



Chris Gayle practises his Nagin Dance with Rangpur Riders teammate Nazmul Islam after the team reached Sylhet yesterday. While Gayle's bat did not smile in the Dhaka phase, the fans will be hoping the 'Universe Boss' can make it rain sixes in scenic Sylhet.

PHOTO: BCB

## Why is Nasir not in Sylhet?

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



Yesterday, during Sylhet Sixers' practice at the Sylhet District Stadium, the ever-popular Nasir Hossain -- who captained the franchise in their debut season in 2017 -- was nowhere to be seen and upon further inquiry, it was learnt from their media manager that he had not made the trip to Sylhet.

"Nasir is carrying an injury and the coach [Waqar Younis] said that it was global practice not to travel with players who would not play, and just to travel with 15 players," Sylhet Sixers media manager Tamzidul Islam told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

The injury in question turned out to be the torn right knee ligament for which he underwent surgery in Australia last year. When pointed out that the injury was thought to be a thing of the past, Tamzidul said that his lack of form -- Nasir scored just four runs in the first two matches and was dropped for the third -- was another reason and that it was thought that having a senior player missing out and sitting on the dugout would not look good.

A few other franchises, when contacted, seemed unaware of the policy to travel with just 15 of the squad. Also, Waqar was the coach last season as well and there were certainly more than 15 Sixers when they travelled to Chattogram. They used 14 players in two matches in 2017 in Chattogram, presumably to correct course, having fallen upon hard times after a bright start. With a poor start this time around, it stands to reason that they would want as many options as possible. Tamzidul added that Nasir was the only squad member left back in Dhaka.

All signs seemed to point to a deeper reason than that stated, but it seems for now that it will have to wait.



### TALK ON



I had long wished to play for the Sylhet team. It's also our home ground and we will be able to enjoy ourselves. I will look to give my best in our home turf and given our team spirit, I feel everyone will be able to give their hundred percent. We made a few mistakes in the batting department in our last game. I think we will come back strongly in Sylhet.

**ALOK KAPALI**  
SYLHET SIXERS ALL-ROUNDER

## Make or break for Titans against Kings

*Malinga joins Khulna; Sylhet take on Comilla*

SAKEB SUBHAN from Sylhet



The Sylhet leg of the Bangladesh Premier League will be most important for the embattled Khulna Titans, who have lost all four of their matches so far and will be hoping to start a turnaround like the one Rajshahi Kings, their opponents today, seem to be staging.

Two wins in their last two matches have lifted Mehedi Hasan Miraz's Rajshahi to fifth in the table, and they will be looking to continue the upward graph in the first match of the Sylhet leg at 1:30 pm at the picturesque Sylhet International Stadium. In the second match of the day, home team Sylhet Sixers, placed just above Khulna with one win from three matches, will take on Comilla Victorians.

For fans of Bangladesh cricket in general, the match between Khulna and Rajshahi is one to keep an eye out for because these two

POINTS TABLE					
Team	M	W	L	PT	NRR
Dhaka	4	4	0	8	2.775
Chittagong	4	3	1	6	0.111
Rangpur	5	2	3	4	0.527
Comilla	4	2	2	4	-0.574
Rajshahi	4	2	2	4	-1.068
Sylhet	3	1	2	2	-0.522
Khulna	4	0	4	0	-1.542



**Sylhet Sixers pacer Taskin Ahmed has been amongst the wickets in this season's BPL. His team has picked up just one win in three matches but as the Sylhet leg begins today, the Sixers will be looking to recapture the form they showed in last season's Sylhet phase, when they picked up three wins on the trot on their home turf.**

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

franchises have banked, arguably more than any other, on local talent. Rajshahi especially seemed to have invested in Bangladesh cricket's future by naming 21-year-old Mehedi as captain. With all the talk about Bangladesh cricket starting and ending with the Big Five of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad, it was a positive to see Mehedi,

Mustafizur Rahman and Soumya Sarkar putting their heads together on Sunday to come up with a narrow win against Mashrafe's star-studded Rangpur Riders.

Khulna, led by Mahmudullah, do not have the bevy of foreign stars to call upon that the likes of Comilla, Dhaka or Rangpur do. While they would have been bolstered by the inclusion of Sri Lankan slinger Lasith Malinga yesterday, with eight games left in

the group stage, they will have to get their batting in order and the onus will be on the captain as well as other local names like Ariful Haque, Jahurul Islam and Nazmul Hossain Shanto.

One of the few boons for Khulna has been the starts provided by Paul Stirling and Junaid Siddique, who was looking at the positives while practising at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday.

"We still have eight matches to come," the former national opener said. "There have been instances when a team bounced back after starting poorly. We have good players. It is very important to win one match, then the combination will seem better."

Both sides have batting problems with Rajshahi's highest score being 135 for eight and Khulna's 161 for five in a losing cause. Rajshahi, as seen when Mustafizur won the match against Rangpur by allowing just three runs in the last over, may have the edge in bowling but Malinga may have something to say about that, if he does play today. They have also beaten Khulna when the sides met on January 9.

Meanwhile, the pitch in Sylhet, according to Mustafizur's partner in crime Isuru Udana, should see higher scores than the slow ones in Dhaka.

"I think the wickets will be much better. I played a few games here and I think the wickets will be good and there will be good scores and I think we can beat them again -- that's our hope."

## Lewis suffers hamstring tear

SPORTS REPORTER

Comilla Victorians' opener Evin Lewis underwent an MRI yesterday and it was revealed that the left-hander is suffering from a grade one hamstring tear. The West Indian left the field in some discomfort during his side's Bangladesh Premier League match against Chittagong Vikings on Sunday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

In the 12th over, the 27-year old seemed to have pulled his hamstring while running between the wickets and eventually left the field on a stretcher after having received treatments on the ground. He retired hurt after scoring 38 runs off 34 balls.

However the left-hander travelled to Sylhet with his team, where he underwent the MRI. While Lewis will be missing Comilla's first game in Sylhet against Sylhet Sixers, he is expected to return for their next fixture of the tournament's Sylhet phase against Khulna Titans on January 18.

## Australia to play ODIs in Pakistan?

AGENCIES, Lahore

Pakistan is scheduled to host Australia for a five-match ODI series in the United Arab Emirates in March, and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had last month decided to renew talks with Cricket Australia to convince them to play at least two of the matches in Pakistan.

But while not immediately committing to a Pakistan tour, CA, the governing body for the game in Australia, insisted it "remain[s] open to the idea of playing in the country again."

On the flip side, the PCB said it is "still waiting for a response from the CA", stressing that discussions with them are ongoing.

With the gradual return of international cricket to Pakistan, it was hoped that the Aussies -- who last toured Pakistan in 1998 -- could come back for "at least some of this year's one-dayers", the SMH reported.

## Dhoni's pace-setting a worry

*India's do-or-die 2nd ODI against Aus today*

PTI, Adelaide



Mahendra Singh Dhoni's inability to set the pace during middle overs will remain a major cause of concern when India take on Australia in a do-or-die second ODI on Tuesday in their bid to keep the three-match series alive.

Hardik Pandya's sudden suspension on disciplinary grounds has brought to focus the balance of the batting order, which was apparent during team's 34-run defeat in the opening match despite vice-captain Rohit Sharma's 22nd hundred in 50-over format.

Dhoni's 51 off 96 balls and failing to rotate the strike has brought to focus the rejigging that skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri will have to fret upon.

With Dhoni being slotted at No 5 even though vice-captain Rohit wants the veteran to bat a notch higher but cues from India's training session made it clear that the team is unlikely to tinker with the batting order.

No pre-match short-list has been announced for this second ODI, and all-rounder Vijay Shankar only arrived late Monday afternoon in Adelaide, thus might not be available for selection.

Australia didn't announce their playing eleven for the second ODI either, but it is expected that they will field the same team as in the first match.

Their biggest concern at the moment is if Glenn Maxwell is batting at his best position at number seven.



**It's a kind of knock-out for us. We can't afford to lose this match. We're not thinking anything different from how we've been thinking for the last couple of years. We just want to win the match and everyone is positive for that.**

**BHUVNESHWAR KUMAR**  
INDIA RIGHT-ARM PACER

## Proteas sweep series

AFP, Johannesburg



Duanne Olivier sparked a Pakistan collapse as South Africa completed a series clean sweep with a 107-run win on the fourth day of the third and final Test at the Wanderers Stadium on Monday.

Starting the day on 153 for three, Pakistan lost their remaining seven wickets for 120 runs to be bowled out for 273.

Olivier effectively ended Pakistan's hopes when he took two wickets off successive balls in the third over of the morning.

Babar Azam received a fast, lifting ball angled in towards his throat, which he gloved to wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock. Azam (22) had helped Asad Shafiq add 58 for the fourth wicket.

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed was bowled first ball. Seemingly expecting another short-pitched delivery from Olivier, he was deep in his crease when he had his off stump knocked back by a fast, full delivery.

With Vernon Philander gaining unpredictable bounce from a good length just outside off stump, Shafiq advanced down the pitch and was caught at second slip off a ball which seamed away from him.

Shafiq had taken his overnight score of



South Africa pacer Duanne Olivier (L) celebrates after scalping the wicket of Pakistan skipper Sarfraz Ahmed (not in picture) on the fourth day of the third Test in Johannesburg yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

48 to 65, made off 71 balls with 11 fours.

Faheem Ashraf and Mohammad Amir were both caught by Aiden Markram at gully off Kagiso Rabada.

Shadab Khan batted well to make 47 not out and received support from Hasan Ali, who made a quick 22, and Mohammad Abbas until Abbas was run out after a mix-up.

SCORES IN BRIEF

**SOUTH AFRICA:** First innings 262 and second innings 303.

**PAKISTAN:** First innings 185 Second innings 273 all out (Imamul 35, Masood 37, Shafiq 65, Azam 21, Shadab 47 not out; Steyn 2-80, Olivier 3-74, Rabada 3-75)

**Result:** South Africa won by 107 runs and clinched the three-match series 3-0. **Player-of-the-match:** Quinton de Kock