Star
DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 2, 2026, SRABAN 18, 1433 BS
SPORT

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 5
Commonwealth Games
Live from 2:00 pm
T SPORTS
Lanka Premier League
Dambulla vs Jaffna
Live from 8:00 pm
TEN CRICKET
The Hundred
Live from 7:30 pm

INFANTINO'S FAILED GAMBLE

STAR SPORTS DESK

FIFA yesterday abandoned its proposal to sell a minority stake in its commercial business after the plan triggered fierce opposition from confederations and member associations over concerns about transparency and governance. The governing body had hoped to raise up to $4.2 billion by selling around 20 per cent of a new commercial entity, FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), valuing it at $20 billion. While the proposal has now been shelved, the backlash has continued, with UEFA, several national associations, and others saying the episode had eroded their confidence in FIFA president Gianni Infantino's leadership because of the way the plan was conceived and presented.

JULY 28, 2026

The Times reveals FIFA is quietly exploring a multi-billion-dollar private equity deal involving the commercial rights to FIFA-run events, including the World Cup, sending shockwaves through world football.

JULY 29, 2026

FIFA unveils FFE, saying it aims to raise $4.2 billion by selling minority, non-controlling stakes to long-term investors.

Member associations are promised a $20 million upfront payment in early 2027, with funding for the 2027-2030 cycle rising from $8 million to $20 million.

Backlash begins immediately. UEFA condemns the proposal, while CONCACAF, the English FA, AFC, and EU sports chief Glenn Micallef all question the plan and the lack of consultation.

FIFA sets September 19 as the deadline for member associations to back the proposal to qualify for the financial payout.

JULY 30, 2026

Infantino insists the proposal is "an opportunity, not an obligation."

CAF calls for consultation with its members before taking a position.

UEFA and its 55 member associations threaten to boycott FIFA competitions, including the World Cup, if the proposal proceeds.

JULY 31, 2026

CONCACAF's 41 member associations unanimously reject the proposal.

AFC joins UEFA and CONCACAF, expressing serious concerns and calling for greater consultation.

Former US Soccer president Carlos Cordeiro, a senior adviser to Infantino, resigns, calling FFE "a bad deal for football."

FIFA vows to continue consultations despite mounting opposition.

"Having listened carefully to all the views, it has become clear that the project has created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place... As a result, this proposal will not proceed."

Infantino statement on Saturday



AUGUST 1, 2026

FIFA chief operating officer Kevin Lamour distances himself from the proposal, describing it as "the project of one person" and saying staff felt "deceived".

FIFA scraps the proposal, with Infantino conceding that the divisions it had created outweighed its intended benefits.

REACTIONS AFTER FFE WAS SCRAPPED

UEFA: "The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family... This is a victory for the whole game. But rebuilding trust in FIFA has only just begun."

England FA: "We fully support UEFA's position. It is time for a full review of FIFA's leadership and governance to ensure the game is run transparently and for the benefit of all 211 member associations."

German FA (DFB): "The FIFA President acted unilaterally, without transparency... A fundamentally different culture must take hold at FIFA, where decisions are discussed and made collectively."

Dutch FA (KNVB): "The way this process unfolded has led to a fundamental breach of trust... The KNVB no longer has confidence in Gianni Infantino's leadership."

AFC: "The future of global football must be shaped through proper consultation, collective dialogue and respect for established governance structures."

WHAT IT COULD MEAN FOR INFANTINO

FIFA's next presidential election is on March 19, 2027, in Rabat, Morocco, where Infantino can seek a final four-year term. Infantino was elected in 2016 for his first term and re-elected unopposed in both 2019 and 2023.

A candidate needs the backing of 106 of FIFA's 211 member associations. The backlash from major confederations has complicated Infantino's political position.

Strong criticism from AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, Infantino's main rival in 2016, has fuelled speculation over a possible challenge. Candidates can enter the race until November 18, 2026.

The abandoned FFE project was widely seen as a potential platform for Infantino to retain significant influence over FIFA's commercial operations even after his presidency ends.

Injury-hit Tigers receive Litton boost

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh received a timely boost amid their injury concerns as wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das was yesterday added to the squad for the opening Test of the two-match series in Australia, beginning on August 13, after recovering faster than expected from a calf injury.

Litton had been sidelined since sustaining the injury during the home ODI series against Australia on June 14 and was omitted from the initial squad announced on July 26. Although the injury was not considered serious, his recovery took longer than expected, ruling him out of the subsequent T20I series against Australia and the tour of Zimbabwe.

After treatment and medical assessments in Bangladesh and Singapore, Litton was initially expected to return for the second Test. However, his rehabilitation progressed well enough for him to be added to the squad for the series opener.

"The 31-year-old batsman has been sidelined since June due to the injury, but has responded well to his rehabilitation programme and will be in consideration for selection for the opening Test," the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said in a press release yesterday.

BCB cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees echoed that view but stressed Litton must still pass a fitness test before being considered for the first Test.



PHOTO: BCB

"There is still time for him to undergo a fitness test before the first Test, and even more time before the second. His recovery has been very satisfactory, which is why the BCB felt it was worthwhile to send him with the squad."

BCB cricket operations in-charge **Shahriar Nafees**

"When the Test squad was announced on July 26, based on the assessment at that time, he was not fit enough. However, from July 26 to today [August 1], his recovery has been very encouraging," Nafees told The Daily Star.

"The BCB medical department and the selectors are now confident that his rehabilitation is progressing well... He has already resumed training, batting and hitting.

"There is still time for him to undergo a fitness test before the first Test, and even more time before the second. His recovery has been very satisfactory, which is why the BCB felt it was worthwhile to send him with the squad," added the former Bangladesh captain.

Litton's inclusion is a major relief for Bangladesh, who are already without pace spearhead Nahid Rana for the series and will miss fellow pacer Shoriful Islam in the opening Test due to injury.

Batting at lower-middle order, Litton has displayed outstanding red-ball form since 2025, scoring two centuries and three fifties in his last six Tests. Both centuries came in his last five innings, and Bangladesh will hope he can carry that form into their first tour Down Under since 2003.

The first contingent of the Bangladesh team departed for Darwin on Friday, while the second group, including Litton, is scheduled to leave Dhaka today.

Bangladesh will play a three-day warm-up match against a Cricket Australia XI at the DXC Arena from August 6 to 8.

The first Test will be held at Marrara Cricket Ground in Darwin from August 13 to 17, while the second will take place at the Great Barrier Reef Arena in Mackay from August 21 to 25, marking the venue's first-ever Test. Both matches are part of the 2025-27 ICC World Test Championship cycle.

Bangladesh grouped with Sri Lanka, Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been drawn alongside Sri Lanka and Bhutan in Group A of the 2026 SAFF Championship, while holders and record nine-time champions India will face the Maldives and Pakistan in Group B.

The 15th edition of the tournament will be held in Dhaka from November 4 to 17, marking Bangladesh's return as hosts of the regional showpiece after the 2018 edition.

The draw, held at the SAFF Congress in Thimphu yesterday, kept the region's two biggest football markets apart in the group stage. Bangladesh were placed in a separate pot as hosts, while India were seeded as the highest-ranked team in South Asia (138), ensuring the two sides could not be drawn in the same group.

Bangladesh will now begin their campaign against a group featuring two familiar regional opponents, while Nepal's participation remains uncertain. Nepal were excluded from the draw due to their FIFA suspension, but SAFF have given them until September to have the ban lifted. If they receive clearance within the deadline, they will be added to Group A.

GROUP A
Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka

GROUP B
India, Maldives, Pakistan

*** Nepal will be in Group A if FIFA ban is lifted*
*** The top two teams from each group will progress to the semifinals*

SALAHUDDIN RE-ELECTED UNOPPOSED

Kazi Salahuddin has been re-elected unopposed as president of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) for a fifth consecutive term yesterday.

The former BFF president and ex-Bangladesh captain, now 72, has led the region's football governing body since 2009.

A previous clause in SAFF's constitution barred anyone over the age of 70 from holding office, but that provision was removed during a constitutional overhaul last year, paving the way for Salahuddin's continuation, extending his tenure as the longest-serving president in SAFF's history.

In a congratulatory message, SAFF said: "Heartiest congratulations to Mr Kazi Md Salahuddin on being re-elected as the President of SAFF!"

"This achievement is a testament to your dedication, vision, and unwavering commitment to the development of football in South Asia. May your new term bring greater progress, unity, and success for the region's football family. Wishing you all the best for the journey ahead!" the statement added.



Sri Lanka's Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage celebrates after winning the men's javelin throw final during the athletics competition at the Commonwealth Games at Scotstoun Stadium in Glasgow on July 31, 2026. After India's Neeraj Chopra won Olympic gold at Tokyo 2020 and Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem triumphed in Paris 2024, it was the turn of Sri Lanka's 23-year-old former cricketer to claim the Commonwealth title. Pathirage took gold ahead of Chopra, while Nadeem finished ninth.

PHOTO: AFP