

## Juniors seek gold in World Kabaddi

SPORTS REPORTER

Although a final berth at the Asian level has turned into a distant dream for Bangladesh senior kabaddi team, their junior counterparts have kept their sights locked on the ultimate prize in the fast approaching 2nd Junior World Kabaddi Championship, scheduled to take place in Iran from February 26 to March 4.

The boys in red and green are scheduled to depart for Iran tonight.

“Our target is to bring gold home as we won bronze last time,” captain Ujjapan Chakma told reporters yesterday.

“I had no hope when I saw this group of guys. The boys, however, had been prepared step-by-step by the Indian coach. We fought against our national B team on level terms in warm-up matches, and even beat them once,” added the Bangladesh captain, the only member who played the inaugural edition in 2019 where Bangladesh finished behind hosts Iran and runners-up Kenya to bag a bronze.

Coach Lingampally Srinivas Reddy said, “I brought them up with the latest approach to kabaddi. The boys are smart and quick learners and give 100 per cent in training. They want to prove themselves and... also know that if they win medals, they will get jobs in Army, Police and other service teams.”

Bangladesh and 15 other teams, split into four groups, will play the round-robin fixtures before the top two teams advance to the quarterfinals.



## Fahim, Kingsley slam hattricks

SPORTS REPORTER

A couple of hattricks from Faisal Ahmed Fahim and Eleta Kingsley helped Abahani stage a statement 7-0 victory over bottom-dwellers Azampur FC Uttara at Mymensingh's Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium yesterday.

Having suffered their first defeat of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) in their previous fixture against leaders Bashundhara Kings, the six-time champions are still nine points behind Kings after 10 matches.

Despite the absence of Brazilian Raphael Augusto and Costa Rican Daniel Colindres, the local players stepped up. On the other hand, Azampur could not keep their resistance after Fahim broke the deadlock in the 35th minute.

Following resumption, Fahim and Kingsley took turns in scoring as the former struck his third in the 79th minute while Kingsley sealed his hatrick in stoppage time. Captain Nabib Newaj Jibon also registered his name on the scoresheet in the 64th minute.

Meanwhile, at the Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj, a seven-minute header from Emon Shahriar was good enough for Mohammedan Sporting Club to down Rahmatganj MFS.

Elsewhere, despite being a man short for the last 70 minutes, newcomers Fortis FC were on the verge of upsetting another powerhouse in Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club after having stunned Mohammedan in their previous match. However, Sheikh Jamal avoided a defeat, courtesy of a stoppage-time strike from Nodirbek, as the three-time champions played out a 1-1 draw at Shaheed Smriti Stadium in Rajshahi.

Sheikh Jamal are now sixth with 14 points, two points ahead of Mohammedan and Fortis while Rahmatganj and Azampur are in the ninth and bottom place, respectively.



Recalled left-arm spinner Taijul Islam shakes hands with wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim as all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz looks on during Bangladesh team's training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Bottom) England team players chat while sitting in the lounge of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport upon their arrival in Dhaka earlier in the morning.

PHOTO: STAR/BCB

## Tigers gear up with extended session

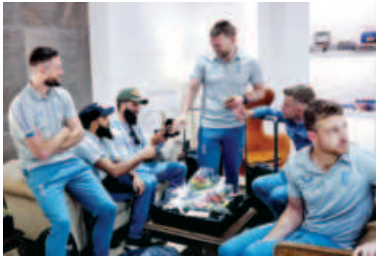
SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal was left hopping as Taskin Ahmed, handed the ball in the first match-scenario simulation during yesterday's training, produced an entertaining spell. He beat outside edge of Tamim's bat twice with searing line and length before the ODI skipper got his bat on one. Taskin then rapped Tamim's pads with the fourth delivery as the fielders went in appeal, although in vain. A maiden over was how the match-scenario simulations began at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

As evening approached, it appeared that the session, under Chandika Hathurusingha's guidance, was coming to an end but that notion was soon quashed as the team kept running the match-scenario simulations well past the evening with the floodlights on, finally coming to an end at 7:45pm.

It was not easy to recall the last time the national team had endured such a lengthy session. Mushfiqur Rahim was the first to the individual net session at 11:00am before Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad followed suit to the indoor nets and went through the regular grind which ended close to 1:00pm. Following a break, all the players turned up along with the coaching panel to begin simulating match scenarios.

Tamim might have struggled a



little during that first over when the session began at 2:00pm but Liton Das, the other opener, showed the fine touch that he displayed in the practice match on Thursday. Mustafizur did not trouble much with the new ball in the next over and Tamim then flicked Taskin for six over square-leg with impeccable timing during the pacer's next over as the contest between bat and ball kept developing in a six-over session with Mehedi Hasan Miraz also bowling two overs.

The first session was to begin preparations for stability at the top in ODIs, without losing wickets and Tamim and Liton held up their end of the bargain.

The second scenario saw Towhid Hridoy and Najmul Hossain Shanto step in to handle the new ball. Mahmudullah-Mehedi, Mahmudullah-Mushfiqur and Afif Hossain Mushfiqur were some of the batting combinations during the simulations, which also consisted of death-over simulations.

Liton talked to Hathurusingha

in-between sessions regarding some technical aspects and the Sri Lankan appeared comfortable around the players.

Selector Habibul Bashar talked to members of the media while the sessions were going on. Asked whether the coach trying too many things with a settled side could unsettle them, he felt that would likely not be the case due to Hathurusingha's past experience.

"I don't think so since coaches are all professional. Chandika knows about Bangladesh. If someone else came, he would have to begin anew. He knows the culture and the environment. So in that regard, he will take less time to embed his ideas than someone else. I personally feel that it's about the players and how they perform. A coach will definitely have new ideas but he won't say that the players have to apply them from today," Bashar said.

The selector also believed that the Tigers would not need to try out too many things but instead maintain the processes. The processes are being maintained but Hathurusingha is turning things up a notch in his second stint with the Tigers.

Many of the players, such as Yasir Rabbi and Mahmudul Hasan Joy, have left to play in the BCL and according to sources, a 15th member will likely not be added to the ODI squad.

## United return to Spain in EL

AFP, Paris

Manchester United face a second straight trip to Spain after they were paired with Real Betis in the Europa League last 16 draw on Friday.

United eliminated La Liga leaders, Barcelona, in a blockbuster tie in the last round.

Premier League leaders Arsenal drew Sporting Lisbon.

Juventus were paired with Freiburg of Germany in a matchup that represents an unlikely reversal of fortunes.

Betis' neighbours, Sevilla, the most successful club in the competition with five titles, face Fenerbahce. Jose Mourinho's Roma, who won the 2022 Europa Conference League, face Real Sociedad.

The only meeting of former winners of the competition pairs Shakhtar Donetsk against Feyenoord.

## Dress rehearsal for BCL final today

SPORTS REPORTER

The fourth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) will resume today following a break of over a month.

However, member of Bangladesh's ODI squad for the upcoming series against England will be unavailable for the remainder of the first-class competition, which includes the final round of league fixtures and the tournament's final on March 4.

Interestingly, there will be a dress rehearsal for the final when table-toppers Central Zone take on South Zone at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura.

Central Zone have 18 points with two wins from two games while South Zone are second with 10 points after securing a win and a draw.

In the other match of the day at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar, Islami Bank East Zone will lock horns with BCB North Zone.

The tournament officials are ensuring players can make the most of their skills on sporting pitches.

## Focus on Vinicius, Griezmann in Madrid derby

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti labelled Vinicius Junior the most decisive player in the world this week – but on Saturday in La Liga he faces another contender, Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann.

Although the France forward finished runner-up at the World Cup and Atletico are struggling in fourth place, Griezmann is in sparkling form.

Diego Simeone's side are four points clear of Real Betis in fifth and their only goal now is to secure Champions League qualification for next season.

A win over Madrid would brighten Atletico's mood, but the Rojiblancos have not won in the league at the Santiago Bernabeu since 2016.



"We've got to win, whatever happens, and end our poor run at their ground," Griezmann told La Liga.

Griezmann has directly participated in 45 percent of Atletico's league goals, with seven strikes and seven assists.

Madrid, by contrast, remain in the Champions League and winger Vinicius played a key role with a brace as they thrashed Liverpool 5-2 at Anfield on Tuesday.

The clash with Atletico brings back bad recent memories for Vinicius, after an effigy of the Brazilian winger was hung from a bridge outside Madrid's training ground before they clashed in the Copa del Rey in January. Vinicius scored in Madrid's 3-1 win in that game. All eyes will be on Vinicius and Griezmann as the two skillful, creative forwards try to inspire their sides to derby victory.

## Saka's role is to 'get kicked and fouled'

AFP, London

Mikel Arteta has backed Bukayo Saka to cope with the rough treatment meted out by opponents but says the Arsenal winger can also learn ways to cope better with being targeted.

The 21-year-old England international has been under the spotlight in recent weeks over a perceived lack of protection from officials and was on the end of some robust challenges in last week's 4-2 win against Aston Villa.

Arsenal boss Arteta admitted after the win at Villa Park that opposition teams set out to stop his star man, who leads Arsenal in goals and assists.

Despite the crunching tackles, Saka has not missed any of Arsenal's past 65 league games, the longest run in the division, as the league leaders prepare to travel to Leicester on Saturday.

"There is a lot of focus now on Bukayo, and we need to keep that in mind as a team with the plans that we put together, understanding what the opponents are doing, but for sure referees have their responsibilities and they have to do their jobs," Arteta said on Friday.

"If you ask him how it used to be when he was 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 -- it isn't very different. Wingers and talented players get kicked and fouled and get the demand to win games and that is the chance he has, that is his role in the team."



Antony scored the decisive goal to complete the comeback for Manchester United in their 2-1 win over Barcelona on Thursday to dump the Spanish side out of the Europa League, leaving the Catalans licking their wounds after another continental failure.

PHOTO: REUTERS