

# Mahedi stars again for Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

 All-rounder Mahedi Hasan once again shone bright with the bat alongside Tamim Iqbal to guide Dhaka Platoon to a comfortable eight-wicket win over Sylhet Thunder in the days' first encounter of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

In chase of a 175-run target, Mahedi started from where he left in the previous game against Cumilla Warriors and struck a second blistering fifty on the trot, this time with Tamim Iqbal joining him as Dhaka won with nine balls to spare.

It was Dhaka's fourth win in six games, while Sylhet crumbled to their fifth loss in six matches after notching their first win of the tournament in the previous game.

Dhaka made a steady start as openers Tamim and Anamul Haque added 58 runs before the latter departed for 32. It was then that Mahedi took on Sylhet's bowlers as he added 87 runs for the second wicket along with Tamim to set the stage for an easy win.

Mahedi played the role of the aggressor and reached his second fifty of the tournament off just 23 balls before being

dismissed for 56 off 28 balls, which featured three sixes and five fours.

At the other end, Tamim looked composed and took Dhaka home with an unbeaten 60 off 49 deliveries, which included five fours and two sixes.

In the process Tamim became the first batsman to reach 2,000 runs in the BPL, ending on 2,029 runs in 63 innings. Mushfiqur Rahim is in second place with 1,937 runs.

Sylhet used seven bowlers but surprisingly skipper Mosaddek Hossain did not introduce left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam until the 13th over of the innings. Mosaddek later said he had delayed Nazmul's introduction because the left-handed Tamim was at the wicket, despite the fact that the other bowlers proved ineffective.

Earlier, Sylhet opted to bat after winning the toss and had a shaky start that saw them lose opener Andre Fletcher for a golden duck and Abdul Mazid for just eight runs. However, the innings was stabilised with a 45-ball 73 from Johnson Charles and an unbeaten 49 by Mohammad Mithun as Sylhet posted 174 for four.

Dhaka's Pakistani legend Shahid Afridi bagged two while his countryman and fellow leg-spinner Shadab Khan and Mahedi picked up a wicket each.



Cumilla Warriors' in-form batsman Dawid Malan hammered the second century of the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League yesterday, scoring 100 off 54 balls against Rajshahi Royals at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram. It proved to be in vain as Afif Hossain hit a 53-ball 76 to power a seven-wicket win for Rajshahi.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SCORES IN BRIEF
<b>SYLHET THUNDER:</b> 174 for 4 in 20 overs (Charles 73, Mithun 49 not out; Afridi 2-26)
<b>Dhaka Platoon:</b> 175 for 2 in 18.3 overs (Tamim 60 not out, Mahedi 56; Ebadot 1-24)
<b>Result:</b> Platoon won by 8 wickets
<b>Player-of-the-match:</b> Mahedi Hasan

SCORES IN BRIEF
<b>CUMILLA WARRIORS:</b> 170 for eight in 20 overs (Malan 100 not out; Irfan 2-23)
<b>RAJSHAHI ROYALS:</b> 171 for three in 17.5 overs (Afif 76, Bopara 41 not out; Mujeeb 1-17)
<b>Result:</b> Royals won by 7 wickets
<b>Players-of-the-match:</b> Afif Hossain and Dawid Malan.

## Sylhet locals suffering from lack of opportunities?

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

 Even before the start of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) there were rumours that there was an illegal approach being made to one of Sylhet Thunder's foreign players as all eyes were on the team owners in the special edition of the T20 event this season.

It was also learned that there was an argument between Sylhet's team sponsors and team director Tanjil Chowdhury, who was appointed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), over irrelevant player selection during the players' draft.

There was more controversy after Sylhet's West Indian pacer Krishmar Santokie bowled a huge no-ball against Chattogram Challengers in the opening game of the tournament, raising concerns about whether there was something underhanded going on.

Tanjil was even quoted in the media as saying that he was not happy after the sponsors roped in Santokie. That created a stir and brought the wrong kind of attention on the tournament in its early days, but Tanjil later claimed in a social media post that nothing of the sort was happening, that the team

were in high spirits and looking to make an impact on the BBPL.

Sylhet's below-par performance throughout the tournament, having so far lost five and won just one game, that too courtesy of Andre Fletcher's hundred -- the first of the edition -- against Khulna Tigers, oes not point to be upturn of fortunes that Tanjil had hoped for.

Moreover, it seems that discontent within the ranks have added to Sylhet's problems.

In a tournament that was touted by BCB President Nazmul Hassan as being a platform for local talent, Sylhet have national players like Mosaddek Hossain, Mohammad Mithun and Ebadot Hossain but Mithun has raised concerns about local players not getting enough exposure compared to their foreign teammates.

Sylhet have so far banked on West Indian recruits like Fletcher and Johnson Charles with the bat, and according to Mithun a lack of opportunities is one of the reasons that locals are yet to perform significantly.

Mithun, who scored an unbeaten 49 against Dhaka Platoon yesterday from number four, hinted at the dissatisfaction and distance between players and team management.

"Look, it's the decision for the

team management," said Mithun when asked whether the locals should perform alongside foreigners. "The foreign batsmen you mentioned, two of them bat at number two and three. T20 is a short game and you need to have enough opportunity to perform. If I get more overs to bat, naturally the chances are higher for me to score more runs."

Meanwhile, Dhaka's Mahedi Hasan has been a revelation with the bat after being promoted to bat at number three as the right-hander cashed in by smashing consecutive fifties, including the one against Sylhet yesterday.

Mithun also pointed to Dhaka's example, where locals like Anamul Haque, Tamim Iqbal and Mahedi batting up the order have made a huge difference so far in the tournament.

"Look, Dhaka's locals are scoring runs. Why? Because those who are batting up the order in their team are all locals. And it's not that our team does not have good batsmen, or players unable to do well. Obviously, if they get enough chance to bat up the order our batters will also do well," Mithun said.

With the tournament approaching the business end, it will be interesting to see whether Sylhet will be able to make a turnaround, but with the way things are going, it seems unlikely.

## Ireland to host Tigers for 3 ODIs

STAR SPORT DESK

After cancelling the scheduled one-off Test match against Bangladesh, Cricket Ireland yesterday announced the dates and venues for a three-match ODI series against Bangladesh to take place in Stormont in May next year.

Ireland will play three ODIs against Bangladesh before New Zealand visit the following month.

The three ODIs will take place in Stormont on 14, 16 and 19 May.

Ireland are also set to play four T20Is against Bangladesh in late May after the two sides' ODI series, but venues for those matches will be confirmed in January, with neutral grounds in England a possible option.

On December 16, Cricket Ireland had decided against playing a Test against Bangladesh, citing financial constraints.

The Bangladesh fixture would have been just Ireland's second home Test following a defeat to Pakistan in summer 2018.



All-rounder Mahedi Hasan proved himself to be Dhaka Platoon's most valuable player in the BBPL's Chattogram leg, hitting a second consecutive fifty to help defeat Sylhet Thunder by eight wickets yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Stokes's father in hospital

REUTERS, Pretoria

England all-rounder Ben Stokes will spend Tuesday at the bedside of his father Ged, who is in a critical condition in hospital in Johannesburg.

The England and Wales Cricket Board said Ged Stokes, a former New Zealand rugby league player, had suffered a "serious illness" on Monday.

The first Test of the four-match series with South Africa starts in Centurion near Pretoria on Thursday.


Stokes, this month named BBC Sports Personality of the Year after his heroics in helping England lift the Cricket World Cup, is a vital member of the team, providing balance to the line-up as both a front-line batsman and bowler.

His potential absence from the Test would be a major blow for an England side that has battled with illness in the camp in the build-up to the series, with bowlers Jofra Archer and Stuart Broad missing both warm-up fixtures with flu.

They are in a race to be fit for the first Test, but have come through net sessions on Sunday and Monday.

## NZ looking to Boult in rare Boxing Day Test

AFP, Melbourne

 New Zealand are hopeful of having pace spearhead Trent Boult back to help halt a rampant Australia in the Black Caps' first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in more than 30 years.

The veteran, suffering a side strain, was badly missed during the opening Test in Perth, when the visitors were thrashed by 296 runs in stifling conditions.

But he has been toiling in the nets and expects to be ready for a rare appearance by his country on one of the best-known dates of the cricket calendar.

"I want to really embrace it and appreciate that stage for what it is," the left-armed told reporters of the special atmosphere that comes with a Boxing Day Test in the 100,000-capacity arena.

"This is the stage that a lot of people dream of being on so to get this opportunity in my career, it's definitely something that I'm looking forward to.

"If I can tick all the right boxes with my body and get myself fit, then I can't wait to get out there," he added.

A big crowd is expected with New Zealand fans snapping up thousands of tickets to witness the December 26 appearance by their team at one of cricket's most famous grounds.

Extra flights were reportedly scheduled between Auckland and Melbourne to cater for demand.

The last time New Zealand faced Australia in a Boxing Day Test was 1987, before many of the current squad were born, with the home side holding on for a draw despite blistering bowling from legendary quick Richard Hadlee.

What sort of wicket they find on Thursday is the great unknown.

Only a fortnight ago, play was abandoned during a domestic Sheffield Shield game at the ground due to a dangerous pitch, with erratic bounce seeing balls rise sharply and unexpectedly to pummel the batsmen.

Ground curator Matt Page has since been working to prepare a new pitch.


Australia go into the second of three Tests without bowling kingpin Josh Hazlewood who was injured in Perth. James Pattinson is set to replace him as the third quick alongside Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc, who has been lethal this summer.



PHOTO: AFP FILE

## Jimmy back in the nick of time for 150th cap

REUTERS, Pretoria

 James Anderson's return from injury could not be more timely for England, who are still unsure about the make-up of their bowling attack as they head into the first Test against South Africa.

But while Jofra Archer and Stuart Broad are still not sure of playing in the match, which starts on Boxing Day, after being laid low with flu, Anderson will be back on the frontline for what will be his 150th Test.

England are expected to field a five-man seam attack, foregoing spin, if all their pacemen are fully fit. However, that situation may need to be reassessed based on the availability of Ben Stokes.

The all-rounder's father was admitted to hospital in Johannesburg his condition was described as being "critical" on Tuesday in a statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board.

The 37-year-old Anderson will be the ninth cricketer to reach the 150-Yest milestone -- joining the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Steve Waugh and Jacques Kallis -- when he makes his return to the England attack for the first time since limping off with a calf injury at the start of the Ashes in August.

"He's looking as good as I've ever seen him," said captain Joe Root.

Anderson had arrived in the country



PHOTO: AFP FILE

ahead of the majority of the England squad to attend a fast bowlers' camp, underlining his desire to get back into the team.

"It feels like a long time since I've played a competitive game so to get some overs ... was very pleasing," he told reporters.

"There was a bit of rust but that's to be expected having not played for four or five months. I'm just happy to be back out there."

Anderson was only 20 when he made his debut, taking five wickets against Zimbabwe at Lord's in 2003, and last month said he wanted to continue through to the next Ashes series.

### PROTEAS SEEK HAPPY END



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