

Stakeholders welcome weekend fixtures



SPORTS REPORTER

Before the introduction of the country's professional football league – Bangladesh League, which had later turned into Bangladesh Premier League – in 2007, the then high-ups of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced plans to hold the league matches every weekend on Friday and Saturday.

15 years following that announcement, the local game's governing body could not live up to their promise to hold the league matches on weekends, blaming the clubs' unwillingness. The participating clubs, though, had pointed fingers at the BFF for frequent postponement of the league fixtures, prompting the clubs to increase their expenditures, especially for the foreign players as well as the training camp.

However, the BFF did manage to commence the opener of the inaugural Bangladesh League on Friday in 2007. They also did it for a few more occasions in the past 15 years but never could maintain holding matches on weekends. There have been instances where no match was played on weekends and that somewhat exposed BFF's organisational abilities.

This time after the game's governing body stated their intention to revert back to weekend fixtures from the upcoming seasons, the stakeholders comprising club officials, coaches and players have welcomed the BFF president Kazi Salahuddin's fresh initiatives. They, however, urged the organisers to stick to the schedule of the league fixtures to bring the country's top league into a stable structure.

Rahmatganj MFS general secretary Imteaz Hamid Sabuj said, "If the season ends within the committed time frame, then it will really be good for the small clubs who always struggled with the funds following the frequent deferrals of the league."

"If you see a few small clubs survive in the top tier league, we expect to end the season within the committed time frame. We realise there is innovation but we actually can understand the benefits and disadvantages of the new schedule only after getting involved in it."

Chatogram Abahani's manager Arman Aziz also hailed the initiatives for achieving a smooth operation of the off-field matters during the season.

"If the BFF can maintain their own schedules, it will really benefit the clubs and country's football. Because of interrupted league schedules, we had often feared compensating for hotel and vehicle bookings before," said Arman.

Country's top coach Maruful Haque said, "The top-tier domestic league is the most important platform to improve the overall game development. If the BFF wants to execute it, they have to follow the systemic way they have decided to implement this time," said Maruful, adding that the methodical coaches also need to be aware of everything regarding season's commitments, in order to prepare their training modules.

The UEFA A license coach, however, urges the BFF to prepare the league fixtures in a manner that allows the clubs to avoid playing big or small matches in succession, so that they bring more competition in the league and avoid injuries of their players.

National goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana said, "I think if everything is maintained as per announcement, it will benefit the players as they would know their season's objectives."

"And consequently, concentration of players will also remain intact and they will be more aware of their fitness."



Veteran off-spinner Salma Khatun (C) discusses plans with skipper Nigar Sultana during a practice session of Bangladesh team in Sylhet yesterday, ahead of today's crucial Women's Asia Cup match against Pakistan, who thrashed Malaysia by nine wickets in their first match yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

Dhawan India captain for SA ODIs

AFP, New Delhi

India named opener Shikhar Dhawan as captain on Sunday for three one-day internationals against South Africa starting this week.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India announced a 16-man squad for the ODIs with batsman Shreyas Iyer named Dhawan's deputy.

Iyer remains on the standby list for this month's T20 World Cup along with ODI teammates Ravi Bishnoi and Deepak Chahar, all of whom are expected to join the T20 team in Australia after the South Africa series.

An on-going T20 series between the two countries ends on Tuesday. The ODI matches start on October 6 in Lucknow.

ODI squad: Dhawan (capt), Gaikwad, Gill, Iyer (vice capt), Patidar, Tripathi, Kishan (wkt), Samson (wkt), Shahbaz, Shardul, Kuldeep, Bishnoi, Mukesh, Avesh, Siraj, Chahar

'Spin is enough to beat Pakistan'

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Even though Bangladesh won only one of their 15 T20Is against Pakistan, all-rounder Rumana Ahmed was optimistic ahead of the two sides' Women's Asia Cup encounter at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, Ground 2 today.

The only time Bangladesh beat Pakistan in the shortest format was in the previous edition of the Asia Cup in 2018. That time the Tigresses beat Pakistan convincingly by seven wickets on their way to clinching their maiden Asia Cup title.

Nigar Sultana and her troops have been in fine form lately – thrashing Thailand by nine wickets in their Asia Cup opener on Saturday after coming into the continental championship after finishing unbeaten champions in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers just a week ago.

"We will obviously bank on our strength and we are heading forward strongly. We have played very good cricket in recent times and, in fact, we are eyeing something big. I can only say that we are progressing. We hope to do well in the next game," Rumana told media yesterday ahead of their game against Pakistan.

Bangladesh are aware that Pakistan are strong against spinners, but the hosts are still



willing to bank on spinners to undo the opponent on home soil.

Bangladesh do have variety in their spin department that comprises leg-spinner Rumana, who bagged three wickets against Thailand, two left-arm spinners in Sanjida Akter and Nahida Akter, and off-spinners Salma Khatun and Shohely Akter.

Rumana hoped such a spin attack should give them the edge on the spin-friendly track in Sylhet. "We know that they are good

against spinners. But, we have attacked them with spin in the past. Our spinners have been doing well for a while, giving their best. I think spin is enough to beat Pakistan."

"We can feel it because of the wicket and the condition. Our pacers did well in New Zealand and South Africa. But at home, spinners have always done well, for both the men's and women's teams. Salma [Khatun] is our best spinner and her spell will be crucial," she said, adding that a score around 140 would be enough today.

Pakistan also started their Asia Cup campaign with a comprehensive victory against Malaysia yesterday. They restricted Malaysia to 57 for nine before getting over the line with nine wickets and 11 overs to spare.

Pakistan's leg-spinner Tuba Hasan, who bagged two wickets against Malaysia, also echoed the same sentiment as Rumana.

"I think all the teams are playing good cricket and it was not an easy game for us [against Malaysia]. Now we are looking forward to our game against Bangladesh. They are a very good side, so we are expecting it will be interesting. Pitch is favouring the spinners and if our bowlers can do well, Pakistan can give their best," said Tuba.

In the other game yesterday, Sri Lanka beat UAE by 11 runs via DLS.



Siddikur earns 60,000 dollars in Taiwan

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Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman showed signs of form which made him an Asian Tour star back in the first part of last decade with a third-place finish in the one-million-dollar Mercuries Taiwan Masters, which concluded yesterday.

Rahman, who last won on the Asian Tour at the Hero Indian Open in 2013, was thrilled with his best finish since the start of the pandemic.

"Oh, it was a wonderful day, I just couldn't putt well today, rest of the game was excellent. Just because of putting I couldn't make a better score, but, overall, I'm happy about my round."

The 37-year-old golfer carded 71 in the last round for an aggregate of nine-under-par (279). The result earned the Bangladeshi golfer 60,000 dollars and will allow him to keep his playing privileges for next season, which was a big relief for the two-time Asian Tour winner.

"That's a big relief for me because I was really struggling from the beginning of this year. I mean, and now I just finished tied third, so I think I have secured my card for next year. Definitely, I will be able to play without tension," he added.

Chan Shih-chang, meanwhile, claimed the title, his first on home soil, but only after a titanic battle with India's Rashid Khan.

'A tragedy beyond comprehension'

AFP, Paris

The death of at least 174 people in an Indonesian stadium stampede "is a dark day for all involved in football and a tragedy beyond comprehension", FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Sunday.

The tragedy on Saturday night in the city of Malang, which also left 180 injured, was one of the world's deadliest sporting stadium disasters.

"The football world is in a state of shock following the tragic incidents that have taken place in Indonesia at the end of the match between Arema FC and Persebaya Surabaya at the Kanjuruhan Stadium," said Infantino.

"All our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, those who have been injured, together with the people of the Republic of Indonesia."

In Spain, La Liga and the Spanish football federation announced there would be a minute's silence before the weekend's remaining matches in the top two divisions.

Italian Serie A tweeted their sympathy. "Sending our condolences and thoughts to the victims, the families and everyone affected by the tragedy in Malang, Indonesia," said the official Lega Serie A account.



Manchester City striker Erling Braut Haaland smashes one at the back of the Manchester United net to complete a stunning hat-trick in their Premier League fixture at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday -- a record third consecutive home Premier League treble for the Norwegian. Haaland's teammate Phil Foden scored a hat-trick too as the Citizens thrashed their city rivals 6-3 in a fairly one-sided Manchester derby. Anthony Martial scored twice while Antony scored the other for the Red Devils.

PHOTO: REUTERS