

# Rakib adds to injury woes

SPORTS REPORTER

Forward Rakib Hossain was the latest to join Bangladesh's mounting injury list after centre-back Tutul Hossain Badsha was all but ruled out of the SAFF Championship, scheduled to begin in India on June 21.

Defenders Tapu Barman, Badsha and Rimon Hossain had joined the preparation camp despite contending with injuries, but none of them could train with the ball on the third day of the camp at the Bashundhara Kings Arena. Tapu and Rimon were only seen stretching alongside their teammates.

"The physio and doctor are working with them. Tapu and Rimon have improved but Badsha is uncertain. The doctor advised him to not wear the boots for two weeks due to a fungal problem in both feet. Badsha is in a difficult position," assistant coach Hasan Al Mamun told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"There was no problem found with Tapu's hamstring after the test but he needs to improve the strength in his hamstring. He is in recovery mode while Rimon has an ankle injury and is also recovering," Mamun added.

"They are experienced and vital players, so we cannot take any risk with them in the friendly matches against Cambodia. We are expecting both to recover fully before the start of the SAFF Championship."

Tapu and Badsha are proven and experienced defenders in the 30-member squad, which also includes two more stoppers: rookie Mehedi Hasan of Mohammedan and Tarique Raihan Kazi of Bashundhara Kings. Right-back Bishwanath Ghosh has also been deployed in a more central role in the past.

"Rakib sustained a [hamstring] injury yesterday [Tuesday]. We will know more about his condition after tests," said the assistant coach, hoping that Rakib would also recover fully before the SAFF campaign.

"Rakib is a key player and is in our plans. There is no problem with the players in terms of fitness but we are wary of how soon they can recover from their injuries. It will be tough for Bangladesh to take part in the SAFF Championship without those experienced players."



# Messi moving to Miami?

REUTERS

Lionel Messi will snub a lucrative contract in Saudi Arabia and move to Major League Soccer side Inter Miami as a free agent after parting ways with French champion Paris St Germain, the BBC reported on Wednesday.

Messi, who played his final game for PSG over the weekend, was also linked with a return to Barcelona but the Spanish club have had their hands tied due to LaLiga's financial fair play rules.

Should the deal with Miami go through, the 35-year-old Argentine will play outside Europe for the first time since he joined Barca's academy at the age of 13 and became the Spanish club's all-time record goalscorer with 672 goals.

Messi had wanted to go to a club where he could eventually have an ownership stake, a source with knowledge of the negotiations told Reuters this week. He also wanted to maximise his existing deal with Adidas and MLS's relationship with Apple.

MLS earns a flat fee of about \$200 million per year from Apple until it reach a certain threshold of subscriptions, after which point they will earn a share of the revenue from those subscriptions.



Tariq Kazi jumps as Eleta Kingsley goes through the paces during a training session of the national football team at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday as the team continued their build-up for the upcoming SAFF Championship.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Can Mirpur track help pacers turn the tables?

SPORTS REPORTER

Afghanistan named a 15-man squad for the one-off Test against Bangladesh, starting from June 14, and the biggest takeaway was the absence of key spin threat Rashid Khan, who was reportedly being rested.

The Afghan spin wizard had taken 11 wickets in two innings as Afghanistan dismantled Bangladesh's batting line-up in the only Test between the sides in Chattogram in 2019, thumping the hosts by 224 runs.

This time around, the Tigers' squad was shaped by picking five pacers, suggesting that Afghanistan's spin threat may be countered by pace-friendly wickets. But how much has Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla favoured pace over the years?

A look at the last 10 Tests in Mirpur, starting with a 20-run win against Australia, shows that stats heavily support the theory of spin-friendly Mirpur tracks. Spinners have taken 223 wickets compared to the 96 scalped by pacers. Approximately 70 per cent wickets in Mirpur have been claimed by spinners, which signals the dominance spin has held at Mirpur.

The last time Bangladesh played Afghanistan in a Test, the Tigers fielded four front-line spinners in Shakib Al Hasan, Taijul Islam, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Hasan. The selection choice with no front-line pacers in the playing eleven created a furore. This time

## No Rashid for Afghanistan

Ace spinner Rashid Khan was the notable omission as Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) announced a 15-member squad for one-off Test against Bangladesh, starting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur from June 14.

### AFGHANISTAN SQUAD

Hashmatullah Shahidi (C), Rahmat Shah (VC), Afsar Zazai (WK), Ikram Alikhail (WK), Ibrahim Zadran, Abdul Malik, Baheer Shah, Nasir Jamal, Karim Janat, Zahir Khan, Izharulhaq Naweed, Hamza Hotak, Ibrahim Abdulrahimzai, Yamin Ahmadzai and Nijat Masoud.

Bangladesh picked two spinners in Mehedi and Taijul, with Shakib out injured for the series.

Bangladesh are likely to pick a pace-heavy attack given that only two specialist spinners are available. But what if the wicket behaves similarly to how it did during the last Test at Mirpur against Ireland in April this year?

In that instance, Bangladesh

picked three spinners along with three pacers but the pacers did not get enough help, with Ebadot Hossain's three for 37 the only example of pace leaving an impact. Will it create more controversy if pacers do not get what is being sought and results go against Bangladesh?

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) arranged a workshop on Turf and Outfield Management at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, which ended yesterday. Ian Joseph, head of Turf Management of New Zealand Cricket was conducting the workshop and believed it was possible to create pace-friendly wickets here.

He felt it was a myth that pace-friendly wickets were not possible to achieve in the nation. "I think that's a bit of a myth. It's up to the skills of the curator to carefully manage the pitch and its preparation and to deliver a quality surface. There have been a number of games that had been played in Bangladesh where the pitches have played very well. I am confident that the pitches will only improve further with the curator training programme and by sharing our knowledge," Ian told reporters.

However, the stats still showed where pace and spin stand in terms of dominating proceedings.

Bangladesh's squad has already been shaped by a certain understanding that pace will hold value in the upcoming Test but if the surface is a true one at Mirpur, it is the batters who have to respond.



# Head leads Australia fightback

AFP, London

Travis Head scored an impressive half century as Australia reached 170-3 against India at tea on the opening day of the World Test Championship final at the Oval.

Australia struggled after losing the toss in bowler-friendly conditions but as the sun burst through the clouds in south London on Wednesday, the runs started to flow.

Middle-order batsman Head was 60 not out at the break and Steve Smith unbeaten on 33 -- the pair had added 94 runs after coming together at 76-3 soon after lunch.

India captain Rohit Sharma elected to bowl under overcast skies and on a green-tinged pitch that promised to assist a four-man pace attack.

The WTC remains the only major men's cricket trophy Australia have yet to win.

The fixture also marks the start of a packed schedule of six Tests in eight weeks for Australia, including a five-match Ashes series against England.

# Taskin eager to play in overseas leagues

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh speedster Taskin Ahmed on Wednesday said that he is eager to play in different leagues around the world after the Bangladesh Cricket Board decided not to release him to play for English County side Yorkshire.

Taskin, who is recovering from a side strain injury, is eyeing to feature in Bangladesh's one-off Test against Afghanistan starting on June 14.

"Every player wants to play leagues worldwide but we also need to think about national commitments since I play all three formats for Bangladesh. But yes it feels bad if I am not able to go in my free time. Sometimes it feels bad not to play leagues worldwide and I am eager to play international leagues for my personal achievements in future," Taskin told the reporters in Dhaka on Wednesday.

The 28-year-old confirmed on Wednesday that he got an offer to play for Yorkshire but revealed that upon discussion with him, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and the board decided not to let him go.

"I got a proposal from Yorkshire and they wanted me to play for a long season. I have talked to the coach and the board. After considering everything, they decided not to release me for the longer version games. As a player, it feels good to know that the board has plans for me for the future," he said.



Top seed and defending champion Iga Swiatek of Poland celebrates her quarterfinal win against Coco Gauff of USA at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris on Wednesday. Swiatek will meet Haddad Maia of Brazil in the semifinals.

PHOTO: AFP

# Haddad Maia puts Brazil back on map

AFP, Paris

Beatriz Haddad Maia became the first Brazilian woman to reach a Grand Slam semi-final since 1968 on Wednesday when she came back from a set down to defeat Ons Jabeur at the French Open.

World number 14 Haddad Maia came through 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 and will face top-ranked defending champion Iga Swiatek in Saturday's championship match.

The 27-year-old left-hander follows in the footsteps of seven-time major winner Maria Bueno who was the last Brazilian woman in the semi-finals of a major at the US Open 55 years ago.

"Ours is not easy to play against, you have to be patient but I believed in my body and tried to keep my rhythm," said Haddad Maia.