

SPORT

All teams still in the picture

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Two-thirds of the competition may be over and there are just ten more league matches to go, but despite that all six teams in the third edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) still have a chance to make it to the last four.

Sure enough, the Chittagong Vikings' defeat to the Comilla Victorians on Thursday on their home turf has made things extremely difficult for Tamim Iqbal and co. However, a close look at the table suggests that they still have a slight chance of making it to the knock out stages.

For starters, they have to win their last two games against the Dhaka Dynamites and the Barisal Bulls. Apart from the wins, they will also need Dhaka to lose all of their four remaining matches.

And that's not all. Chittagong will also need the Sylhet Superstars, who have two points and four games in hand, to beat Dhaka and lose at least two out of the remaining three games.

With so many ifs and buts, it's safe to say that the Vikings seem to be the most vulnerable team. In addition, they may not even be able to field their best eleven in the next two matches. Their skipper and highest run-getter Tamim Iqbal isn't a hundred per cent fit and may not be able to feature in the next two matches.

The team management will also be nervously waiting to see if their top order batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan, who was involved in a collision with Imrul Kayes during the match on Thursday -- after which Chittagong were fined five penalty runs -- will face any kind of action from the BPL's technical committee.

Sylhet, on the other hand, have a better chance of qualifying and their fate is in their own hands. They will go through to the last four provided that they win all their games. There is no doubt that it will be a tough ask for Mushfiqur Rahim and co, who haven't yet managed to find their rhythm in the league.

They will hope that things change with the addition of Shahid Afridi to their side. The Pakistan batsman began his BPL stint in Chittagong with a thunderous half-century. Kumar Sangakkara's Dhaka Dynamites aren't in a comfortable position either. They have six points from four matches and are currently fourth in the table, with pressure mounting from Sylhet.

While their bowling has been doing well, their batting is yet to click. And the reason behind that is that their local batsmen haven't managed to fire. The likes of Mosaddek Hossain or even Nasir Hossain haven't been displaying the form that they did in the recent past.

As a result, there has been plenty of pressure on their skipper, Sangakkara.

Shakib Al Hasan's Rangpur Riders may be sitting pretty at number three with eight points from seven matches, but they will know how crucial their next three games could be.

They will have to win at least two out of their next three games and, in particular, fire from all fronts in the match against Sylhet.

With ten points each, Comilla Victorians and the Barisal Bulls at the moment seem to have already taken a step towards the knock-out stages.



Pakistani fast bowlers Sohail Khan (L) and Mohammad Irfan enjoy a bit of Bengali delicacy during a break from Dhaka Dynamites' practice session at the BCB National Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Gayle makes landfall

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Barisal Bulls could not have asked for more. With ten points off six matches, they are in prime position to finish the competition on top at the moment.

And that success is not something that too many experts would have predicted prior to the start of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), because on paper their team definitely wasn't the best.

However, to their credit the players they selected overwhelmingly performed, especially their bowling line-up.

To add to this, they can now include in their playing eleven the dangerous Chris Gayle, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday. The West Indian will be able to play at least four matches for the Bulls and there's no doubt that his inclusion can only make the team a lot more balanced.

Gayle has played six matches in the BPL so far and has an astounding

average of 100. He has scored more than 400 runs in the competition with three centuries to his name.

The West Indian, who last played in the Caribbean Premier League in July this year, upon his arrival in his typical flamboyant style said that he had come here to 'hit sixes' and hoped to continue his good run in the BPL.

"We are second in the table and are playing some good cricket. That's good for me and that can ease the pressure off me. There shouldn't be any added pressure because they have been doing well," said Gayle.

"Hopefully we can continue that form. I am looking forward to meeting the boys and having some

fun with them," he added.

Gayle is likely to play for Barisal from Sunday onwards. In Evin Lewis Barisal already have an explosive opener. The youngster from Trinidad scored this edition's first century in Chittagong. His innings had come out of nowhere and had taken the Dhaka Dynamites by a surprise.

After that match Lewis had said that it was his dream to open alongside Gayle, whom he considers to be his idol. If things go as per plan, that dream is expected to come true on Sunday when the Bulls take on the Sylhet Superstars at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

When informed that Lewis had already scored the first century of the competition, Gayle stated that he was targeting one as well.

When asked if he had any message for his fans in Bangladesh, the left-hander broke into a smile and said: "Well I am here. Bangladesh, I am here. I am in town see you on the sixth. Let's have some fun at the stadium all



Chris Gayle arrived in Dhaka last night sporting Barisal Bulls merchandise as he looks to add further firepower to the team. PHOTO: COLLECTED

WORLD T20 QUALIFIERS

BD women seek perfect finish

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Bangladesh will be hoping to cap off an excellent journey with a win in the final of the ICC Women's World Twenty20 Qualifiers today when they take on Ireland at the Terdthai Cricket Ground in Bangkok.

Bangladesh have been in a rich vein of form throughout the tournament, making their way to the final undefeated and mostly unchallenged. The Irish, too, have done remarkably well, boasting their own undefeated record going into the final.

However, one aspect Bangladesh might need to improve on is batting as on most occasions one or two of the batters bailed the team out of trouble. The bowling has been excellent, helping the team defend average totals with consummate ease.

Bangladesh's bowling attack thrived on stifling their opponents, restricting the opposition to sub-60 totals in all their games so far, failing to completely dismiss the opposition only once.

In stark contrast, Ireland have been a well-oiled batting machine. Batting second in three of their four matches, Ireland have won with plenty of balls and wickets to spare.

Their batters have been relentless, chasing down targets with a no-nonsense approach which has seen them chase down a score of 90 with almost eight overs to spare; a remarkable feat in the competition where the highest total has been 110.

With all these elements present, the game should make for an interesting final although both teams have already secured passage to the ICC Women's World Twenty20.



Top-seed Iris Wang of the United States executes a smash during her quarterfinal rubber of the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Open International Challenge at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Shuttlers look forward to the SA Games

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The Bangladeshi shuttlers are looking forward to cashing in on the experience they gathered from the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Open International

Challenge in the upcoming South Asian Games after the last remaining pair from the host country was eliminated at the quarterfinal stage.

Ahsan Habib Parash and Shapla Akter ended the hosts' participation after losing against Yong Kai Terry and Wei Han Tan pair of Singapore in straight sets (16-21, 21-21) in the mixed doubles event at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

Like the two previous editions, the Bangladeshi shuttlers had to be content with the experience as they are now looking forward to the upcoming tournaments.

"Actually we were the bottom-level

players in this tournament. It would have been a daydream to expect us beat the opponents, who are much ahead of us in terms of quality," said former national champion Enamul Haque, who however believes that this tournament would help their cause in February's SA Games in India.

"Though we could not produce good results, we can hope to do well in the SA Games because there will not be players of this quality there. Except for the Indians, there is hardly any difference among the other shuttlers of the subcontinent," said Enam, adding that they would be happy if they can retain the bronze medals they won in team event and mixed doubles event in the last edition of the regional multi-sport competition.

Defending women's champion Elina Sultana, too, believed that the experience would auger well for them in future.

"Our foreign coaches have noted down our weak points and we hope to rectify the mistakes in the next two months of

Siddikur's surge halted

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Siddikur Rahman's surge in the Ho Tram Open was halted midway through the second round as play was called off early due to fading light.

The two-time Asian Tour winner, who had started the second round in joint 33rd position, had moved up to 11th after exchanging four birdies for a bogey in the first nine holes in gusty conditions on Friday afternoon. That took him to four-under for the event, but he could not start the back nine as play was suspended at 5.35pm local time.

Siddikur was six strokes off the pace, with Chinese Taipei's Lin-wen Tang taking the clubhouse lead at 10-under-par (132).

BFF yet to clear Lopez's dues

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Twelve days after his termination, the national football team's former coach Fabio Lopez is yet to receive some of his pending wages.

After being sacked two-and-a-half months into his four-month contract, the Italian and his two assistant have been staying at a Dhaka hotel, with all expenditures carried out by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

"We have already paid their salaries for three months and we are expecting to clear the one-month's remaining salary within a week," said BFF's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag.

Jadeja's 5-for wrecks SA

AFP, New Delhi



Ajinkya Rahane hit the first century of the series before spinner Ravindra Jadeja ripped through South Africa's line-up as India compounded the visitors' misery in the fourth and final Test Friday.

Jadeja, 26, picked up five wickets for 30 runs to help India bowl out the top-ranked tourists for 121 off 49.3 overs at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi.

The visitors, who have already lost the series, trail by 213 runs in the first innings. AB de Villiers waged a lonely battle, making 42 off 78 balls.

Left-arm Jadeja appeared to be on a roll, recording his fourth five-wicket haul in Tests to tighten the screw on the Proteas.

Paceman Umesh Yadav (2-32) gave India the key breakthrough by having opener Dean Elgar caught behind for 17 before uprooting the off-stump of J.P. Duminy for his 50th Test wicket.

Jadeja dismissed the other opener Temba Bavuma (22) and also removed skipper Hashim Amla, who nicked behind to the wicketkeeper.

Amla scored just three from 34 balls, in a yet another single figure score on what has been a miserable tour for him.

Jadeja grabbed three more wickets in fading light, much to the delight of a sizeable crowd in the Indian capital.

Ravichandran Ashwin (2-26) and Ishant Sharma (1-28) also joined the party, helping India end the day on a high.

The hosts were bowled out for 334 five overs into the post-lunch session

with recalled paceman Kyle Abbott taking two wickets in three balls to send back Ashwin (56) and Sharma (zero).

It was the second career five-wicket haul for Abbott, who had picked three wickets on the opening day.

After resuming at the overnight 231-7, India added 103 runs while losing three wickets, including that of Rahane (127).

Rahane, 27, reached his fifth Test century and his first on home soil with a classic straight drive off Abbott.

The stylish right-hander, on 89 overnight, raised his arms in celebration before waving his bat towards cheering fans.

No batsman had scored a century in an otherwise low-scoring series which India have sealed already after winning the first and third Tests.

Rahane thrived on the Kotla track, which seemed to have evened out after offering inconsistent bounce and turn to bowlers on the opening day.

His fine innings came to an end

when he handed a straightforward catch to de Villiers in the covers off leg-spinner Imran Tahir.

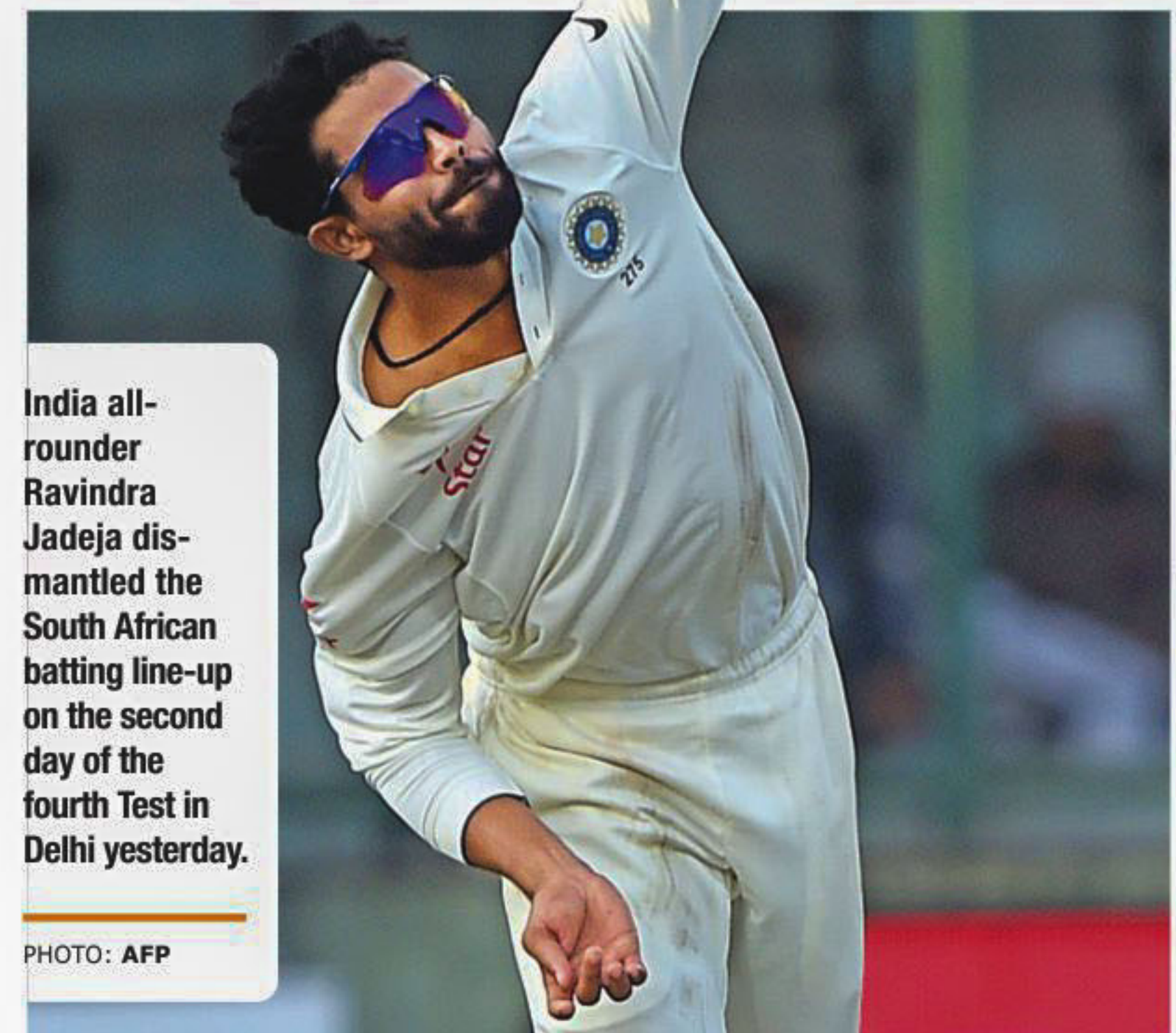
His 127 runs came off 215 balls and was studded with 11 fours and four sixes.

Rahane exhibited crackling form in the first session, lofting off-spinner Dane Piedt for two sixes in three balls, including

one that sailed over the long-off fence.

He also shared 98 runs with Ashwin, helping India steady the boat after they were struggling at 139-6 at one stage.

Ashwin, the leading wicket-taker of the series with 26 scalps, showed his skill with the bat as well, reaching his sixth Test half-century with a six off Tahir.



India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja dismissed the South African batting line-up on the second day of the fourth Test in Delhi yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 334 (Dhawan 33, Kohli 44, Rahane 127, Jadeja 24, Ashwin 56; Abbott 5-40, Piedt 4-117)
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 121 (Elgar 17, Bavuma 22, De Villiers 42, Yadav 2-32, Ashwin 2-26, Jadeja 5-30)