



Mushfiqur Rahim was in imperious form as he hit a 51-ball 96 to guide Khulna Tigers past a stiff target of 190 set by Rajshahi Royals in the BBPL match at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## '360' Mushy powers Khulna

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Less than a month ago when almost all the Bangladesh batsman struggled to cope with the quality bowling during the two-match Test series in India, Mushfiqur Rahim was the only batsman to show the class, technique and temperament to set himself apart and strike two fifties in the two games.

In the span of three weeks, Mushfiqur retained his form while shifting focus from the longer version to the shortest format in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League for Khulna Tigers.

After scoring an unbeaten 28 to win the first game, the 32-year-old smashed a blistering 51-ball 96 to chase down the joint-fifth highest total in BPL history of 189 by Rajshahi Royals yesterday.

The stellar contribution from the captain sealed a five-wicket win at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, Khulna's second win as many games.

Mushfiqur needed four runs to reach his first T20 century, with Khulna needing two off the last four balls of the innings. He went for glory, only to be caught by Shoaib Malik at long-on off Ravi Bopara, ending a match-winning 51-ball 96, during which he hammered four sixes and nine fours.

Following the early dismissals of openers Najmul Hossain Shanto (0) and Rahmanullah Gurbaz (7), Mushfiqur took charge to stabilize the chase with Rilee Rossouw.

The wicket at the ZACS lived to its reputation once again, offering a lot of runs, as Mushfiqur and Rilee took on the Rajshahi bowlers and added 72 for the third wicket.

Mushfiqur played the role of the aggressor

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**RAJSHAHI ROYALS:** 189 for 4 in 20 overs (Malik 87, Bopara 40 not out; Amir 2-36)  
**KHULNA TIGERS:** 192 for 5 in 19.4 overs (Rahim 96, Rossouw 42; Russell 2-41)  
**Result:** Tigers won by 5 wickets.  
**Player-of-the-match:** Mushfiqur Rahim.

as he added 44 off 27 while the in-form Rilee contributed 26 off as many deliveries before being dismissed by pacer Kamrul Islam for 42 off 35.

The Khulna skipper however remained strong as he built two more partnerships, a 61-run fourth-wicket stand with Shamsur Rahman and another 30 with Robbie Frylinck for the fifth wicket.

The experienced cricketer displayed an array

of improvised and conventional cricketing shots, ranging from his scoops to sweeps and drives, with great elegance as an elated James Foster—Khulna's head coach—termed Mushfiqur a '360 degree player', the name given to South Africa batsmen AB de Villiers for his wide shot-making range.

"Mushy is a 360-degree player. In the last few years, having played against him when I was with Khulna Titans [as assistant coach], he is very difficult to bowl at. Very powerful as well but he has got a touch game, he is the complete package.

"I am saying he is a 360 player because he is hitting all around the ground. He is a wonderful player, one of the cricketers very difficult to bowl at. You know, there are cricketers who are strong hitting to deep midwicket, to mid-off. But Mushy is a player who can hit behind and straight but that doesn't come with luck, it comes with a lot of hard work and practice," Foster said yesterday.

Earlier in the game, Rajshahi Royals were sent to bat first and Shoaib's 50-ball 87, with eight boundaries and four sixes, helped the side post 189 for four. Left-arm pacer Mohammad Amir picked two while Frylinck and Shahidul Islam bagged a wicket each.

It was the highest score of the edition, eclipsing Dhaka Platoon's 182 in the Dhaka leg, but Mushfiqur made sure that it would not stay at the top for long.

## Mashrafe missing in more ways than one

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram



Where is Mashrafe Bin Mortaza? Inquisitive eyes were searching for the inspirational Bangladesh ODI skipper when his team, Dhaka Platoon, were practising at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday on the eve of their BBPL match against Chattogram Challengers.

Mashrafe's presence always creates a positive ambience and he has always been fully committed to his team regardless of whether it was national team duty or for any other team.

Surprisingly, Mashrafe's association with Dhaka Platoon has not been as visible as it was with other franchises in previous editions.

His absence was further highlighted by the absence of another senior, Tamim Iqbal—who was not there due to high fever.

There was a similar scenario ahead of the tournament when Dhaka had started their preparation camp involving local cricketers. Mashrafe was available for the first two days, only to miss most part of the remaining days and join the team ahead of the tournament—a characteristic most unlike Mashrafe indeed.

The 36-year-old has also been struggling to find his rhythm with the ball since a dismal performance in the World Cup in England, where the right-arm pacer managed only one wicket.

Most importantly, there was a big question mark over his fitness during the world's biggest 50-over competition that many believed harm the progress of the team in the tournament.

However, he looked in good shape in terms of fitness and managed to reduce a significant amount of weight ahead of the tournament while also recovering from a back injury. The cricketer-turned-politician did spend a significant amount of time away from cricket as he maintained

a distance from the cricketers' movement in October this year but the strides he has apparently made in terms of fitness have not been reflected in his bowling.

Mashrafe has picked three wickets in three matches in the ongoing tournament at an economy of 7.40 and, more importantly, the cricketer was seen limping around—as was the case during the World Cup—creating doubts about his match fitness.

Even the pacer's inclusion in the Dhaka team was not without drama. The most successful captain in the history of the BPL was not drafted until last moment despite being an A+ category player. Dhaka eventually picked Mashrafe in the seventh round of the draft and it was learned that an integral member of the team had pushed the management to pick Mashrafe. That required permission from the BPL Draft Commission, given Dhaka Platoon had already picked Tamim as their A+ category player but it was granted through a discussion during the break in the draft.

So far, Mashrafe's return to competitive cricket after the World Cup in July this year has barely provided any indication that he is going to prove people wrong with another exemplary comeback.

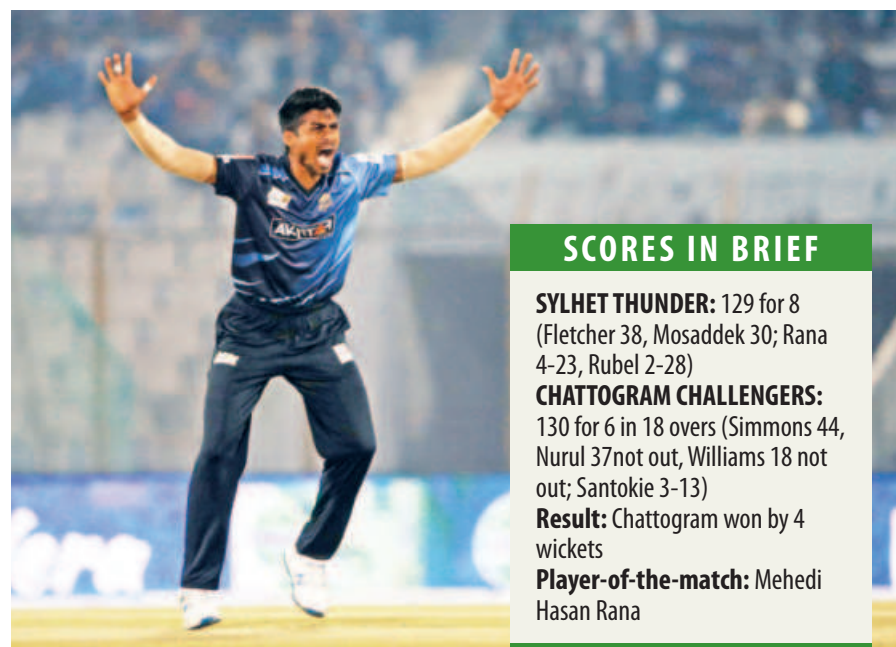
Team officials informed that Mashrafe had joined Dhaka Platoon on Monday and was at the hotel during practice yesterday.

With curiosity growing over Mashrafe's absence, Dhaka head coach Mohammad Salauddin was queried and the former Bangladesh assistant coach replied: "He is fine. I think it is okay and I think we don't need to think about him."

"He [Mashrafe] is always fit. He is doing the thing that he needs to do now. He is in the gym. I think it is more important for him to get his fitness back. There is no reason for anyone to think that he is not involved because he is not on the field [for practice sessions]. He is very much involved. He is busy doing gym and swimming which is needed for him now," he added.



PHOTO: STAR FILE



Chattogram Challengers pacer Mehedi Hasan Rana appeals for one of his four wickets in the BBPL match against Sylhet Thunder in Chattogram yesterday. Sylhet managed just 129 for eight, which Chattogram eclipsed by four wickets in 18 overs.

PHOTO: STAR

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**SYLHET THUNDER:** 129 for 8 (Fletcher 38, Mosaddek 30; Rana 4-23, Rubel 2-28)  
**CHATTAGRAM CHALLENGERS:** 130 for 6 in 18 overs (Simmons 44, Nurul 37 not out, Williams 18 not out; Santokie 3-13)  
**Result:** Chattogram won by 4 wickets  
**Player-of-the-match:** Mehedi Hasan Rana

## Players reject SA invitation

AFP, Cape Town

The South African Cricketers' Association on Tuesday rejected a move by Cricket South Africa to find a solution to an issue which is the subject of ongoing legal action.

SACA repeated its call for the board to resign as the rift between players and board showed no signs of being healed, despite the suspension of chief executive Thabang Moreoe and the appointment of Jacques Faul as interim chief executive, Graeme Smith as interim director of cricket and Mark Boucher as head coach.

SACA said it would not participate unless a previous decision by CSA was formally withdrawn.

CSA decided in April to radically restructure the domestic game, scrapping the current franchise system and reducing the number of teams playing professional cricket. The decision is the subject of an ongoing court action by SACA.

"Although CSA has announced that SACA will be part of this committee we have yet to be formally contacted," said SACA chief executive Tony Irish.

"SACA will not participate in this committee until the existing restructure decision is formally withdrawn."

## Can Sabbir still come good?

RAMIN TALUKDER and ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Sabbir Rahman was once considered one of Bangladesh's most formidable promising prospects. His ability to find more time when facing faster bowlers was counted on by the team management and his progress in away conditions saw his star rise in Bangladesh cricket after coming onto the scene in 2014.

Sabbir's place in the squad was once thought to be a formality and the 28-year-old's haul of 66 ODIs and 44 T20Is goes some way to showing the faith that was placed on him. However, how much of that potential has actually been repaid with performances so far is a factor that can go on to define the present state of Bangladesh cricket as well.

Bangladesh cricket has often seen promising prospects fall away after early skirmishes. Many have failed to live up to standards and their national futures are now considered bleak. Names such as Shamsur Rahman Shuvo, Shahriar Nafees or a more comparable character in Nasir Hossain come to mind when delving into Sabbir's career. Their national team career faded due to inconsistency after early promise. Is Sabbir also following that trend?

His innings of 85 against Rangpur Riders in last edition's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) saw him get back in contention

for the World Cup, with skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza himself backing his inclusion. Serving a ban for disciplinary issues at the time, the management reduced Sabbir's sentence in order for him to make the World Cup squad. He then struck a hundred in the New Zealand ODIs.

He played only twice in England



and following the World Cup did not make an impact and is quickly fading from discussions when it comes to someone who can play an important part for the Tigers.

"In the World Cup I played two matches and obviously I can't score 200 runs in two matches even if I try. Maybe I would have carried out my responsibility if I played four or five matches but unfortunately whoever played in my place did well," Sabbir told

The Daily Star yesterday.

He played all three ODIs in Sri Lanka but was dropped from the side during the home T20I tri-series. Even skipper Shakib Al Hasan's high-profile ban did not lead to selectors picking Sabbir as he was not included for the T20Is in India.

Sabbir feels that he is still going through a learning phase. "Maybe in the last five years, I got out after 30 or 40. Perhaps if I could have converted those to 60 or 70s, then I wouldn't have to see such days. Maybe I would have been an automatic choice. Everyone has a learning phase which I am going through now and from here on in this is my learning process to learn and reach the next step," he said.

Sabbir said he was keen to 'repay the faith shown' by captain Mashrafe and he reiterated that he considers the BPL to be the stage which can help him get back to the national team fold. "The Sabbir of before was more excited but I feel more responsible now," he said.

Sabbir was perhaps expected to take on more responsibility with the 'Big Five's' career closer to the end than the beginning. He said disciplinary issues were in his past now and he just needed some 'luck' to get back amongst the runs.

Once considered a T20 specialist, he could return once more to the T20 fold, but the inconsistent performances over the last few years means the faith already shown in him is yet to bear fruit.

## Drone no more!

The first day of the Chattogram leg of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League saw a few technical difficulties for the broadcasters at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

First, the broadcasters lost the drone that captures images of the stadium after the controller lost its communication while operating the device.

It was later revealed that a battery failure had caused the drone which was eventually grounded as it remained untracked. According

to sources, the broadcasters even announced a Tk 10,000 reward to whoever can find and return the drone.

## Power too

Later in the day, during the second game between Sylhet Thunder and Chattogram Challengers was halted for over 10 minutes due to a technical error in the floodlights. Malfunctions of the Chattogram floodlights has now become a regular occurrence as a similar incident took place during the tri-nation T20I series in September this year.