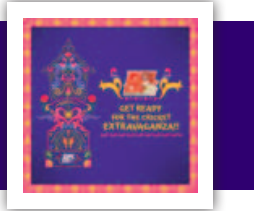


BPL Mashup



Shakib to see ophthalmologist in London
Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan will see an eye specialist in London soon, a member of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) medical team informed The Daily Star yesterday.

The 36-year-old, expected to have flown for London at 1:00am today, had been suffering from an eye issue since last year's ODI World Cup. He recently checked up with an ophthalmologist in Dhaka after having done the same during the showpiece event in India.

With Shakib set to feature for Rangpur Riders in the forthcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), beginning January 19, his franchise has arranged the medical appointment. The Bangladesh captain had batted wearing glasses during a net session yesterday at Bashundhara Sports Complex.

"Shakib is going to London to do a check up on his eyes. It's not a serious concern and we are expecting him to be available before the BPL begins," Rangpur Riders CEO Ishtiaque Sadeque told The Daily Star.

SBNCS gets slight makeover

The Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS) in Mirpur is going through slight renovation as BCB is installing 7500 new chairs ahead of BPL's 10th edition.

Syed Abdul Baten, BCB grounds and facilities manager, informed that all the broken chairs at the venue will be replaced.

"The main problem is with Club House north and south. We are replacing those chairs at the earliest. We have got 7500 chairs to complete the work," Baten told the media.

'Nothing to lose' for Mahmud's Dhaka

Durdanto Dhaka head coach Khaled Mahmud usually remains in charge of formidable teams in both Dhaka Premier League and BPL. However, going against the trend, he is set to start this season with a newly formed team in the country's lone franchise T20 tournament. The former Bangladesh captain said that his side's target would be to qualify for the playoffs.

"If I am thinking realistically, given the strength we have, the first step we can target is the knockouts and making the top four. You need luck to be champions too," he told reporters after his side's first practice session at SBNCS yesterday.

Dhaka do not have many big local or foreign players but decided to put faith in youngsters from home and abroad. Homegrown stars such as Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Mosaddek Hossain will form the core of the side along with Mohammad Naim.

They have added Sri Lankan Sadeera Samarawickrama and Pakistani Saim Ayub but it remains to be seen who could be the X-factor from the squad.

Mahmud, already a successful local coach, understands that his team will start as underdogs but feels his team will have to make do with what they have.

"Of course, this is a big challenge for me. Everyone will tag us as a number six or seven team. I don't get offended by it because we have nothing to lose. Whatever we will do, it will be an achievement for us," Mahmud said.

"We might have been unsuccessful in bringing in big players to our side. We don't have a big budget. But I'm not worried about it. In this type of format, anything can happen. We need three to four players to deliver good performance," Mahmud added.

Mosaddek or Taskin may captain the side in the upcoming tournament, Mahmud also informed.

Dhaka will begin their tournament campaign against reigning champions Comilla Victorians in the tournament opener.



Novak Djokovic was put to test by Croatian teenager Dino Prizmic as the Serbian began his quest for a record 25th Grand Slam singles title with a cagey 6-2, 6-7(5), 6-3, 6-4 victory in the opening round of the Australian Open yesterday. Earlier, [Inset] American legend and four-time Australian Open winner Andre Agassi, who labelled Djokovic as the greatest men's player of all time prior to the year's first Grand Slam, was present at the trophy arrival ceremony in Melbourne.

PHOTO: AFP



'Would love to win it again'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Memories of her two previous titles at the Australian Open have made it hard for Naomi Osaka not to dream of holding aloft the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup once again as she marks her return in a first-round meeting with Caroline Garcia on Monday.

Osaka has reached at least the third round in six of her seven appearances on Melbourne's blue hard courts, winning the 2019 and 2021 titles.

After watching from afar last year ahead of the birth of her daughter Shai in July, Osaka has been quick to dampen talk of a fifth Grand Slam win and has played just two matches in the build-up to the year's first Grand Slam.

However, Osaka said she would love to win again.

"I love the comfort of it. Going into the locker room and having the same locker as before," she told reporters ahead of the tournament.

"I think little things like that really make me happy. Being able to hit on Rod Laver, look up at the sky and just realise, 'I've been able to win twice here'. I would love to do it again."

Can Papon walk the talk?

ANISUR RAHMAN

The newly appointed Minister of Youth and Sports Nazmul Hassan Papon made many great promises on the first day at his new office yesterday, promises the country's sports fraternity has heard before from his predecessors with very little implementation.

Papon arrived at the National Sports Council (NSC) office yesterday for the first time after taking oath as the minister and told the media about his plans to sit with every federation to know about their issues.

"I have to know the people who are involved with the federations. I have to sit with each federation's officials separately because meeting eight or nine federations at the same time will not do any good," Papon told the sports journalists present at the NSC.

"We have to know what type of support they need. Before providing financial support, we have to know about their objectives and targets for at least three years because it won't be possible to see the outcomes if they set a five-to-seven-year plan," he added.

Although Papon wanting to sit with each federation to identify the issues is commendable, the main reasons hindering the growth of the country's sports like - financial constraint, lack of round-the-year training, dearth of facilities and quality coaches, low accountability and transparency of federation officials - are already widely known.

Previous ministers have spoken about fixing these issues, but most of their vows proved to be empty promises.

Papon, who is the incumbent president of the

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), also spoke about opening up new grounds across the country, instead of focusing on building stadiums.

"I am not in favour of stadiums, rather I am in favour of sports. We don't need to have stadiums everywhere. We need to have open grounds with facilities like dressing rooms so that the people have access to enter the grounds and play there," he said.

Papon's predecessor Zahid Ahsan Russel had also made similar promises about solving the problems and spoke about taking the necessary steps to nurture sports in the grassroots level.

However, it was later seen that Russel, like the previous ministers, emphasised more on infrastructural development during his tenure.

As the minister, Papon also has to find a way to revive various sports which are slowly disappearing from the country and find ways to spread sports in the rural areas.

Unlike Russel, Papon also has some added challenges, as right now he is the head figure of the country's sports ministry and the most influential sports body - the BCB.

The minister is yet to step down from his post at the BCB and has indicated to the media that he won't leave the post abruptly.

As the sports minister, Papon has so far said exactly what was expected of him. But previous experiences are dissuading the country's sports fraternity from holding its breath in anticipation for a radical change in the coming years. In his initial media interaction, Papon has talked the talk, only time will tell, if he can walk the talk.



Four familiar faces -- Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez, Sergio Busquets, and Jordi Alba -- albeit in different colours, were all present during the year's first training session for Inter Miami on Saturday, invoking a sense of nostalgia for those who have been used to seeing this group play for Barcelona in the past decade. While Busquets and Alba joined Inter Miami in the MLS last season, this was the first time that Suarez took the field alongside Messi since both last played together for the Catalan giants before the Uruguayan left in 2020, signing for Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: INTER MIAMI

Ngetich breaks world 10 km record

REUTERS

Kenyan runner Agnes Ngetich broke the 10km world record in Valencia on Sunday, shaving 28 seconds off the previous mark, becoming the first woman to run the distance in under 29 minutes.

Ngetich clocked a time of 28:46, breaking Yalemzerf Yehualaw's road mixed race world record set two years ago.

"I am so happy. I didn't expect this world record. I was coming to improve my time, at least somewhere around 29:14, but I am happy that I ran a world record of 28 minutes. I didn't expect this," Ngetich said. The 22-year-old World Cross Country Championships 2023 team gold medallist had previously set the 10 km world record in a women-only race in September with a time of 29:24.

Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo won the men's race in Valencia with a time of 26:48.

SHORT CORNER

Drama, nail-biter in store for S Korea: Klinsmann

Jurgen Klinsmann expects his South Korea side to reach the Asian Cup final but warned on Sunday that there will be "drama" and "nail-biters" on the way. South Korea will be fully expected to begin their title bid on Monday against Bahrain with victory.

Kiwis beat Pakistan to take control of T20 series

Pace bowler Adam Milne claimed four wickets as New Zealand beat Pakistan by 21 runs in the second Twenty20 international Sunday to take a 2-0 lead in a five-game series. The tourists threw away a strong position in their run chase, in response to New Zealand's 194-8.

Japan begin Asian Cup with Vietnam win



Japan came from behind to beat Vietnam 4-2 in their Asian Cup Group D opener in a thrilling encounter on Sunday at the Al Thumama Stadium where five goals were scored in the first half and Takumi Minamino grabbed a brace.

Windies turn to Lara for inspiration

A new-look West Indies team is seeking inspiration from Caribbean great Brian Lara ahead of a tough two-Test series in Australia set to begin on January 17. Lara, who is set to work as a commentator in the series, took on additional responsibilities as he joined the Caribbean team in its first hit out at the Adelaide Oval today, the venue of the first Test.

Shibli, Mridha among players to watch at U19 WC

So often a gateway to the future, the U19 Cricket World Cup has seen a number of players go on and enjoy fruitful senior international careers. With the tournament beginning on January 16, the ICC takes a look at a number of players tipped to perform in South Africa.

AFCON: Ivory Coast sate home fans



It was no memorable performance, but delighted supporters nevertheless clogged the streets and parties continued late as host Ivory Coast opened proceedings at the Africa Cup of Nations finals with a 2-0 victory over Guinea Bissau in Abidjan on Saturday.

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