

SPORTS

Comilla Victorians' injured captain Tamim Iqbal has a friendly chat with Chittagong Vikings' Misbahul Haq during training at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday. The two teams will face off in today's first match when the BPL resumes after a day's break.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Can locals join the party?

BPL gets back on the park today after a day's break

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The rickshaw-puller eagerly asked this reporter on the ride to the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday: "When is the next game of Sylhet Sixers in the BPL?" He then added in a lively tone: "Our team has surprised us with two wins in the first two matches with the two foreign openers [Upul] Tharanga and that West Indian player [Andre Fletcher] did the job for us."

The buzz and intensity surrounding the Bangladesh Premier League has reached its peak in Sylhet, where almost everyone in the city is keeping a close eye on every single aspect of the matches.

After a day's break, the BPL will be back on the field today at the Sylhet International Stadium and on TV screens across the country when Chittagong Vikings take on Comilla Victorians in the day match at 2:00pm and Sylhet square off against Rajshahi Kings in the evening match at 7:00pm.

Unfortunately, in the four matches so far there have been no local names who shone brightly enough to catch the rickshaw-puller's eye, and the

foreigners ruling the roost has been the real picture in the fifth edition of the BPL.

The aforementioned names are actually the two top run-getters in the tournament. Tharanga, who scored consecutive fifties in the first two games for Sylhet, tops the list with 120 runs while his partner Fletcher is in the second spot with 99 runs. There was not even one local name in the top five run-scorers' list. The one exception to the foreign dominance so far has been provided by Sylhet skipper Nasir Hossain.

Nasir is the highest wicket-taker with three scalps in two games and his economical figures along with the help of the two foreign openers are the main reasons for the home team's current place at the top of the table.

Defending champions Dhaka Dynamites, who were the first of two to be beaten by the Sixers, also managed to make a comeback in the second game with the help of two of their foreign players. Evin Lewis and Cameron Delport's blistering fifties helped Dhaka post 202 for seven and clinch a comfortable 65-run win over Khulna Titans on Sunday.

The picture was pretty similar for Rangpur Riders. Despite Mohammad Mithun top-scoring with 46 runs, it was English cricketer Ravi Bopara and Sri Lankan Thisara Perera who eventually took them through to the target in a tight chase to seal the win in their first game against Rajshahi Kings.

Chittagong Vikings, interestingly, will play their opening game of the tournament against Comilla Victorians today and might have the advantage of the nature of the pitch, condition and the opponent.

"It depends on individual. Some can learn by watching while some learn by playing, but obviously we did get some idea about our opponents regarding their batting and bowling. So we can make our plans after watching those games which will help us to prepare better," said Chittagong Vikings icon player Soumya Sarkar after the training session in Sylhet District Stadium yesterday.

Meanwhile, the high flying hosts Sylhet will look to continue their brilliant run under skipper Nasir when they take on Darren Sammy's Rajshahi who will be looking for their first win in the second game of the day.

BPL betting claims another life

AL-AMIN

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is only in its fifth edition this year but more importantly, the glamorous T20 cricket competition has become the most followed and money-spinning domestic sporting event. Unfortunately, the BPL caravan has also brought along the evil of betting with it. More painfully, we have had another casualty due to betting in the country yesterday.

The man who has been identified as a victim of an all consuming evil is Nasim Ahmed. A BBA student of a private university in Dhaka, the 23-year-old was stabbed to death on Monday morning reportedly by a group of thugs for 'protesting' betting happening close to his Badda residence the previous night when a BPL game was going on in Sylhet.

Police are investigating the incident. Our focus is not whether he was protesting or not but instead the evil practice itself because it is an open secret that betting frenzy returns with the BPL every year. It involves everybody: from the rich to the poor, from an aged individual to a student in a country where betting is illegal. We do not have any survey that would help identify how much money is involved in betting during the more than a month-long BPL tournament. But independent international studies suggest that the amount is more than a billion dollars if we consider the involvement of unsolicited betting syndicates in India and the Middle East.

But betting in Bangladesh is at a grassroots level and massively involves students, day labourers, rickshaw pullers and even farmers. The BPL was meant to be pure entertainment but it has turned into a

bonanza for those betting syndicates, who have been sucking money out of the pool and strayed youths in every nook and corner of the country. Although high-stake betting is taking place secretly, small scale betting is being conducted openly.

You just need to walk out of your home and look for a tea stall or a small gathering on the street where there is a television showing BPL matches live to find small scale bets being placed that range from how many runs will be scored off a delivery to who is going to win the game.

This small scale betting has been growing like an epidemic and tragically Nasim has become another casualty of it. If this is overlooked then we are destined to endure more deaths in the future. This is something law enforcers can curb substantially if not wipe out completely.

When the BPL governing council member secretary IH Mallick was updated about the tragic death yesterday he admitted that betting is on the rise to an alarming level. He also said that the Bangladesh Cricket Board has a role to raise awareness against this illegal practice.

"Those who bet not only lose money but also create all sorts of tension in an otherwise peaceful family. We are seriously thinking of doing something to fight this evil. I'm not sure whether it would be possible for us to come up with a slogan during the on-going BPL so that we can create awareness among the people against betting. But we will definitely work out something in the future," said Mallick.

Awareness against betting is something our cricketing heroes can campaign for massively. But more serious actions from law enforcers and tougher laws are of paramount importance if we are to stop this epidemic feeding on cricket-ainment.

BD U-19s off to Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 15-member Bangladesh Under-19 team for the ACC Youth Asia Cup, which will be held in Malaysia from November 10th.

Bangladesh have been placed in Group A alongside India, Nepal and Malaysia while Group B comprises of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the winner of the western region which will be determined tomorrow, the same day that the Saif Hasan-led team will leave Dhaka for the tournament.

Bangladesh face Nepal, against whom they secured a 2-1 series victory at home on Sunday, in their opening group match at the Kinrara Oval on November 11th. Their second group match will be against Malaysia on November 13 while their third fixture pits them against India on November 14.

The Bangladesh U-19 team, which suffers from a lack of match practice ahead of next year's ICC Youth World Cup in New Zealand, organised the three-match series against a Nepal U-19 side at the BKSP as a part of their preparations for the Asia Cup.

Bangladesh won the first encounter

by 3 wickets and also won the second by 123 runs before Nepal got some solace from their 6 wicket victory in the last game.

Hasan Mahmud and Kazi Onik Islam claimed three wickets each while Nayeem Islam took two before Naim Sheikh scored 53 and Towhid Hridoy added 48 to ease to victory in the low-scoring first match. In the second encounter, Hasan Mahmud captured three wickets after Saif Hasan hit 62 and Afif Hossain tallied 59 to ensure the home side another triumph.

However, a 139-run opening stand between Jitendra Singh (45) and Mahamad Asif Sheikh (90) helped Nepal finish the tour with a six-wicket win.

SQUAD: Saif Hassan (captain), Afif Hossain (vice-captain), Nayeem Hasan, Pinak Ghosh, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahidul Islam, Mohammad Rakib, Robiul Haque, Hasan Mahmud, Qazi Onik Islam, Roni Hossen, Aminul Islam, Shakhawat Hossain, Naim Sheikh and Shakil Hossain.

BANGLADESH'S MATCHES
November 11: Bangladesh vs Nepal at Kinrara
November 13: Bangladesh vs Malaysia at Bayuemas
November 14: Bangladesh vs India at RSC

Liton not at home

SPORTS REPORTER

It is taken for granted that players struggle to adjust to conditions away from home but when he says he finds it hard to adapt to home conditions, it will certainly raise some eyebrows.

Interestingly, this was the explanation provided by Comilla Victorians opener Liton Das when asked why the national team players, who failed to perform in South Africa, are still not able to recapture their form in the ongoing fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League.

"In T20s, players can play well and bad -- it can happen. But it's not like that we are stuck on it, as the conditions here [Bangladesh] are different it will take some time to adapt as we returned after a long tour," Liton said in Sylhet yesterday.

"We have been playing on different pitches for a long time and it's a bit difficult to adjust. It seems like the wicket is on the slower side so there is some difficulties to adjust to that and in T20 cricket there is no time to think."

Practice turns into get-together

DWOHA CHOWDHURY from Sylhet

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) can be a taxing event to any cricketer and this, the fifth edition of the tournament, is no different. Hence it is understandable that management has afforded rest days, with yesterday being one such day.

However, regardless of what the time was intended to be used for the Sylhet Sixers, Rajshahi Kings, Comilla Victorians and Chittagong Vikings elected that theirs was better spent at the Sylhet District Stadium practising. This did not pan out as intended though, as each team arrived almost simultaneously and after numerous meets and greets, the pitch soon turned into more of a get-together venue.

Comilla Victorians captain Tamim Iqbal, who is recovering from a thigh muscle tear that forced him out of most of the South Africa tour and his side's opening fixture in the BPL, was warmly welcomed by his team as well as all others present, possibly to cheer him up from his recent downturn in luck.

Hours later, the Tigers' opening batsman was sitting alone before Mominul Haque of Rajshahi Kings approached him for a chat. Soon after, Chittagong Vikings bowler Taskin Ahmed, a newlywed, who was practising in the nets slightly pulled a muscle and duly came off to treat it where he was confronted by Tamim.

"Oh my God, Jama! [Groom]," Tamim belted out as Taskin, with henna literally still

painting his hands red, replied only with a blushed smile.

The trio were later engaged in what seemed to be a long conversation involving almost all the players present, whether it be local or overseas, as they relaxed and enjoyed their time. Players were even spotted sharing meals and water regardless of team orientation.

Mominul Haque informed The Daily Star that he always 'enjoys our little talks while on practice like this as we don't consider each other as competitors but rather as friends'.

Chittagong Vikings will play their first match of the tournament against Comilla today.



Newly married Taskin Ahmed was the centre of attention of his Chittagong Vikings teammates during a practice session at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Shakib, Tamim and Fizz in T10 Cricket League

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh superstar Shakib Al Hasan was one of the headline acquisitions in the auction for the newest and shortest format of cricket on Sunday, when the Brian Lara-coached Kerala Kings drafted the world's number-one all-rounder in the T10 Cricket League auction at the Lotus Yacht in Dubai.

The premier of cricket's shortest franchise competition will be held in the UAE from December 14-17, and will also feature two other Bangladesh stars in pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman and Tamim Iqbal.

Mustafizur found a place fittingly in the franchise named Bengal Tigers and he will have the likes of fellow mystery merchant Sunil Narine and the inspirational Darren Sammy for company.

Tamim, meanwhile, has been drafted into the Pakhtoon side.

"Personally I am looking forward to this," an excited Tamim Iqbal told The Daily Star yesterday. "I hope it's going to be fun, yet it will also be a very competitive tournament with the presence of all the big names in world cricket."

'Leading SL is a dream come true'

Since making his international debut in 2009, all-rounder Thisara Perera established himself as one of the most exciting all-rounders in world cricket and plays T20 leagues all over the world. His achievements include ODI and T20I hattricks for Sri Lanka. He was also made captain of Sri Lanka's T20I side which toured Pakistan this year. The 28-year-old, who is playing for Rangpur Riders in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League, spoke to The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin about his career, inspiration, his new role as the Sri Lanka captain along with other aspects in an exclusive interview. The following are excerpts from the free-wheeling chat:

The Daily Star (TDS): How do you see BPL's growth so far?
Thisara Perera (TP): I played my first BPL two years ago and this is my second time here; I would say it has become better than before. It has been growing higher and higher since it started and the participation of world-class players has made it better by the day. From the arrangement and facilities point of view you can compare the BPL with any other league in the world.
TDS: How was the experience on the recent tour of Pakistan? Did the intense security arrangements affect you as a player?
TP: Yes, such tight security can bother

players but the thing is we also have to help return cricket to Pakistan as we had a similar situation in Sri Lanka five-six years ago. Being a neighbouring country we must help to return cricket to Pakistan. From my part I am really satisfied with the tour and security.
TDS: How do you see your career so far and your new role as Sri Lanka's T20I captain?
TP: I think I am really happy with my performance and proud of whatever I have done so far. I am the current T20I captain of Sri Lanka and it's a dream come true for me. Every player first dreams of representing the country

and later you have to perform for your nation and finally, every player dreams of captaining the country. I think I am really happy the way things have gone so far.
TDS: What was the most memorable moment of your career?
TP: I think the toughest and most memorable experience of my career so far was the 2014 World Twenty20 final because we lost five wickets in a very short time. And then myself and Kumar [Sangakkara] had a 40-run partnership



which I think helped Sri Lanka win the title. I think that is the most memorable experience of my career.
TDS: How do you deal with the role of a finisher needing to score upwards of 15 runs an over at the business end of vital games?
TP: If you look at my average and strike rate you will notice that my average is going down and the strike rate is moving upwards. This is because almost every time I go out to bat 15 to 20 runs per over is required.

But I enjoy the role of a finisher and I have gone through such serious situations more often than not, so it has become a habit for me.
TDS: What was the decisive moment of your career?
TP: In my cricket life, I think in 2009 there was a Powerplay of five overs in [domestic] T20s and I think that's the turning point of my cricket life. That's why I came into the national team, because I was scoring runs heavily in domestic cricket at a high strike rate. Kumar was the captain at that time and he picked me as I can score runs quickly. Everyone has their heroes and I think Sanga is my hero. I do have a

few other heroes in cricket but he was the man who picked me to utilise the Powerplay.
TDS: How do you see the progress of Bangladesh cricket?
TP: I think they have come a long way and especially after the BPL they now have the confidence. At the same time, they also have quite a few mature players and also good management. The local players are also keen to learn from the foreign players whenever they get the opportunity. Many of them come to me to learn about the leg-cutters, off-cutters and about batting in pressure situations. So I think they have a very good future.