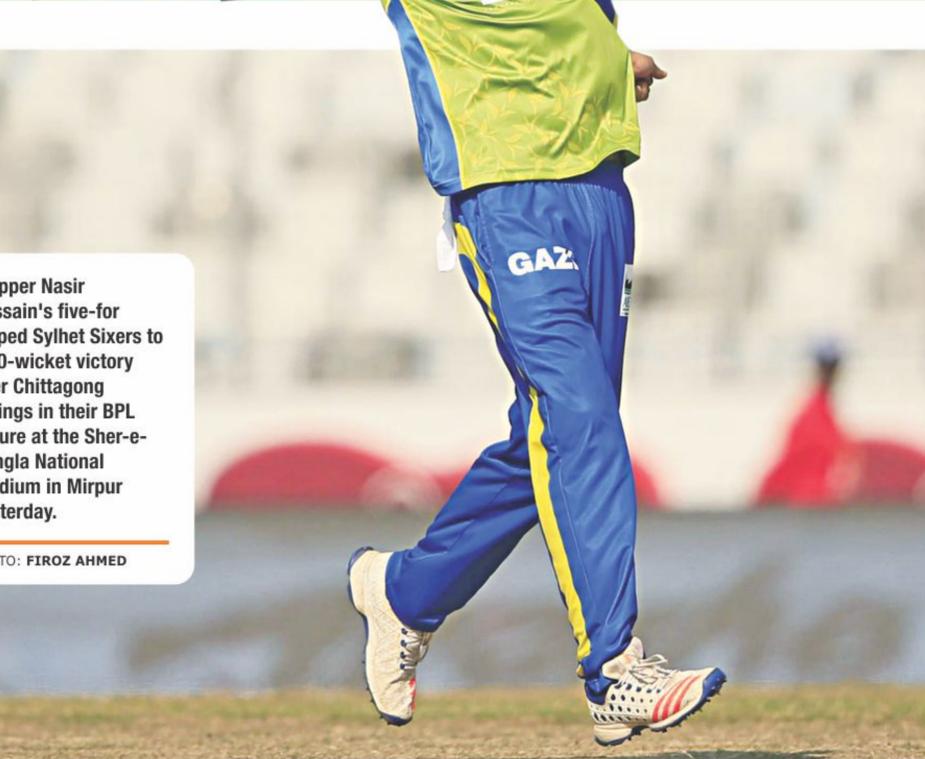


SPORT



Skipper Nasir Hossain's five-for helped Sylhet Sixers to a 10-wicket victory over Chittagong Vikings in their BPL fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Not a T20 wicket, but not a bad one: Mallick

SPORTS REPORTER

The organisational aspect of the Bangladesh Premier League has come under the spotlight after the return of the tournament to Dhaka for its final stretch which has been greeted by a string of low scores in the first two days. On Saturday, Rangpur Riders were dismissed for 97 by Comilla Victorians, who in turn lost six wickets and used up 19.3 overs to get the win. In Saturday's evening match Rajshahi Kings were all out for 106 chasing Dhaka Dynamites' 205, a big score that suggested that the pitch is better under lights -- a notion strengthened by the fact that in yesterday's day match Chittagong Vikings folded for 67.

Comilla skipper Tamim Iqbal and Rangpur captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, among the most experienced cricketers in Bangladesh cricket, derided the pitch after the match on Saturday, with Tamim calling the wicket 'horrible' and questioning why, with a 10-day gap because of the Chittagong leg, a better strip could not be prepared. BPL governing council member-secretary and Bangladesh Cricket Board director IH Mallick,

however, had a different take and put the onus on the batsmen to score.

"No, it's not a horrible wicket," said Mallick in Mirpur after the end of yesterday's day match. "This wicket is prepared with the national team in mind and you cannot change that overnight. That is not just me talking, the groundstaff and the curator [Gimini Silva] say that you need three to four months to change the wicket. I agree that it is not suitable for T20s, but it's not horrible. If batsmen can adjust to the wicket and apply themselves then you can score 140-150 runs here.

Having said that it takes around three-four months to change a wicket, Mallick revised that number when reminded that there has been a gap of three months since the Australia Test in late August.

"No, I just said that. You need six to eight months to make a wicket.

"It is not right to bring the curator's ability into question," said Mallick when asked whether this has been a failure on Gimini's part. "He has been in charge of the ground for the last four years; no one questioned the curator when Bangladesh defeated India, Pakistan, South Africa and won two Tests here. If the batsmen don't apply

their technique, it is unacceptable to blame the curator."

Mallick seemed to lose his cool when told that such issues did not crop up in the Sylhet or Chittagong legs.

"I have told you this very same thing before, if you don't want to understand it, I cannot explain it to a crazy person," said an irritated Mallick. "Here, a team has scored 205 and 97 [106] on the same wicket. I am not saying that it is a good T20 wicket, I admit that and in that there is a failure but we are trying to see if we can make it better. That is another matter, but it is not horrible."

Mallick also informed that the BCB CEO had a meeting with the Sylhet Sixers in connection to the franchise's complaint about bowler Kamrul Islam Rabbi bowling a seven-ball over against Rangpur Riders in Chittagong on November 28, when the two on-field umpires and the third umpire failed to correct the counting error on the field when reminded by the bowler. Mallick said that it will be looked into and there will be action taken if the incident was found to be intentional, but related that even the Sylhet Sixers did not think it was done on purpose.

Sylhet rally late in Chittagong rout

SPORTS REPORTER

After the batting paradises of Chittagong that produced the highest score of the fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was the scene of the season's lowest total, but according to long-suffering Chittagong Vikings captain Luke Ronchi it had very little to do with the pitch. Unlike Rangpur and Rajshahi's surrender for 100-odd totals on a treacherous pitch on Saturday, Ronchi said it was just down to bad batting that the Vikings were all out for 67 and lost the match by 10 wickets to fellow fifth-edition black sheep Sylhet Sixers.

Nasir Hossain led from the front with a five-wicket haul that was instrumental in delivering the win with 10.5 overs to spare and Sylhet, who have had one foot out of the tournament for some time now, earned themselves a temporary stay of execution, but they were eventually knocked out hours later by virtue of Rangpur's win over Khulna. Chittagong are abject outsiders with just two wins from 11 games.

For the Vikings, the innings ironically started with a six off the first ball bowled by Sylhet skipper Nasir Hossain to his opposite number. Ronchi, however, was out off the very next ball and Soumya Sarkar departed

in the last ball of that over. Exactly 11 overs later, the players were walking back to the pavilion with the scoreboard reading 67 all out. Only three batsmen -- Luis Reece, Stiaan Van Zyl and Irfan Sukkur -- reached double figures and none were higher than Irfan's 15.

"The wicket was alright," said Ronchi, who has cut a forlorn figure throughout the BPL and yesterday was left to fend for himself at the post-match presser as no one from the Vikings management accompanied him. "It was probably a 140-150 sort of wicket. It was just poor batting. From what I saw of yesterday's stuff and today, it was a different wicket; it was just really getting out to different shots and different dismissals and things like that. It was more the batting than the pitch."

Nasir conceded 31 runs from his four overs but had the scalps of Ronchi, Soumya, Reece, Van Zyl and Tanbir Hayder. While the surface was not as treacherous as the dual-bounce terrors of the previous day, there was considerable turn and the beleaguered Chittagong batsmen had no answer to Nasir, off-spinner Sharifullah (2 for 23) or left-arm spinner Nabil Samad (3 for 7).

Given the paltry nature of the chase, Sylhet did not break a sweat in reaching 68 in 11.1 overs without loss, with Mohammad Rizwan unbeaten on 36 off 33 and Andre Fletcher with him on an unbeaten 32 off 34.

MOMENTS

DAWN DOESN'T TELL THE DAY, BUT MORNING DOES

When embattled Chittagong Vikings skipper Luke Ronchi hit opposite number Nasir Hossain's first ball of the match for a straight six, it seemed that there would be a change in the low-scoring tide. That feeling lasted for one ball. Nasir held his nerve to float one up outside off stump and Ronchi tried to give it the full treatment, but the ball snuck between pad and the expansive drive to hit timber. When Soumya Sarkar offered a return catch off the last ball of the over, the picture was clear: the first ball was an outlier, but the first over certainly was a harbinger of things to come.

HOPES DASHED: PART TWO

With hopes of a big score long since abandoned by the time five Chittagong wickets fell, there was now the hope of Stiaan Van Zyl and Irfan Sukkur putting together a rearguard and taking the score past 120 so that, at least, it would be a good match. But Nasir spoiled that too in the seventh over. Babar Azam had already dropped Van Zyl on four in the fourth over off Sharifullah and when Irfan and Van Zyl hit two boundaries off Nasir the partnership stood at a stellar 15 runs and the score 45 for five. But for the second time yesterday, Nasir dashed Chittagong hopes -- and also brought up his first T20 five-wicket haul -- by getting Van Zyl to hole out. 22 runs later, it was all over.

DROPS GALORE

Rangpur's half-centurion Mohammad Mithun was the chief beneficiary of some terrible catching, being dropped on eight and 30. The first one, dropped by Carlos Brathwaite in the deep off Khulna skipper Mahmudullah Riyad in the eighth over, was a difficult one in the context of the two to follow, as Brathwaite actually had to run. The next one, in the 19th over off the bowling of Joffra Archer, was a dolly in mid on that BPL debutant Mohammad Irfan did not even get a palm to as it bounced off his chest. The title of the worst drop, however, has to go to Rangpur's Nazmul Islam, who dropped Nazmul Hossain on zero in the second ball of the chase. A top-edge off Shohag Gazi was looping towards short fine leg and all eyes instinctively darted back to the pitch to see the celebrations and the dejection. Unfortunately Nazmul's eyes seemed to do that as well.

Riders complete playoffs lineup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Mashrafe Bin Mortaza-led Rangpur Riders became the fourth team to qualify for the Bangladesh Premier League playoff stage with a spirited 19-run win over third-placed Khulna Titans at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur last night.

With the win, Rangpur are still in fourth spot with six wins from 11 games, but have ensured that there is no chance for the Sylhet Sixers, who are on four wins from 11 matches.

Chasing 148, with all their big batsmen gone and needing 41 from the last three overs, Khulna's Joffra Archer ignited some hope by hitting two sixes in the 18th over by Isuru Udana, but was run out off the last ball. Thereafter, Khulna lost one more wicket and finished their innings on 128 for eight.

Khulna wasted the perfect start provided by a 60-run opening stand by Nazmul Hossain and Michael Klinger in just eight overs. But when Nazmul was trapped in front by off-spinner Nazmul Islam, who earlier dropped the batsman on nought, for 20, it precipitated a panicked collapse of six wickets for 37 runs in 7.1 overs as Rangpur found their groove.

After Nazmul's departure, Nazmul Islam and Nahidul Islam conceded just 11 runs in the next two overs and that seemed to set the cat among the pigeons. Afif Hossain holed

out to Mashrafe at deep midwicket off Shohag Gazi in the 11th over, Klinger followed for 44 in the 13th over, slapping Ravi Bopara into the hands of the same fielder at cover. In the 15th over Khulna skipper Mahmudullah Riyad was bowled by Nahidul trying the slog sweep.

Carlos Brathwaite came in and hit a six, but off the last ball of the over, Nicholas Pooran was run out trying for a desperate run. Off the very next legal delivery, having bowled two wickets to start off the 16th over, Isuru Udana had Brathwaite swinging expansively to a full, wide delivery and edging through to the keeper. With the big man gone and the score reading 97 for six, the match was all but gone for Khulna.

Earlier, Mohammad Mithun was dropped twice as he took Rangpur to 147 for six with a well-paced 50 off 35 balls with two fours and four sixes, three of which came in the last over bowled by Shafiul Islam. But on a two-paced pitch it was not easy going for the Riders after Khulna chose to field first at the toss.

Only Mithun and Chris Gayle made substantial scores while none of the rest crossed Brendon McCullum's 15. Gayle hit 38 off 27 balls and hit four boundaries and two big sixes and fell when he top-edged a googly from BPL debutant Mohammad Irfan to be caught at short third man in the 11th over. Irfan finished his quota with one for 20, while Archer was Khulna's best bowler with two for 28 from four overs.

POINTS TABLE

Team	M	W	L	N/R	PT	NRR
Comilla Victorians	10	8	2	0	16	0.626
Dhaka Dynamites	11	6	4	1	13	1.587
Khulna Titans	11	6	4	1	13	0.012
Rangpur Riders	11	6	5	0	12	-0.095
Sylhet Sixers	11	4	6	1	9	-0.340
Rajshahi Kings	11	4	7	0	8	-0.991
Chittagong Vikings	11	2	8	1	5	-0.752

SCORES IN BRIEF

CHITTAGONG V SYLHET CHITTAGONG VIKINGS: 67 all out in 12 overs (Irfan 15, Reece 12, Van Zyl 11; Nasir 5-31, Nabil 3-7)
SYLHET SIXERS: 68 for no loss in 11.1 overs (Rizwan 36 not out, Fletcher 32 not out; Sunzamul 0-13)
Result: Sylhet won by 10 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Nasir Hossain.

RANGPUR V KHULNA

RANGPUR RIDERS: 147 for 6 in 20 overs (Gayle 38, McCullum 15, Mithun 50 not out, Bopara 11, Mashrafe 15 not out; Archer 2-28, Brathwaite 1-10)
KHULNA TITANS: 128 for 8 in 20 overs (Nazmul 20, Klinger 44, Afif 8, Archer 19; Bopara 2-4, Shohag 1-26, Nahidul 1-16, Nazmul 1-19)
Result: Rangpur Riders won by 19 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Mohammad Mithun.

Smog clouds Kohli's 243

AFP, New Delhi

Virat Kohli smashed a record double century to put India on top in the third Test against Sri Lanka, whose fielders wore anti-pollution masks in extraordinary scenes in a smoggy Delhi on Sunday.

Kohli cracked a career-best 243 but his sixth double century as captain was overshadowed on the second day after Sri Lanka complained about air pollution in the Indian capital, halting play three times.

The second session of the match was delayed more than 20 minutes as smog visibly worsened at Feroz Shah Kotla stadium and the umpires consulted the match referee and team doctors.

Sri Lanka's fast bowlers Lahiru Gamage and Suranga Lakmal returned to the pavilion amid the drama, leaving the visitors short of fielders and prompting Kohli to declare India's first innings on 536 for 7.

Sri Lanka coach Nic Pothas defended the decision to halt the match, saying players' safety is of "paramount importance". India's powerful cricket board was less than impressed,

accusing the visitors of making a fuss, and vowed to write to its Sri Lankan counterpart about the incident. But Pothas said his men were physically sick amid the "extremely high" pollution levels choking the ground.

"Obviously it is well documented that Delhi has high level of pollution. They had got extremely high at one point, we had players coming in at one point and vomiting," Pothas told reporters.

"There were oxygen cylinders in the change room. It's not normal for players to suffer in that way while playing the game."

"Under most circumstances we wanted to play cricket. We just wanted to have some clarity on the safety of players," Pothas said.

Sri Lanka were 131 for three at stumps, trailing the hosts by 405 runs.

Angelo Mathews, on 57, and skipper Dinesh Chandimal, on 25, were batting when bad light stopped play for the day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 536 for 7 decl (Vijay 155, Kohli 243, Sharma 65; Gamage 2-95, Sandakan 4-167)
SRI LANKA: First innings 131 for 3 (Perera 42, Mathews 57 not out 57, Chandimal 25 not out; Shami 1-30, Jadeja 1-24)

MOST DOUBLE HUNDREDS

Player	Mat	Inns	Runs	HS	200s
D Bradman (AUS)	52	80	6,996	334	12
K Sangakkara (SL)	134	233	12,400	319	11
B Lara (WI)	131	232	11,953	400*	9
W Hammond (ENG)	85	140	7,249	336*	7
M Jayawardene (SL)	149	252	11,814	374	7
V Kohli (IND)	63*	105	5,218	243	6



Sri Lanka players wear masks to protect themselves from the notorious air pollution of New Delhi, which halted play quite a few times during the second day of the third Test at the Feroz Shah Kotla Cricket Stadium yesterday. (INSET) India captain Virat Kohli raises his bat after completing his double century.



PHOTOS: AFP