may have been a few question marks over Mushfiqur's keeping over the years and with options available in the form of Nurul and Liton Das, Fahim believes the time has come to create a passage for a smooth handover of the baton in the coming days.

"I think it is important to rotate players as the current pandemic situation makes it difficult for the cricketers to play continuously. It is also important to make Nurul feel that he is part of the team and allow him to believe that he is good enough," he said.

With an average of just over 16 in 17 T20Is, Nurul will have to keep pushing the selectors through performances whenever he gets an opportunity, which will also keep Mushfiqur on his toes as well.

"Nurul needs to play more and perform to make an impact. Definitely, it is a sweet problem that will also put Mushfiqur under some sort of pressure, which is the kind of healthy competition every team wants to have. I will hope this thing will replicate in the ODI format too where specialization is important for the betterment of Bangladesh cricket in the coming days," added Fahim.

## ALL EYES ON DJOKOVIC as US Open gets underway today

AGENCIES

usopen Serbian top seed Novak Djokovic will be the centre of attention when the final Grand Slam of the 2021 calendar, US Open, showdown begins today on the hardcourts at Flushing Meadows.

Djokovic will try to complete the first calendar-year men's singles Grand Slam in 52 years and become the all-time men's leader in Slam titles by capturing the US Open.

After winning this year's Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon, a fourth victory for Djokovic at Flushing Meadows will enable him to enter an exclusive club.

Only five players have previously won all four majors in the same year, with Australian great Rod Laver the only man to have achieved the feat in the Open era.

Five past champions won't be in the field when the showdown begins Monday on the hardcourts at Flushing Meadows, with Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Stan Wawrinka, Juan Martin del Potro and 2020 winner Dominic Thiem absent due to injuries.

That leaves the main obstacles in Djokovic's path to a 21st career Slam crown as a set of rising 20-something talents trying to build their trophy hauls -- Russia's second-ranked Daniil Medvedev, Greece's third-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas and fourth-ranked Olympic champion Alexander Zverev of Germany.



### HIGHLIGHTS

- Novak Djokovic will attempt to complete a rare calendar sweep of the Grand Slams and go past Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal in terms of major titles.
- This will be the first Grand Slam tournament since the 1997 Australian Open not to feature Federer, Nadal, Serena Williams, or Venus Williams in the main singles draw.
- The tournament will be the first Grand Slam since the coronavirus pandemic started to be allowed a 100% capacity throughout.
- Spectators at the US Open will be required to show proof of at least one vaccination dose.

Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty is widely considered as the player to beat in the women's singles, although Japan's defending champion Naomi Osaka is aiming to lift the title for the third time in four years. With an all-court game that has yielded five titles so far this year, 25-year-old Barty has cemented her place as the world number one and goes into the US Open as the favourite.

After lifting the Cincinnati title last week, Wimbledon champion Barty has notched a tour-high of match wins (40) in 2021 and a 14-1 winning record against top-20 opponents.

Meanwhile, players' mental health is also in focus after four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka led the charge for her fellow athletes this year.

The 23-year-old withdrew from the French Open after being fined and threatened with expulsion for refusing to attend media conferences, which she said had an adverse impact on her mental health, and disclosed she had suffered from depression for years.

The incident led Roland-Garros organisers to concede that the sport's governing bodies needed to do better and the United States Tennis Association (USTA) this week announced a mental health initiative for players in partnership with the Mount Sinai Health System.



## SHAKIB, MUSTAFIZUR IN LINE FOR IPL

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman gears up for his turn while all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan looks on during fielding session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday ahead of the five-match T20I series against New Zealand. There was a good news for both the players as BCB cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan said yesterday that the board was positive about their participation in the second phase of the Indian Premier League (IPL). "Shakib applied for NOC yesterday while Mustafiz had placed his application a few days ago. We will decide on September 1 but the board is positive on this issue and it will be a positive decision," said Akram, adding that their participation will benefit the whole team ahead of T20 World Cup in October. The franchise tournament, which was postponed after March 29 following rising Covid cases in India, will resume on September 19 and will end on October 8 in UAE.