



No established playground in the vicinity? No problem! Turns out, a small patch of vacant crop field should suffice. The picture, taken yesterday from HIRAK PAARA, adjacent to Gobindaganj upazila town of Gaibandha district, highlights the raw sporting spirit of children spread across the country as they engage under minimalist conditions while negating the conviction of cricket being an elitist sport.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

"We know he's [Ross Taylor] a quality player. We want to try to make sure he doesn't have a great send-off - we want to make sure his send-off is as miserable as possible."

Russell Domingo
Bangladesh head coach



Enamul leads premier chess



SPORTS REPORTER

GM Ziaur Rahman could not topple GM Enamul Hossain Razib in the Golden Jubilee of Independence 46th National Premier Chess Championship after playing out a draw against his son - Tahsin Tajwar Zia in the championship's fifth round at the Crown Hall of Hotel Asia Resorts in Paltan yesterday.

Enamul maintained his lead with 4.5 points after a stalemate against Mehdi Hasan Parag to stay ahead of Ziaur, who tallied four points from five matches.

GM Reefat Bin Sattar, IM Minhaz Uddin Sagor and CM Sharif Hossain occupy joint-third position with 3.5 points while GM Abdullah Al Rakib, GM Niaz Murshed and Tajwar are jointly placed in the fourth position with three points each.



'Here I am'

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Rafa Nadal confirmed his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title on Friday by posting a picture of himself at Melbourne Park on social media and allaying fears that he could miss next month's Australian Open.

Nadal caught the novel coronavirus while playing in an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi this month and said he would make a decision on his future tournaments depending on his "evolution" over the weeks ahead.

"Don't tell anyone ... here I am," Nadal, who is tied on a men's record 20 major titles with Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, said in a Twitter post showing him standing on the Rod Laver Arena court.

Nadal, 35, played in Abu Dhabi after spending four months on the sidelines with a long-term foot problem. He was knocked out at Roland Garros in the French Open semi-finals and was forced to pull out of Wimbledon, the Tokyo Olympics and the U.S. Open.

The positive COVID-19 test cast further doubt on whether the Spaniard would play at the Australian Open - a tournament where he has won once and been runner-up four times.

Nadal will be expected to kick off his preparations for the Grand Slam by returning to the tour for the first time since August at the ATP 250 event in Melbourne from Tuesday.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV

New Zealand vs Bangladesh
1st Test, Day 2
Live from 04:00 am (Sunday)

T SPORTS

Kabaddi
IGP Cup
Live from 04:30 pm

STAR SPORTS HD 1

EPL
Arsenal vs Manchester City
Live from 06:30 pm
Watford vs Tottenham
Hotspur
Live from 09:00 pm
Crystal Palace vs West Ham
Live from 11:30 pm

'Mominul is trying to take pressure off his team'

SPORTS REPORTER



Hoping to change the fortune in the longest format of the game, Bangladesh cricket team have already entered the year 2022 with yet another challenging tour of New Zealand.

With just a win against Zimbabwe in Tests last year, Bangladesh suffered heavily and went on to lose series against West Indies, Sri Lanka and the latest 2-0 whitewash at home against Pakistan to set foot in the second cycle of World Test Championship (WTC) today.

Questions have been asked of the Tigers' approach and the need to upgrade the mentality in cricket's most elite format. Long-term planning has become the need of the hour to revive Bangladesh cricket.

However, Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque is reluctant to ponder on the distant future and is still content with the slow and steady approach.

"At the moment, we aren't thinking of what we will do in Test cricket in 2022. We're going to play most of our series this year in tough conditions. So, rather than thinking of the future, we would like to go slow and think series by series," said Mominul ahead of the first of the two-match Test series in New Zealand.

Interestingly, Mominul's reluctance to think on a broader canvas raises the question, will the scenario transform overnight without long-term planning?

Jalal Yunus, the new chairman of the BCB's cricket operations committee, expressed his views regarding the situation to The Daily Star.

"Look, what Mominul



PHOTO: PHOTOSPORTNZ

said is from a player's point of view as he is trying to take pressure off of his team and keep the environment relaxed. To be honest, it's the management's duty to think about long-term planning.

"I have some long-term plans in store but it will take time. It's important not to hurry rather proceed with a gradual process. I'm willing to have an effective national coaching staff. There is also a plan to prepare the second eleven, to facilitate the national team's pipeline, and also arrange tours in higher-ranked countries outside the national team, be it with the A-team or any other development program."

While Jalal pointed out his aspiration regarding the national team, veteran coach Sarwar Imran recommends digging deep at the root level to yield actual benefit of a

long-term plan.

"Reforming lower-tier cricket is vital. Since I am involved with a third-division team this season, I can say that things did change a lot. We play matches on turf pitches in a good environment and the umpiring has also been good, so far. But this needs to continue and the board should make sure they improve the quality of cricket by bringing competitiveness.

"It's crucial to have the regional cricket association produce players from their region and have a core group of players. Also important, to minimise the gap in standard between first-class cricket and international cricket. I'd love to see our first-class cricket on TV and this can also help to boost the four-day cricket and make it popular," stated Imran.

India win U-19 Asia Cup

AGENCIES

India hammered Sri Lanka by nine wickets in the final of the U-19 Asia Cup to seal their eighth title at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Riding on a fine unbeaten 56 from Angkrish Raghuvanshi, India gunned down the 102-run target in just 22 overs to seal a crushing win against Sri Lanka.

It became a 38-over-a-side contest when play resumed with Sri Lanka limping to 106 for nine. India were set a revised 102-run target in 38 overs via the DLS method which they reached rather comfortably in 21.3 overs with opener Raghuvanshi scoring an unbeaten 56 off 67 balls. India's only loss in the competition came against arch-rivals Pakistan who lost to Sri Lanka in the semifinals.

The tournament provided valuable game time for the Yash Dhull-led side ahead of the U-19 World Cup, beginning in the West Indies from January 14. After the tournament's leading scorer Harnoor Singh departed cheaply in the chase, Raghuvanshi played sensibly alongside Shaik Rasheed (31 not out off 49) to get the job done.

Earlier, Indian bowlers came up with a disciplined bowling effort to restrict Sri Lanka to 106/9. In the last eight editions of the U-19 Asia Cup before this, India had won the title seven times.



Christian Ronaldo scored one and set up another as Manchester United moved up to sixth in the Premier League thanks to a 3-1 over struggling Burnley at Old Trafford on Thursday to maintain their unbeaten start under interim manager Ralf Rangnick.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Tuchel frustrated by Lukaku comments

AFP, LONDON



Thomas Tuchel admitted on Friday that he was frustrated with the "noise" around

Romelu Lukaku's situation at Chelsea after the Belgium forward expressed his dissatisfaction with his role at the club.

The "surprised" Chelsea boss said he would sit down with the 28-year-old to discuss the issues but did not see any evidence that his player was unhappy.

Lukaku rejoined the Premier League side from Inter Milan for a club-record fee of £97.5 million (\$132 million) in August.

He has scored seven times in a season hampered by injury and coronavirus but Chelsea boss Tuchel has at times left him out of the starting XI even when he has been fit.

Lukaku told Sky Italy he was "not happy with the situation" at Stamford Bridge in an interview released on Thursday, but it was understood to have been conducted three weeks ago.

The player has since told ESPN Brazil he had "a couple of conversations" with Tuchel about what the German wanted from him, during which he told his boss

he was "multidimensional".

Tuchel, whose second-placed side face Liverpool this weekend, told his pre-match press conference that the situation was frustrating.

"We don't like it, of course, because it brings noise that we don't need and is not helpful," said the Chelsea boss. "But on the other side, we don't want to make more out of it than it actually is."

"You know very well how it is - it's very easy to take lines out of context, to shorten lines to make headlines, then realise later it's not so bad or what he meant."

Tuchel said he was not aware that Lukaku was unhappy at the club.

"The thing with Romelu is that I don't think anyone in this building is aware he's unhappy," he added.

"That's why (there is) surprise at the statement. That's why we need to check with him now, because I can see no reason why it should be like this."

"So I will wait to see what Romelu has to say and then we will deal with this."

The former Paris Saint-Germain boss said a certain level of tension in a dressing room could be turned into an advantage.

"It's not necessary for the dressing room to be always in harmony," he said.