

## Hockey squad named for AHF Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday declared a 28-member preliminary squad for the AHF Cup in March with the inclusion of three new faces – goalkeeper Nuruzzaman Nayan, midfielders Raju Ahmed Tapu and Abed Uddin. Coach Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy pinned his hopes on all 20 members from the Asian Champions Trophy and recalled five players – Khaled Mahmud Rakin, Milon Hossain, Mahabub Hossain, Razib Das and Ashim Gope, who were dropped from the final squad. Nayan, Tapu and Abed have been called for the squad for the first time.

The players have been asked to report to the coach on February 12 at BKSP with double-dose Covid-19 vaccine certificates and training will get underway the following day.



Mahmudullah Riyad plays with Soumya Sarkar's topknot as Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and others – all former or current national team players playing for different BPL franchises – share a laugh during time off from training at the Sylhet Divisional Cricket Stadium yesterday. (Bottom) All the fun will be set aside and a lot of focus will be on the pitches when the Sylhet three-day leg of the competition starts today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Covid hits shooting team

SPORTS REPORTER

Nilufar Yeasmin has been ruled out of the Indonesia-bound shooting team after returning positive for Covid-19.

The Bangladesh squad was scheduled to leave last night for Indonesia to take part in the ISSF Grand Prix, to be held from February 8 to 18 in Jakarta.

Apart from Nilufar, pistol shooter Shakil Ahmed and rifle shooter Yousuf Ali are not flying with the squad as well as Shakil is yet to complete the second dose of Covid-19 vaccination while Yousuf has a passport related issue. However, both of them are expected to fly by February 8.

Excluding Nilufar, a total of 11 shooters are scheduled to take part in men's and women's 10m, 50m rifle events and men's and women's 10m pistol events.

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The curvy roads through the Lakkatura tea estate suddenly detaches itself from the main road and makes way to the picturesque Sylhet International Stadium, set to welcome back the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) on Monday to its green gardens. The hills and the



bring an air of tranquility, a specialty of the stadium in Sylhet. The surrounding beauty is not diminished when one enters the ground, the green gallery holding sway.

Sylhet historically, also used to bring in big runs in the BPL. But unlike the previous editions, expectations this time

around are tinged with fear that the wickets could once again come into focus for the wrong reasons due to batters' inability to play to T20 tempo. If the recent Independence Cup and the one-day format of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) is anything to go by, run-making will not be easy.

The Sylhet phase will begin with the clash of table toppers – Comilla Victorians and Fortune Barishal – on Monday.

The wickets at Mirpur had always been troublesome for the T20 format but after a Chattogram phase full of big runs, expectations from Sylhet would be to keep the T20-like stroke-play going. In the last Sylhet phase of the BPL, average first innings score was 159 with five teams surpassing 160-run mark. With Bangladesh overall struggling in T20Is, better wickets are of paramount importance. However, in the fifty-over matches of the BCL, average first innings total was 188. A score of 200 was reached only once in a match as spinners continued to gnaw at batters due to the low bounce. Even part-time spinners were difficult to score off. It is also likely that upcoming Afghanistan series matches will not be hosted at Sylhet due to this reversal of wickets' nature.

Hometown boy Rezaur Rahman Raza of Chattogram Challengers was hoping for

better performance from the wickets two days before. "The last few tournaments we had here, we didn't find wickets to be that good. Hoping it will be better in the BPL. That's our belief," he had said.

It was learned that for the BPL, work had been done on getting better surfaces but the execution was not quite there due to shortage of staff and gap in collaboration between main curator and ground staff. Since outer ground wickets also had to be maintained in the past year, resources could not be wholly pooled to focus on the main ground wickets.

"I am expecting tight games because of the wickets and the spin. The teams that bat well as a unit, look like they will win with partnerships and things like that. [Expecting] some high-scoring games but mainly middling scores; not too low, not too high," English all-rounder Moeen Ali stated after his side Comilla's practice yesterday.

Barishal batting consultant Nazmul Abedeen Fahim was hoping that the wickets can help induce excitement and hopefully spread the charm of T20 cricket.

"We have not seen the wicket yet but what we have heard is that a lot of work has been done on the wicket. Everyone is trying so that there is some bounce in this wicket to produce some runs," Faheem said.

## 'It's all love' between Chinese, US curlers

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese curling duo's unexpected gift to their victorious USA opponents at the Beijing Winter Olympics brought a temporary thaw to the chilly atmosphere between the two world powers.

Curlers Ling Zhi and Fan Suyuan presented a set of commemorative pins to Christopher Plys and Vicky Persinger after the Americans prevailed 7-5 in their mixed doubles round-robin encounter on Saturday.

"These will be on my desk for a very, very long time," Plys said of the pins, which he called "just beautiful, something super unique".

"I don't know what it is with the Chinese curlers. We can't really communicate that well, but we always seem to give each other a smile and a fist bump."

Ling, who hails from the wintry northeastern China city of Harbin, said the bonhomie was a "tradition of curling – athletes are friendly to each other".

Ling invited Plys to visit his hometown.

The Beijing Olympics opened on Friday under the shadow of the pandemic and a diplomatic boycott of the Games by the United States and several of its allies over China's record on human rights.

Plys said he doesn't "let our countries' politics get in the way of what's going on".

"At the end of the day we all bleed the same blood and play the same game. It's fun to experience each other's cultures a bit and show them it's all love."

## Big bucks for India's U-19 WC winners

AGENCIES

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Sunday announced cash rewards for the U-19 World Cup-winning Indian team after they outclassed England in a hard-fought final at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Saturday.



Led by Delhi boy Yash Dhull, India chased down 190 with four wickets and 14 balls to spare to be crowned the U-19 World Cup champions for a record-extending fifth time.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah took to social media to announce cash rewards for the players and the members of the support staff. Each player will get Rs 40 lakh while the members of the support staff are set to get Rs 20 lakh.

"I'm pleased to announce the reward of 40 lacs per player and 25 lacs per support staff for the U19 #TeamIndia contingent for their exemplary performance in #U19CWCFinal. You have made India proud," Shah said in a social media post.

The BCCI secretary also congratulated the efforts of the Indian team, which was badly hit by Covid-19 during the group stages.

## India's comfortable win in landmark ODI

AFP, Ahmedabad

Spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar set up India's comfortable six-wicket victory over the West Indies for the hosts' landmark 1,000th one-day international on Sunday.

Rohit Sharma took to the field as India's new full-time ODI captain and his decision to bowl was vindicated by the two spinners as the hosts bowled out the West Indies for 176 in Ahmedabad.

The skipper's top-scoring 60 then helped India romp home in just 28 overs on the day they became the first team to pass the 1,000 ODI milestone.

The West Indies had slipped to 79-7 before Jason Holder hit 57 to salvage some dignity for the visitors.

Leg-spinner Chahal returned figures of 4-49 – including the key wicket of skipper Kieron Pollard for nought – to rattle the West Indies batters.

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj struck first in the third over to send back Shai Hope as an incoming delivery got the wicketkeeper-batsman's inside edge on to the stumps.

India introduced spin in the eighth over and off-spinner Sundar soon made it count, dispatching Brandon King for 13.



Chahal broke the West Indies' back with successive strikes but Holder avoided the hat-trick.

Holder put on 78 runs with Fabien Allen, who made 29, to offer some resistance against India's onslaught.

He went past 2,000 ODI runs and then raised his 11th half-century in the 50-over format but finally fell to Krishna, who finished with figures of 2-29. Rohit came out attacking and dominated returning pace bowler Kemar Roach to smash two fours and one six in the 10th over.

He put on 84 runs with opening partner Ishan Kishan and made his half-century in 42 balls before Alzarri Joseph trapped him lbw, also sending back former captain Virat Kohli in the same over.

Kohli announced his arrival with two successive boundaries but got caught out at long leg two balls later.

Left-arm spinner Hosen got the wicket of Kishan for 28 and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant was run out while backing up at the non-striker's end as India wobbled.

Suryakumar Yadav, who made 34, and debutant Deepak Hooda, who scored 26, saw the team home with their unbeaten stand of 62.



Theo Hernandez rides on the back of Olivier Giroud, who scored twice in three minutes as AC Milan stunned city rivals Inter 2-1 in a thrilling Serie A derby on Saturday, sending the Rossoneri one point off top as the champions' 14-match unbeaten league run came to an end. Ivan Perisic put Inter in front at a raucous San Siro late in the first half before Giroud nudged in an equaliser in the 75th minute and then found the bottom corner three minutes later.

PHOTO: TWITTER