

## Title now MSC's to lose

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Mohammedan Sporting Club took another giant step towards a maiden professional league title with a 3-1 win over Bangladesh Police in Cumilla as their nearest competitors Abahani fell to a 2-0 defeat against holders Bashundhara Kings in Dhaka yesterday.

The country's two traditional rivals -- Mohammedan and Abahani -- had only a four-point gap before the start of the 13th-round fixtures, but Mohammedan's lead has now increased to seven points with only five matches left. Mohammedan now have 34 points while Abahani remained second on 27 points.

Although the Motijheel-based outfit still need nine points to take an unassailable lead to confirm an elusive title that they have been searching for 17 years, any further slip up by archrivals Abahani will prompt an early celebration at the Black and Whites dugout.

At the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla, Bangladesh Police gave a tough time to Mohammedan before conceding in 52nd minute, thanks to a powerful header from Nigerian forward Sunday Emmanuel.

However, Police bounced back to level the margin in the 63rd minute with Brazilian defender Danilo Augusto converting from the spot after Shakil Ahad



A high-voltage Bangladesh Premier League clash between Bashundhara Kings and Abahani at the Kings Arena yesterday turned out to be chaotic as the contest ended with three players being sent off. Sohel Rana's challenge on Abahani's Shahin Ahammad in stoppage time caused a scuffle, resulting in the referee brandishing straight reds to Kings' Saad Uddin, Rana, and Abahani's Shahin. However, the game was decided long before as Kings' Faisal Fahim scored a brace on either side of half-time to help his side to a 2-0 victory.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Jam-packed schedule puts selectors in a jam

SPORTS REPORTER

Selectors are currently passing a busy time over forming separate squads ahead of the national team's and its understudy team's jam-packed schedule in May with the main concern being picking the right player for the right team.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday confirmed that the national team will play two T20Is against UAE in Sharjah on May 17 and 19 respectively before heading to Pakistan for a five-match T20I series, scheduled to start in Faisalabad on May 25.

But in the same month, both Bangladesh 'A' and Emerging Team will play separate series at home.

New Zealand 'A' team arrived in Bangladesh yesterday for three one-dayers and two four-day matches against their Bangladeshi counterparts, scheduled on May 5-24 in Sylhet and Mirpur.

Meanwhile, South Africa Emerging Team is scheduled to arrive on May 7, and will play three one dayers in Rajshahi on May 12-16 and two four-day matches in Chattogram and Mirpur between May 20-30 against Bangladesh Emerging Team.

The selectors have already named a 15-member Emerging Team squad, led by Akbar Ali alongside youngsters like Jishan Alam, Rakibul Hasan and Ripon Mondol, and the squad for the first two one-dayers of the 'A' team's series which includes the likes of Parvez Hossain

### Bangladesh tour of UAE, Pak

Practice camp: May 5; Team to depart for UAE: May 14

2 T20Is vs UAE: May 17-19

5 T20Is vs Pakistan: May 25 to June 3

### Bangladesh 'A' team's home series against NZ

3 one-dayers: May 5-10

2 four-dayers: May 14-24

### Bangladesh Emerging team's home series against SA

3 one-dayers: May 12-16

2 four-dayers: May 20-30

Emon, Shamim Hossain and Shoriful Islam.

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu admitted the challenge of forming three separate squads concurrently, and told The Daily Star, "There is a matter of fine tuning. We need to name a squad for the last one-dayer [against New Zealand A]. Then we need to take some players from there for the national team's T20I assignment. We also need to form a four-day squad for the red-ball series as well."

It is learnt that pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who was initially named in the

'A' team's squad, will be rested instead as the BCB wants to be extra cautious with him following Taskin Ahmed's injury and Nahid Rana's ongoing stint at the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

"The team management agreed to give Mustafizur a rest as he has already played four games in the PSL after coming back from rehab. He will be playing T20Is against UAE and Pakistan and we then also have a full-fledged white-ball series against Sri Lanka. We have picked Khaled [Ahmed] in Mustafizur's place," Lipu said.

The hectic cricket schedule increases the risk of players getting injured and as many of the national team cricketers play across all three formats, the chief selector felt an injury would make their job much more difficult.

"It's good if a player plays in all three formats, but it's also risky. When he is out of form or gets injured, we need to find three players to replace him. If one of my confirmed players gets injured in between, we need to find three players to replace him in the Sri Lanka series. Then the selection becomes very difficult."

The chief selector also said that in case of filing up a vacuum in the side, they would prefer picking someone with experience of playing international cricket.

"We have some players. But it's not like everyone is ready... When we find a vacuum in the team, we want to keep some players ready who also have experience of playing in international cricket."

## T20 captaincy call after Liton's injury assessment

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is waiting on the injury assessment of Liton Das as the wicketkeeper-batter is the frontrunner to captain the Tigers in their upcoming T20I series against the UAE and Pakistan.

Bangladesh are slated to play two T20Is against UAE on May 17 and May 19 in Sharjah before the five-match T20I series in Pakistan from May 25 to June 3. BCB is expected to name the same side for both series.

Liton would undergo an X-ray on Saturday to assess the extent of the injury he suffered during a practice session in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) last month. Following a scan, it will be determined whether he can recover in time before the UAE series. The BCB is understood to be waiting on the captaincy call until Liton's development is assessed.

Meanwhile, Taskin Ahmed's Achilles injury, for which the pacer is currently in England to consult specialists, has made BCB's captaincy options limited. It was learned that Taskin would be rested for both series to allow him recovery time.

Liton had served as the captain in Bangladesh's last T20I assignment in the Caribbean in the absence of captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was out with injury. Shanto had discussed not continuing the T20 captaincy with the board.

## SHORT CORNER

### Stokes fit to captain England against Zimbabwe

Ben Stokes was given the all-clear to captain England in their one-off Test against Zimbabwe, set to be a four-day game, later this month as he was named in a 13-man squad announced Friday. The 33-year-old all-rounder has been recovering from hamstring surgery after breaking down in New Zealand in December, his second hamstring tear in five months.

### Titas win maiden Premier Chess League title

Titas Club emerged champions in the Great Wall Ceramic Premier Division Chess League for the first time after beating Uttara Central Chess Club 4-0 in the ninth and final round held at the Bangladesh Chess Federation Hall Room yesterday. Titas secured 16 points from nine rounds, two more than Manha's Castle who finished runners-up ahead of Leonine Chess Club.

### Problem No.9: A sobering sign of Bangladesh's striker shortage

After Bashundhara Kings lifted the Federation Cup, their captain Tapu Barman made an interesting claim to The Daily Star during an interview. He said things were "better than last year" because more local forwards had made their mark on the goal-scoring chart in the recently concluded tournament. On paper, it seems promising: seven players sharing the top spot. However, the reality isn't as rosy once the surface is scratched.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website

## Bayern on cusp of Bundesliga title

AGENCIES

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany is keeping talk of celebrations on ice as his team prepare for Saturday's Bundesliga clash at fifth-placed RB Leipzig where they can clinch a record-extending 34th German league title.

Kompany's side hold an eight-point lead over last season's champions Bayer Leverkusen, who are second on 67 points, with three games remaining.

A win on Saturday would clinch the title, but even matching Leverkusen's result at Freiburg on Sunday would be enough for Bayern to secure the title.

"We want to win tomorrow and be champions," Kompany told reporters on Friday. "That'd be nice. Tomorrow is a final for us. Hopefully, we do it. We're preparing as normal for Leipzig. I'm not preparing any celebrations. I'm preparing for the game."

"They have a lot of talent and quality, lots of good young players. They lost in Frankfurt (last week). I think they'll now play with full energy again, look to attack."

"Teams make radical decisions against Bayern ... I think we will get the best version of Leipzig as an opponent. It will be tough. We need to prepare for the game, not for a party."



Bayern's top scorer Harry Kane, looking to land a long-awaited first title of his career, is suspended, but Kompany said the striker would likely travel with the team.

"Harry is one of our best players mentally. He knows his moment is coming. He's exuding confidence," Kompany said.

Kane has scored 36 goals and registered 12 assists in 44 appearances in all competitions for Bayern this season.

"I have not seen anything in training that even hints he is not even playing on Saturday. He's trained well," said Kompany.

"Maybe some guys will come with us to Leipzig ... Harry probably won't pass up the opportunity to come."

Meanwhile, a 13th league title with Bayern would be a fitting farewell for the German, whose summer departure after 25 seasons at the club draws near.

Mueller, a one-club player, joined Bayern aged just 10 and played his 500th Bundesliga game last week. Mueller has amassed a remarkable 32 trophies with Bayern, including two Champions Leagues, but will leave at the end of the season after he was not offered a contract extension.

No player has ever won 13 Bundesliga titles, and only Manchester United's Ryan Giggs has hit that mark in any of Europe's top five leagues.



Both Manchester United and Tottenham put a foot in the Europa League final, with convincing wins on Thursday. All of United's goals came in a frenetic first half, with Bruno Fernandes scoring twice to help beat 10-man Athletic Bilbao 3-0 away at the San Mames stadium, the venue for the final. The fervent home fans were enraged when Athletic defender Daniel Vivian was sent off for pulling back Rasmus Hojlund, and Fernandes slotted home the resulting penalty, after Casemiro had opened the scoring against the run of play in the semifinal first leg. Fernandes rolled in a third before half-time. [Inset] Meanwhile, a second-half penalty from Dominic Solanke and strikes from Brennan Johnson and James Maddison in the first half helped Tottenham seal a 3-1 win at home against Bodo/Glimt. The Norwegian side, however, kept slim hopes of a turnaround alive, thanks to a late goal from Ulrik Saltnes.

PHOTO: REUTERS