

## '5-6 captaincy candidates' in Shakib's absence

SPORTS REPORTER

With Shakib Al Hasan currently out injured with finger injury, the question has arisen on who would lead the Bangladesh Test side against Afghanistan on June 14. Under natural circumstances, the vice-captain comes in to lead the side but rumours are floating around that Liton Das does not want to lead the side in the match.

If Liton does not lead the side, the responsibility may fall to younger stars such as Mehedi Hasan Miraz or Nazmul Hossain Shanto. Former Bangladesh captain Akram Khan, current chairman of facilities, spoke to reporters regarding Miraz and Shanto.

"They are players of the future. When they were picked, some of the players had captaincy qualities. They have those qualities," Akram said.

He also put forward the notion that "five or six players" are candidates to take over responsibility as skipper in Shakib's absence but "it will depend on the current captain, selectors and coach".

BCB president Nazmul Hassan, however, is yet to hear about Liton's unwillingness to lead. "I talked to Shakib and he was hopeful of playing the Afghanistan ODIs and T20Is. In his absence the vice captain is supposed to take over but I haven't heard anything from Liton yet," the BCB president told The Daily Star yesterday.

## Murray pulls out of French Open

REUTERS

Former world number one Andy Murray has withdrawn from the French Open.

The 36-year-old, who has made just one appearance at Roland Garros since reaching the semi-finals in 2017, last month said he wanted another chance to play at the clay court Grand Slam while he is still fit and healthy.

Three-times Grand Slam champion Murray won the second-tier Aix-en-Provence Challenger Tour crown earlier this month, but suffered early exits in Monte Carlo, Madrid, Rome and Bordeaux.

The Scot, who reached the final of the French Open in 2016, has opted to skip tournaments during the claycourt season in the past to focus on the grasscourt swing heading into Wimbledon. In February, he said Wimbledon offered him the best chance of going deep at a Grand Slam.

The French Open runs from May 28 to June 11. Holder Rafa Nadal, who has won the French Open a record 14 times, also pulled out of the tournament after failing to regain full fitness from a hip injury. Australian Nick Kyrgios and Matteo Berrettini of Italy will also miss the tournament.



The Premier League and Manchester City's top-scorer Erling Haaland walks into the Etihad Stadium with fans cheering on the new champions of the Premier League on Sunday. City were also accorded a guard of honour as per the norm by Chelsea. Pep Guardiola's men clinched their third successive title just a day before second-placed Arsenal went down 1-0 away to Nottingham Forest.

PHOTO: AFP

## Guardiola mind games get the better of Arsenal

REUTERS

Arsenal's collapse in the Premier League title race showed they lacked the mentality and depth to dethrone Manchester City, but if there is any solace Mikel Arteta can take from the season is that they finally have a team that can be title contenders.

Arsenal's 1-0 loss at Nottingham Forest on Saturday brought the two-horse race to a premature end as Pep Guardiola's City were crowned champions with three games to spare, completing part one of a potential treble.

Having enjoyed the view from the top for nearly 250 days, Arsenal's title challenge crumbled in the face of a relentless, well-oiled winning machine that had been assembled and perfected over many years by Guardiola.

While Arteta and his players dismissed talk of "bottling" the title race, for their fans there is a crushing sense of what could have been.

Arsenal were eight points clear two months ago and appeared to be heading towards bagging their first league title since Arsene Wenger's 2003-04 'Invincibles'.

### GUARDIOLA MIND GAMES

But the eight-point gap was an illusion as City always had games in hand while Guardiola played mind games, effusive in his praise of Arsenal and Arteta, his former assistant at City.

"Our problem is Arsenal was amazing so far. They do really well," Guardiola had said in April. "We are still there but there is another one better than you. You have to

accept it, admit it and keep going."

As Arsenal stumbled with three straight draws last month, they glanced at the rear-view mirror and took their eyes off the road.

What started with Roberto Firmino's late equaliser in a 2-2 draw with Liverpool at Anfield, finished with Taiwo Awoniyi's winner on Saturday



Arsenal dropped 15 points in eight games.

Guardiola has seen his fair share of tense title races and even when Arsenal had three games to go, he gently applied more pressure.

"Definitely they are going to win their three games. I would like them to drop points to be honest, but I think they will

get nine points," he said as he flashed a knowing smile.

Arsenal lost two of those games without scoring, losing 3-0 at home to Brighton & Hove Albion before defeat at Forest.

City, meanwhile, banked on their experience in title run-ins to win all their games, even dismantling European powerhouses Bayern Munich and Real Madrid in the Champions League along the way.

The master had outshone the apprentice as Guardiola's side marched to their fifth league title in six seasons.

### SQUAD DEPTH

City's enviable squad depth has also been a major talking point with no outfield player clocking more than 3,000 minutes in an exhausting league season while Arsenal have had three led by Gabriel, Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard.

While Arteta had a starting line-up that challenged the best in the business, long-term injuries to key players -- such as defensive lynchpin William Saliba -- exposed the lack of capable backup players who could step in and do the job.

After playing out of their skins until April, Arsenal simply ran out of steam with no scope for player rotation.

"We wanted to squeeze everything that we had out of that group and find alternatives and ways to reach certain levels," Arteta said.

"We fell short and it is my job and my responsibility. I have to analyse that and think."

What to WATCH | Star Sports Select HD2 English Premier League Newcastle United vs Leicester City Live from 1:00 am (Tuesday)

## Boomers can qualify for semis, believes Nabil

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation has appointed David Dobarro Magan as national team's physiotherapist for next month's FIFA friendly against Cambodia and the subsequent SAFF Championship in India.

The appointment of the Spaniard was disclosed following a meeting of the National Teams Committee at the BFF yesterday. The meeting also decided to bring in David Gomez Gonzalez as assistant coach and Miguel Angel Anido Iglesias as goalkeeping coach, with both Spaniards being part of the team's coaching staff during March's home FIFA friendlies against Seychelles.



Kazi Nabil Ahmed, chairman of the NTC, informed that the Javier Cabrera-led side will leave Dhaka for Cambodia on June 10 for the June 15 friendly following a training camp, which will start on June 4 at Regency Hotel and Resorts in the capital. Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir has been nominated as the team leader for the two assignments, he informed.

The BFF vice-president said despite having tough teams in the SAFF Championships, Bangladesh can still qualify for the semifinals.

"All teams are strong. Kuwait and Lebanon, the two invited teams, are way ahead in rankings. We will start against the strongest team (Lebanon)," Nabil said. "But I think we have chance to qualify if we play two good games."



Argentina's World Cup winning goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez is likely to come to Dhaka in July ahead of his scheduled visit to Kolkata. Satadru Dutta, an Indian sports promoter who brought football legends like Pele and Diego Maradona to Kolkata, is all set to bring the Argentina No. 1 to the city of joy. "Emiliano Martinez is probably the most popular Argentina player after Lionel Messi. So me and my partners are bringing him to Kolkata," the 43-year-old sports promoter told The Daily Star from Kolkata on Sunday.



Barcelona might have lost 2-1 to Real Sociedad but with the league title in the bag, there was an end-of-season feel at Camp Nou on Saturday. Despite the loss, Barcelona players were in a jolly mood, throwing manager Xavi Hernandez in the air as the Catalans celebrated their La Liga triumph, confirmed last week when they beat Espanyol 4-2 away from home.

PHOTO: BARCELONA

## 'Bayern can still win title'

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain Thomas Mueller said his side were not out of the Bundesliga title race after the 3-1 home loss against RB Leipzig on Saturday gave Borussia Dortmund the edge.

Dortmund can go two points clear with one round of games remaining by winning at Augsburg on Sunday, but Mueller, 33, was confident his side could come back.

"Of course" the veteran told Sky Sports Germany, "we can still be German champions."

"Dortmund still need to win twice and we'll see what happens."

"I've won a few championships, even when we weren't big favourites. There's still a chance."

Mueller, who came through the junior ranks at Bayern, has won 11 titles in Munich, including the last ten in a row.

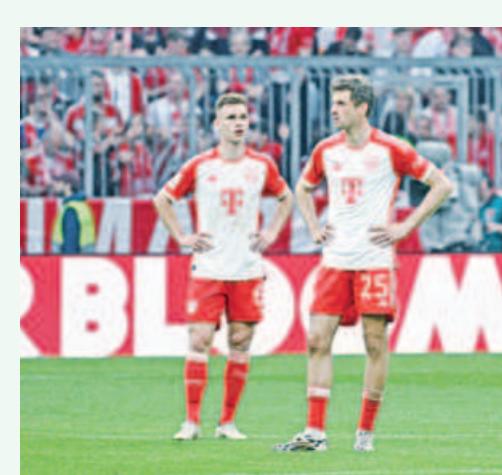
"They have to win both games and I want to see that first."

"If they do that then I congratulate them, but until then we'll be together and do everything we can to get three points next week."

Bayern manager Thomas Tuchel said "the season isn't over" but admitted that his side were not playing well enough.

"When you play so far below your level, then it's hard to win games and when it's hard to win games, it's hard to win (the title)."

Taking over from the sacked Julian Nagelsmann in late March, Tuchel has won just five of 11 matches in charge of Bayern, a period which has included elimination from the



Champions League and the German Cup.

Bayern's final game is at Cologne, while Dortmund play at home against Mainz, with the games kicking off simultaneously on Saturday.

A "deeply disappointed" Bayern CEO Oliver Kahn, who made the decision to sack Nagelsmann and replace him with Tuchel, said it was "bitter" that his side "did not have the title in our hands anymore."

"We had a giant chance to become German champions and we gave it away," he said.

"(Now) we're relying on other results on other pitches - but it's not over yet."

"It's only over when the referee in Cologne signals that it's over."

Brighton seal maiden European berth

REUTERS, Brighton

Brighton & Hove Albion ensured they will play in Europe next season for the first time in their history after beating Southampton 3-1 at the Amex Stadium in the Premier League on Sunday, with teenage striker Evan Ferguson scoring twice.

Brighton are sixth in the standings on 61 points and can no longer be caught by eighth-placed Tottenham Hotspur, meaning they are guaranteed a spot in Europe next season either in the Europa League or the Europa Conference League.

Brighton went ahead in the 29th minute through Ferguson's powerful effort. A moment of individual brilliance from Kauro Mitoma doubled Brighton's advantage 10 minutes later.

Mohamed Elyounoussi pulled one back for Southampton in the 58th minute, but Pascal Gross wrapped up the win.