

## 'Respect more important than being liked by all'

SPORTS REPORTER

Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat stated that being the first Bangladesh umpire to make the cut in ICC's Elite Panel of umpires "is a matter of great honour".

"To be the first from my country on the panel makes it extra special and I look forward to justifying the faith shown in me," Sharfuddoula said in yesterday's ICC media release.

The 47-year-old had been a cricketer and also played in the 1994 ICC Trophy. However, injury issues saw him turn to umpiring. Sharfuddoula would go on to join Bangladesh Cricket Board as cricket operations manager, but later had quit to become an umpire.

So far, he has overseen 10 Tests, 63 One-Day Internationals, and 44 Twenty20 Internationals.

"I played the Dhaka Premier League in 89 and I was in class 8 or 9 playing for Surjo Torun. Then I played for the Bangladesh team in 92 after passing SSC. I think I was too young, and then in 94 I played the ICC Trophy.

"Funny thing is that I played for the U-19s after I was already captaining the national side. Then I played the Premier League for 17 to 18 years and then had one first-class tournament before the back pain came. I decided on a job or studies before coming to umpiring," he said about his career in a BCB video.

Saikat had umpired in the Australia vs West Indies series recently, a high-voltage series fought with passion. Yet, having umpired in World Cup games in India and a Test series as neutral umpire in Australia, Saikat considers home matches to be the most difficult.



"Umpiring here is a lot of pressure. We are a cricket-obsessed nation, and everyone wants the team to win. We also want it to be understood that when we go out into the ground, we must maintain neutrality.

"We can't be biased. I have played for Bangladesh and, of course, I feel good when the team wins but there are errors in judgement, and it's part of life and people need to accept that too.

"Actually, I have done World Cups and also the Test series in Australia. However, truth be told, I haven't felt the kind of pressure that I feel umpiring on home soil.

"But people are now seeing that umpiring is a difficult job, and umpires are human beings as well," he added.

Saikat, who is also the first from Bangladesh to umpire in a World Cup match, serves as an example for many who wish to become umpires. One of his advices to young and upcoming umpires is that "an umpire should look to earn respect rather than be liked by everyone."

"I have played cricket, but I feel that I haven't done anything more difficult than umpiring. If someone wants to come, they need to know that on days you will head back home crying. In our country's perspective, there is undue criticism of umpiring.

"But it's not like good days aren't there. One thing I would say is not to lose confidence in yourself," he said.

Saikat's consistency is something that ICC chief Geoff Allardice caught on to, saying it is "a well-deserved reward for many years of consistent performances".



Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who had initially opted to sit out the Sri Lanka series owing to fitness issues, joined the Bangladesh Test squad yesterday ahead of their second and final match against the Lankans in Chattogram tomorrow. Having already suffered a 328-run thumping in the first Test in Sylhet, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto would be delighted to have the all-rounder available for the crucial contest.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## 'Overplayed' Shoriful at risk of breaking down?

EKUSH TAPADER and ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

When the Bangladesh team began their two-day training ahead of the first Test in Sylhet, pacer Shoriful Islam was in Dhaka, with the physicians trying to determine whether he was fit enough to play the match.

Shoriful, declared injury-free, joined the team on the day before the Test but didn't bowl at all at training, making it seem that the pacer would be rested for the match. However, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha had said before that game that Shoriful was excused from training only to keep him fresh for the first Test.

But the left-arm pacer underwhelmed in the match on a greenish surface at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, claiming just one wicket each in the two innings and at times looked fatigued.

Shoriful has been the workhorse of the national team's pace attack since last year's ICC World Cup, having played in 23 out of the 24 matches the Tigers have played in the period -- three Tests, 14 ODIs, and six Twenty20s.

In between the Bangladesh matches, he also played 12 games for Durdanto Dhaka in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Playing so many games at a stretch must be testing the limits

of the 21-year-old's fitness and according to a source, Catapult, a software used to assess the fitness levels of the national team players, is already indicating that Shoriful is in need of a break.

Shoriful is currently the only all-format pacer in Bangladesh with Taskin Ahmed reportedly taking himself out of red-ball cricket due



to back issues, Ebadot Hossain still recovering from an injury and Mustafizur Rahman not being part of the Test setup for a while.

All-format pacers have become a rare commodity in international cricket and a handful of them who are around are carefully managed by their teams, given rests in

between to ensure their body doesn't break down.

Given the fact that Shoriful has been playing continuously for almost six months, veteran cricket coach Nazmul Abedin Fahim felt the pacer is in need of a rest and it would be wiser to not pick him for the forthcoming second Test against Sri Lanka in Chattogram, starting tomorrow.

"In the first Test, he seemed tired. He tried, but his body wasn't responding... Maybe he is not in a position to give his 100 percent. He has definitely been overplayed," Fahim told The Daily Star.

"We think that making a cricketer play one or two more games is not a big deal. But gradually, there is an accumulation of fatigue, which we don't consider. People get worn out. Getting overplayed could really harm Shoriful," he added.

Even though the final call to include a player in the eleven is made by the team management, chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu ensured that the selection panel will also be keeping an eye on the issue.

"We are keeping an eye on it. I will go there tonight [yesterday] and will have a discussion with the team about it. We have a chance to equal the series in Chattogram. But we have a lot of white-ball matches and a T20 World Cup coming up, we have that in mind. Let's see what happens," Lipu told The Daily Star.

## Injury blows ahead of crucial PL matchweek

AGENCIES

The Premier League returns this weekend after the final international break of the season, with a headline fixture on the cards as reigning champions Manchester City host Arsenal on Sunday.

With 10 games to go, the top-of-the-table tussle at the Etihad Stadium is set to have major consequences on the three-way battle for the title, also involving Liverpool, but apart from the points up for grabs, the trio also have a host of injury blows to worry about.

Pep Guardiola's City will miss defenders Kyle Walker and John Stones as the duo picked up injuries on England duty while key midfielder Kevin De Bruyne's groin issue meant he was withdrawn from Belgium's squad to face England. Defender Manuel Akanji was also withdrawn from Switzerland's squad, meaning Guardiola has a few headaches ahead of a game they dare not lose. That leaves Guardiola Ruben Dias, Josko Gvardiol, and Nathan Ake to choose from for the back line and he may also have to give the likes of Sergio Gomez and Rico Lewis the job to fill in for City's regular starters in defence.

Arsenal, too, have key injuries but unlike City, the Gunners' concerns lie in the attacking side of things as wingers Gabriel Martinelli and Bukayo Saka were sidelined and will miss the vital clash. Martinelli has missed a handful of games since a foot injury in the first week of March, while Saka withdrew himself from international duty following a thigh injury.

For Liverpool, who face a tricky Brighton just before Arsenal and City's clash, goalkeeper Alisson Becker remains unavailable owing to a thigh issue. Full-backs Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andrew Robertson will both miss the contest, while the Reds will sweat on striker Darwin Nunez's fitness.

## Titu made technical director, Butler women's coach

SPORTS REPORTER

AFC pro-licence coach Saiful Bari Titu is all set to be appointed as the technical director of Bangladesh Football Federation after the BFF technical committee recommended the veteran coach for a one-year appointment on Thursday.

The post of technical director was vacant since the middle of 2023 when Paul Smalley left the job.

Titu is going to the third local technical director after Shahidur Rahman Shantu and BA Jubair Nipu since the post was created 15 years ago.

"Eleven coaches applied for the technical director's post with only Titu applying from Bangladesh. We gave priority to the local coach as per the job circular as well as a FIFA directive, which suggests developing local coaches as technical director," BFF vice-president and technical committee chairman Mohiuddin Ahmed Mohi told the Daily Star after the meeting.

"We recommended Titu for a one-year appointment as he will work on every technical aspect regarding the BFF," Mohi said. "As a local coach, Titu knows every detail of the country's football and we believe he can play a great role in developing the country's football."

BFF general secretary Emran Hossain Tushar informed that the appointment of Titu will come into effect from April 1 while BFF Elite Academy's British coach Peter Butler take charge of women's teams.

## Heated affairs expected as BPL resumes today

SPORTS REPORTER

With all participants boosted by fresh foreign recruits, the second phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is expected to be more competitive as the country's top-flight football league resumes today following a nearly five-week break.

Across three venues, Chittagong Abahani take on Bangladesh Police in Munshiganj, Mohammedan Sporting Club and Fortis Football Club clash in Mymensingh, while Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club play against Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra in Gopalganj.

All 10 clubs signed up new foreign players during the mid-term transfer window, from February 25 to March 23. In this regard, the mid-to-lower table clubs had been far busier than the title aspirants: Bashundhara Kings, Mohammedan Sporting Club and Abahani.

Of the 24 newly overseas players -- 11 booters more than the previous season's mid-term signings -- bottom dwellers Brothers have signed a maximum of six foreign players after parting ways with all previous foreigners.

The Gopibag-based outfit intend to strengthen their backline, having conceded 29 goals in nine matches of the first leg, and have also signed naturalised Eleta Kingsley as a backup forward.

"During the first leg, our forwards did well but the backline could not hold on to the lead, thus we were deprived of many

BPL STANDINGS					
TEAM	MATCHES	WIN	DRAW	LOSS	PTS
Bashundhara Kings	9	7	1	1	22
Mohammedan	9	4	5	0	17
Abahani	9	4	3	2	15
Sheikh Jamal	9	4	1	4	13
Fortis	9	3	3	3	12
Sheikh Russel	9	2	4	3	10
Police	9	3	1	5	10
Chittagong Abahani	9	2	4	3	10
Rahmatganj	9	0	7	2	7
Brothers Union	9	0	3	6	3

points," said Brothers manager Amer Khan, adding that they are not thinking about avoiding relegation.

As far as the top guns are concerned, leaders Kings will feature Nigerian forward Mfon Sunday Udoh, who played for them during the AFC Cup, whereas Mohammedan have Uzbek midfielder Bekhruz Sadilloev in their ranks, as a backup for his compatriot Muzaffar Muzaffarov.

Abahani, meanwhile, roped in Australian defender Aaron Michael Evans alongside national captain Jamal Bhuiyan

to reinforce the midfield as well.

"Although it will boil down to ifs and buts, it is possible to catch Kings as the second leg is going to be more competitive than the first, with the inclusion of new players," Abahani manager Nazrul Islam said.

After a long gap, Mohammedan have a good chance to overtake Kings but coach Alfaz Ahmed is more focused on the team's improvement rather than securing the top place of the 10-team table.

"We haven't formed a champion team... If we get the favour of luck, we may also

finish on the top of the table, but it will exceed our expectation," Alfaz said.

"The second leg is going to be do-or-die for everyone because all teams except Bashundhara Kings are almost close with points, so no one will spare anyone on the ground," said the former national forward.

Two mid-table teams in Sheikh Russel and Bangladesh Police have each enlisted four overseas players. They had to play with less foreign players in the first leg, owing to injury problems as well as some foreign players' unavailability despite having registered them in time.

"We are now stronger with the addition of foreign players, who usually can make a difference in our league matches. We have missed the service of having four foreign players in a match," said Sheikh Russel assistant coach Abdul Baten Komol.

Chittagong Abahani and Sheikh Jamal also signed up three and two foreigners, respectively. Chittagong Abahani manager Arman Aziz said they hardly had any time to sign up quality foreigners before the start of the league, so they were forced to make an almost wholesale change.

"So far we have a good collection of local players. If the foreign players can shine up as per merit, then we can expect some good results in the second leg," said the former national midfielder.

And last but not the least, Fortis and Rahmatganj Muslim Friends Society each drafted in one foreign player to minimise their deficiencies.