World number three Novak Djokovic inched closer to a record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam title by crushing Peruvian Juan Pablo Varillas 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 on Sunday to reach the French Open quarter-finals. A two-time champion in Paris, Djokovic has now reached the guarter-finals at the French Open for a record 17th time, one more than 14-time champion Rafa Nadal. PHOTO: REUTERS



#### Adel, Shaeed at loggerheads

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation's vice-president Sajed A Adel and general secretary Mominul Haque Shaeed traded blames vesterday ahead of the federation election, which is scheduled to be held on June 19.

Adel claimed that he was barred from placing his objection letter at the election commissioner's office at the National Sports Council by Shaeed and his associates. Shaeed, however, claimed that he was not even present there, adding that this could be a ploy by the vice-president to malign him.

"Shaeed told me you can't place your paper here, you better leave, Adel alleged, adding that Shaeed might have done this from fear that he might contest for the general secretary post against the incumbent one.

When contacted, Shaeed claimed these to be baseless accusations to

"I don't know why he's spreading propaganda against me. Since I was embroiled in a scandal, he's taking advantage of that," Shaeed added.

The chief election commissioner Saidur Rashid did not pick up the phone when contacted for a comment on this issue.



Ebadot Hossain (L) apparently tries to make a point to fellow pacer Taskin Ahmed and pace bowling coach Allan Donald (R) during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday declared a pace-heavy squad for the upcoming one-off Test against Afghanistan. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## BCB focusing on Tigers' mental aspect

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is focusing on the mental aspect of the cricketers and the appointment of psychologist Alan Brown ahead of the Tigers upcoming one-off Test against Afghanistan seems to be a part of

Brown, who specialised in utilising the individual quality of a player to a team environment, was seen working alongside Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha at the home of cricket in Mirpur yesterday. Brown, in fact, had already started working with the Bangladesh cricketers even before arriving in the country on Saturday.

"Through research, he (Brown) has been involved with the world-renowned Gallup Strength training programme, established in 1930. Mainly he works on the aspect on how to utilise the individual quality of a player to a team environment," BCB's cricket operations manager, Shahriar Nafees, told the media yesterday.

Meanwhile, the board is also planning to rope another sports psychologist, Phil Jauncey, who has previously worked with the Tigers in 2014.

"Doctor Phill Jauncey will come to Bangladesh in August and he is a classical psychologist and worked with us before. He will work on the individual aspect of the players. Our plan is to provide such support throughout the year, whenever required. "Normally, we don't require the support of a psychologist all the time as it takes some time for the players to practise on a specific mental aspect and after working on it, they will follow the process from time to time," Nafees added.

Asked whether the inclusion of different sets of psychologists could create any conflict in working terms, the former Bangladesh opener replied, "Fitness is important in sports. Both fitness-trainer and physiotherapist work to enhance the players' fitness but operate on different aspects. Therefore, there is no chance for them to be in conflict and, I think, there will be coordination."

Nafees, however, was reluctant to comment whether the BCB is planning to have a permanent psychologist till the upcoming ODI World Cup in India, slated for

# 'Challenging' conditions shape Test squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das is set to make his debut as Test captain, standing-in for Shakib Al Hasan who is out injured, as the Bangladesh squad was announced yesterday for the lone Test against Afghanistan, to be held in Dhaka from June 14.

The selectors have picked uncapped batter Shahadat Hossain Dipu and pacer Mushfik Hasan after the duo showed potential against West Indies A recently. Meanwhile, Zakir Hasan returned from injury and Mahmudul Hasan Joy was retained in the side and

Liton Das (Captain), Tamim Igbal, Zakir Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul Haque, Mushfigur Rahim, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Khaled Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Shahadat Hossain Dipu and Mushfik Hasan.

the batter will carry confidence following his unbeaten ton against West Indies A in the third four-day game

The selection under head coach Chandika Hathurusingha was supposed to be aggressive and the presence of five pacers gives credence to the idea of an attacking selection policy. The Tigers lost their maiden Test against Afghanistan by 224 runs in Chattogram in 2019 and it inflicted major woes, one that caused BCB president Nazmul Hassan to suggest he was going investigate what went on in the strategical setup of the game despite the team management being aware of Afghanistan's spin-threat.

The furore was created by the Tigers picking no specialist pacer in the line-up for the match and the wicket favoured spin which played into Afghanistan's hand. This time, there would be the opportunity to go for different conditions despite the Mirpur track not generally favouring pacers.





**Mushfik Hasan** 

**Shahadat Hossain Dipu** 

Soaring temperatures has been a major challenge to city dwellers and people across the country and the team management are concerned about it as well. Pacer Taskin Ahmed has been rehabilitating since his side strain injury that ruled him out of the Ireland Test recently. With their ace pacer still on way to recovery, the team management were not in favour of taking any chances in terms of having enough numbers in pace attack. Thus, Taskin was picked with backups in mind.

"We are happy with the pace strength," chief selector Minhajul Abedin told The Daily Star yesterday.

"It will be a challenging series since we are playing in such intense heat and the wicket will be very challenging. So, I am hoping that our players will do well. Afghanistan are a strong side and they will be facing a very good challenge."

Bangladesh picked two spinners in Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam while the pace attack also consists of Khaled Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Ebadot Hossain.

Allan Donald was working closely with the pace group yesterday as the likes of Taskin, Ebadot, and Khaled bowled at a separate net against the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Najmul Hossain. The conditioning would be necessary while the need to improve the pacers' arsenal would have been on the agenda, given that only two spinners have been picked.

Chandika, who arrived a day before, joined the session yesterday and oversaw the batters at work, focusing on Tamim during a majority of the lefthander's net session as preparation swung into gear.

### Benzema says goodbye to Madrid

REUTERS

Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema will leave Real Madrid as a free agent in the close season after 14 trophy-laden years, the LaLiga club said on Sunday, with the striker set to move to Saudi Arabian side Al Ittihad. Saudi Arabia's state-run Al Ekhbariya television station reported that Al Ittihad had reached an agreement with Benzema on a two-year contract, with club officials in Madrid to hammer out a "record deal" with the striker. The 35-year-old Frenchman had looked set to stay at the Spanish club for one more year after a 2022-23 season in which he struggled with injuries and missed out on France's World Cup campaign in Qatar due to another injury. However, an offer estimated by media to be worth more than 100 million euros (\$107.05 million) from Saudi Arabia reportedly made him reconsider his future.



Benzema joined Real Madrid in 2009 from Lique 1 side Lyon.

The French forward lifted five Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey with Real.

He is Real Madrid's second top scorer of all time, with 353 goals for Madrid, behind only Ronaldo on 450. He has 165 assists to complement his goal tally.

His 44-goal tally in 46 games in the 2022-23 season earned him the Ballon d'Or in 2022.

The 35-year-old has made 647 appearances for the Los Blancos and could take it to 648 if he features in Real's final La Liga match against Athletic Club on Sunday.

In the Champions League, the French striker has found the net on 78 occasions in 133 matches for Real and also recorded 27 assists. His 12 goals for Lyon in Europe means he boasts 90 goals and sits fourth in the competition's all-time scoring charts behind Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, and Robert Lewandowski.



PSG players, including Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos who marked their final appearance for the Parisians, celebrate their record 11th French title on Saturday after losing final league game against Clermont 3-2. All eyes are on the **Argentine superstar now, with Messi strongly** rumoured to sign for Saudi club Al-Hilal.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## On road to deserving recognition

SPORTS DESK

On Saturday, as Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola went up to pick his FA Cup medal following a 2-1 win in Wembley -- a score-line that does not justify how City never had to go beyond their second gear against Manchester United -- Sir Alex Ferguson was there to greet him.

The two of the finest coaches in history shook hands and embraced a hug. Ferguson wore a smile as he congratulated the Spaniard, but perhaps there was more to it. One may also wonder what exchange of words took place between the two. More than a mere formality?

Ferguson, during his trophyladen 26 years with Manchester United, has experienced all that a managerial career had on offer. The anticipate how English football was going to unfold once he retired with a fitting league title in 2013.

Ever since Ferguson stepped down and became one of United's directors and ambassadors, they still wait to get their hands on the familiar league trophy. Adding to their misery, "noisy neighbours"

have gone on to establish themselves as a domestic powerhouse, courtesy of the financial backing since the Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008 and the subsequent implementation of their sporting model.

Guardiola's Moreover, appointment in 2016 has proved to be decisive for the blue half of Manchester while the Red Devils have



Scotsman, however, perhaps did not continued to fall short in cementing a playing style, having tried different coaches with varying philosophies in

the post-Ferguson era. 2009, Ferguson infamously said, "Not in my lifetime," in reply to whether United would ever be underdogs. It may appear that Ferguson, now 81 years old, was

City, as coined by Ferguson himself, again served a humble pie by City, who boasts five league titles in the past six seasons.

> United, being one of the seven clubs and the only English side to complete a European treble, had the chance to play spoilsport to City's treble aspirations but they were not up to the challenge when it came to invalidating the inferior tag. However, Guardiola must know that to bridge the gap with United, in terms of Club status, all roads now lead to Istanbul – the stage for the upcoming Champions League final.

"To win the FA Cup, the emotions are really special. Now is the first time I can talk about the treble," said Guardiola at the final whistle.

"One more to come, one more to go and we feel that we are in a position we probably will never be

"We have done some incredible seasons... but we have to win the Champions League to be Before a Manchester derby in recognised how the team deserves to be recognised," Guardiola added after joining Ferguson and Arsene Wenger as the ones who pulled off an FA Cup and league double more than once.

