

## Shakib, Liton granted NOC

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) granted star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and batter Liton Das No Objection Certificate (NOC) for the Global T20 League Canada, cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus informed the media yesterday.

The third edition of the T20 tournament will begin on July 20 and end on August 6.

“Shakib asked for an NOC from July 20 till July 29. Liton had asked for NOC to play from July 20 till August 6. Both their NOCs were granted,” Jalal told the media yesterday.

Taskin Ahmed was not encouraged to play the County Championship season due to the high workload of red-ball cricket. Shakib and Liton were allowed in order to boost their form with competitive cricket ahead of the World Cup.

“There is no national duty right now and they [Shakib and Liton] were given clearance after discussions with the head coach and the management. The competitive games that they can play in this period before the World Cup is good for us.

“The Asia Cup may take place in the first week of September and they will be in Dhaka by 20th [August],” Jalal added.

While Liton is expected to be available after the GT20 League, Shakib will be heading to feature in the Lanka Premier League. However, Jalal informed that Shakib’s availability in the tournament might be cut short as his NOC clearance was given in line with the requirements of the team management.

## CR7 eyes another milestone

STAR SPORTS DESK

Cristiano Ronaldo is set to be the first male footballer to make 200th international appearance if he features as expected against Iceland in Reykjavik in a Euro 2024 qualifier on Tuesday.

With 199 caps for Portugal, Ronaldo already holds the record for most appearances by a male footballer. He surpassed Bader Al-Mutawa of Kuwait earlier this year, who earned 196 international caps.

Ronaldo’s 199th cap was in their 3-0 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina in Lisbon last Saturday as Portugal continued their flawless run in the qualifiers. And even though the perennial record breaker was unable to add to his tally of 122 international goals, also the most by a male footballer, Ronaldo left a strong impression on the pitch.

Ronaldo, however, will not be the first footballer to 200-cap milestone in football. As many as 26 female footballers have made 200 or more full international appearances during their careers.



Dinajpur Academy High School players run for joy following a three-wicket victory over Chandpur Goni High School in the final of the Prime Bank School Cricket at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday. The school from Dinajpur chased down revised target of 158 runs in 30.3 overs following rain after the school from Chandpur had scored 174 for nine in their allotted 50 overs. Ainul Islam of Dinajpur was adjudged the player of the final while Chandpur’s Salman Jahan Niaz was adjudged player of the tournament.

PHOTO: BCB

# Backup options in mind as focus turns to white-ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh’s focus has turned to white-ball scheme, particularly with the Afghanistan ODI series slated to begin on July 5.

With ODI being the most important format, injuries to key stars have been an issue and selector Abdur Razzak reiterated that they are hopeful of getting Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal ready before the Afghanistan series. In addition, more importantly, they are focusing on keeping backup options open.

Shakib suffered an injury to his finger in the series against Ireland in England, while Tamim suffered lower back pain before the Afghanistan Test and it led to him being ruled out of the Test.

“Shakib has recovered well. Tamim has been doing well since the last session and has begun practice and batted. We are hoping to get them in the next series, but it’s still up to the medical team,” Razzak told the media yesterday.

While both stars have been named for the ODI series against Afghanistan, the BCB are keen to focus on backup options for injury replacements. Zakir Hasan, who was included in the ODI series against Ireland at home but had to be ruled out due to injury, did not make the Afghanistan ODI series team. However, his and Mohammad Naim’s recent form has seen their chances of being backup options improve with Naim already included in Afghanistan ODIs.

“Zakir has a chance of doing well in white-ball and he is in good form at the moment, which is important for us. It’s nothing significant but we require players according to team combination, so no one is being omitted as such. He has been doing well and we are



thinking of whether he can be included in white-ball schemes.

“There is not much opportunity to change the ODI setup. Naim did well in the Premier League. His case is like that so if there is a problem, there is a player

ready. Tamim was injured suddenly [ahead of Afghanistan Test] and if we didn’t have players ready, we would have been in a difficult situation,” Razzak said yesterday.

Razzak maintained that there was a difficulty for the likes of Anamul Haque Bijoy to ‘break into the side’ even as he was not out of the equation.

The squad for the Asia Cup was supposed to also be the World Cup squad but, according to Razzak, some changes may be forced due to injury or performances.

“We have to be open about a few aspects as there is the case of injury or performances.”

The squad for the Emerging Asia Cup in Sri Lanka lends credence to the idea of allowing such backup options to show their strengths ahead of the World Cup.

The Tigers were expected to hold their World Cup preparation camp in India but scheduling issues has seen BCB opt for home pastures. Following the Asia Cup in September, the Tigers will undergo their camp in August.

“Skill training will take place for the first 10 to 12 days. The venue is yet to be decided but our initial thoughts are to hold it in Sylhet or Chattogram. The rest of the time, that includes fitness and other training sessions, are likely to take place in Dhaka till the end of August,” cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media yesterday.

## Pakistan’s SAFF fate in the balance

SPORTS REPORTER

While seven out of eight participating nations are gearing up for a pre-SAFF Championship press conference in Bengaluru today, Pakistan team is still waiting for Indian visas to come to the country.

The 14th edition of the regional football extravaganza is scheduled to get underway in Bengaluru tomorrow, with hosts India scheduled to play against Pakistan in the day’s second match while Kuwait and Nepal will play the first match at Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru.

Lebanon, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal teams are already in India but Pakistan, who were supposed to land in the country on Sunday after completing their four-nation tournament campaign in Mauritius, had to cancel their flight for failing to obtain Indian visas.

“They [Pakistan] have not gotten the visa till now. The AIFF secretary general informed me that they are waiting for a letter from the Indian govt. If the letter is issued by today [Monday], Pakistan can arrive tomorrow [Tuesday],” SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal told The Daily Star yesterday.

When asked what would happen if Pakistan team do not get the visas on time, Helal said, “We have nothing to do and we can’t defer the championship because there are things like broadcast and return flight of the teams related to the matter of deferment. Let’s hope Pakistan arrive tomorrow and play the next day.”

Helal also informed the referees from Bangladesh and Pakistan have also not gotten their visas yet.



## Clark ‘plays big’ for late mother

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Wyndham Clark’s late mother always told him to “play big” and the American did just that at the U.S. Open to earn an emotional breakthrough victory on Sunday.

Clark said he drew inspiration from his mother Lise, who died of breast cancer in 2013 at the age of 54.

“My mom was so positive and such a motivator in what she did,” Clark said. “She called me ‘Winner’ when I was little.” She had a mantra of ‘play big’.

The 29-year-old from Denver said his mother used to leave notes of encouragement in his golf bag, gym bag and backpack when he was young, sometimes leading to embarrassing moments in front of friends. Those notes turned to text messages as he got older and he was away playing tournaments.

“I was a mama’s boy, so there would be a lot of hugging and crying together,” he said.

“But I know she’d be very proud of me. I miss her, and it’s obviously great to think about her, and being here in LA and winning something like this makes me think of her even more.”



Veteran Australia spinner Nathan Lyon celebrates the wicket of England’s Joe Root, who was stumped for the first time in his Test career on Day 4 of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston on Monday. Root scored 11,168 runs before being stumped, the second-most accumulation after West Indies’ Shivnarine Chanderpaul. Lyon returned figures of 4-80 as England were bundled out for 273 in their second innings, setting up a 281-run target for Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

## Fears calmed over Fuente project

AFP, Rotterdam

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente has quelled the doubts around him by leading his country to Nations League glory and ending a decade-long trophy drought.

La Roja needed penalties to see off Croatia and triumph in Rotterdam, but doing so helped ease tensions following their Euro 2024 qualifying defeat by Scotland in March.

De la Fuente’s appointment by the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) to replace Luis Enrique raised eyebrows – the 61-year-old is a relative unknown as a coach, having worked within the country’s youth ranks from 2013 onwards.

After an unconvincing performance in a win over Norway in his opening game, defeat in Glasgow sparked alarm.

However, matches three and four proved far more enjoyable for the coach, beating Italy and then Croatia to lift the cup.

Although the Nations League is a new competition, this only its third edition, Spain and De la Fuente are hopeful that it can prove a springboard for more success, with the waters now more tranquil around him.

“All projects are better constructed on a base of victory and this gives us more strength, confidence, calm,” said the coach.

One of De la Fuente’s biggest choices has been a shift to a 4-2-3-1 formation, instead of Spain’s typical 4-3-3.



The key cog is Manchester City midfielder Rodri, who was named the player of the Nations League finals.

While Luis Enrique drew criticism for playing Rodri as a centre-back at the 2022 World Cup to make room for veteran Sergio Busquets, his successor has reinstalled him in the centre of the pitch.

Rodri, arguably the best in the world in his position, linked well with Mikel Merino against Italy and then Fabian Ruiz against Croatia.

Speaking with clarity and confidence and leading by example on the pitch, Rodri has become his country’s torchbearer.

“This generation promises a lot,” he said after the Nations League triumph. Before, he had called for Spain to start a new winning cycle.

Rodri’s emergence as the team’s

“frontman” is in part due to an absence of star power in the attack, with Spain boasting a host of dangerous – but not elite – forwards.

Barcelona’s Ansu Fati was bright off the bench against Croatia and showed he can have a big impact if he can stay fit, while Jeremy Pino, Dani Olmo and Marco Asensio are all similarly bright, but inconsistent.

Alvaro Morata has played at many of Europe’s top sides without fully convincing, while back-up striker Joselu has just joined Real Madrid, his career best form coming at the ripe age of 33.

Spain could not find a breakthrough against Croatia and needed penalties to triumph, which De la Fuente said added extra spice to the victory.

“Obviously, winning gives you more shine. I expect more joy to come in the future.”