



Raul Becerra (C), who scored two goals, celebrates with the two other goalscorers -- Khaled Shafei and Jonathan Fernandes -- during Bashundhara Kings' 4-1 win over Abahani in their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (Bottom) Referee Sujit Banerjee, seen here with his family, breaks down in tears during an event marking his retirement from the job prior to the kick-off. During a career spanning a decade and a half, the 43-year-old officiated countless matches and graduated to referees' instructor.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Four-star Kings go 12 points clear

SPORTS REPORTER

Traditional powerhouse Abahani again fell prey to Bashundhara Kings as the six-time professional league champions suffered a 1-4 defeat in a crucial Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A first defeat in 11 matches also saw the Sky Blues slip in the title race; the gap with league leaders Bashundhara Kings now at 12 points.

The defending champions have 34 points from 12 outings at the mid-way stage of the league while Abahani have 22 points and a game in hand on the leaders.

Argentinian forward Raul Becerra struck a brace while Brazilian forward Jonathan Fernandes and Iran's Khaled Shafei netted a goal each before Haitian striker Kervens Belfort pulled a goal back.

The high-voltage match was not only important for Abahani in order to keep their title hopes alive but also because they would have wanted to show pride after being beaten by Kings four times in a row -- two league defeats in 2018



and one loss each in the Federation Cup and Independence Cup.

Abahani, who have been going through a lean patch following injuries to key players and a lack of depth, could not even repeat their Federation Cup performance, although they were unlucky to have rattled the post twice.

Bashundhara's South American frontline of Robson and Becerra once again proved instrumental, aided by a group of national players.

Becerra fired the follow-up home in the 18th minute after Robson hit the far post before Shafei unbelievably flicked a

Robson corner to the near post in the 25th minute. Abahani were deprived of a chance at reducing arrears when a header from Belfort came off the post in the 45th minute.

Jonathan took the game away from Abahani after striking from inside the box six minutes into the second half before Becerra struck his 11th goal of the league campaign with a diving header in the 76th minute.

Belfort scored a consolation goal in the 81st minute, converting from the spot, as Abahani suffered a fifth straight loss at the hands of Bangladesh's new powerhouse.

"It will be very difficult to catch Bashundhara but not impossible. However, we must improve. We must play a different type of football. It is very, very difficult for us to turn things around. Of course, the club have expectations of winning but playing like this, we are far from Bashundhara," Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos said after the match.

"There maybe a realistic chance of returning to the title race but it is difficult. At this point, it does not depend on me or my team. It depends on Bashundhara losing points," a frustrated Lemos added.

Despite having a big gap at the top, Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Brunzon stayed grounded when asked whether he could smell the trophy. "Not at all. We still need to win seven to eight matches in the second phase of the league to win the title and there is a long way to go. The advantage is that we have seven home matches in Cumilla, so we will try to capitalise."

In the day's first match, Uttar Baridhara stunned Sheikh Russel 2-1 to taste a first victory in 11 matches and claim ninth position with nine points. Russel, with four defeats from 11 matches, remain fourth with 17 points.

## Tanvir spins Wolves into submission

SPORTS REPORTER



Left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam bagged 13 wickets in the match to help the Bangladesh Emerging team win the lone four-dayer against the visiting Ireland

Wolves by an innings and 23 runs at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

Ireland, resuming the third day on 35 for four in their second innings, were once caught in Tanvir's spin web.

The 24-year-old had taken three wickets on the second day, and went on to bag five more wickets to end up with his career-best figures of eight for 51 from 28.3 overs.

The visitors struggled to negotiate the spin and arm-balls from Tanvir, who had picked up five wickets in the first innings. He had never before taken five wickets in an innings in 11 previous first class games.

Skipper Harry Tector top-scored with 55 for Ireland while Curtis Campher added 22, but none of the visiting batsmen were able to score significantly and were eventually bundled out for 139 runs.

Earlier, Bangladesh took a big 162-run lead in their first innings after having shot out the visitors for 151 in their first innings.

Although it was a green top in Chattogram, it was Tanvir's left-arm spin that hounded the visitors. He said he tried to use the pace variation and bowl consistently in a particular area and that brought him rewards.

"As you know, it was a green top but our

coach instructed us to bowl in a particular area. I tried to use my pace variation as there was nothing much for the spinners on the surface. At times I also bowled the armer which worked well for me. But my main strength is my turn," Tanvir told the Daily Star.

The cricketer from Barishal, who had to miss his second-year final exam of his graduation course to take part in the ongoing series, said it was worth it.

"It was for the third time that I missed my second-year final exam for cricket. But I have no regrets, to be honest. But it seems



that I have to get admitted yet again to my college to complete my graduation," he said with a smile. "It was my maiden five-wicket haul in first-class cricket and also my maiden ten-wicket haul in a game, I am very happy."

The visitors will take part in the first of five unofficial ODIs against Bangladesh on March 5.



The players and officials of Bangladesh Emerging Team celebrate with the trophy after beating Ireland A by an innings and 23 runs in the unofficial Test at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. (Above) Left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam, with 13 wickets in two innings, played a massive role in the victory.

PHOTO: BCB

## Archery moves to Cox's Bazar

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu 12th National Archery Championships are all set to get underway in Cox's Bazar today, with the aim giving the national archers an opportunity to cope with adverse conditions they often face while taking part in tournaments overseas.

The championships, sponsored by City Group, will see approximately 150 archers from 40 teams taking part over five days. The competitions will feature 10 events, five each in recurve and compound.

National archers like Ruman Sana, Abdul Hakim Rubel, Tamimul Islam, Iti Khatun, Shaymoli Roy and Beauty Roy will get the experience of shooting in open space at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in the coastal city.

Ruman Sana, the premier archer of the country, is expected to face similar windy conditions during the Tokyo Olympics this year.

"Archers often face problems adjusting to windy conditions abroad. So we have arranged this championship for them to cope with that in Cox's Bazar. If the sponsors allow us to stage the national championships in such settings in future, we will continue to hold the championships so that the archers get acclimatized to playing in such tough conditions," Bangladesh Archery Federation's general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal said yesterday.

## Inter Milan owners shutter CSL club

AFP, Shanghai

Chinese Super League champions Jiangsu FC have "ceased operations", the club said on Sunday, underlining the financial problems coursing through football in the country.

Jiangsu, who won the domestic title for the first time just three months ago, are owned by the conglomerate Suning -- which also owns Italian giants Inter Milan.

Chinese media said that Jiangsu have not officially dissolved and could yet have a lifeline if new investors are found soon. The unravelling of Jiangsu, until recently known as Jiangsu Suning, could be followed in the coming days by the closure of fellow CSL side Tianjin Teda.

Chinese football has in recent years gained a reputation for lavish spending on foreign players and coaches, as the country pushed to become a world leader in the sport.

Jiangsu brought in ex-England coach Fabio Capello and signed Brazilians Alex Teixeira and Ramires for 50 million euros and 28 million euros respectively.

But, even before the coronavirus pandemic, money had begun to dry up across Chinese football.

The club from the eastern city of Nanjing blamed an "overlap of various uncontrollable elements", but said that it was "continuing to seek, in a wider scope, interested parties for its future development of the club".



Paying respect to the injured Tiger Woods, fellow American golfer Justin Thomas posted this picture on Twitter on Sunday, with the caption: "Seemed fitting for tomorrow after the kind of week we've had... Black and red on Sunday for TW!"

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Gunners dent Leicester's chances

AFP, London



Arsenal delivered a hammer blow to Leicester's faint hopes of winning the Premier League with an impressive fightback to win 3-1 on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side fell behind to Youri Tielemans' early goal at the King Power Stadium.

They had lost nine of 11 league games when they conceded the opening goal this term.

But David Luiz equalised and Alexandre Lacazette's penalty gave the Gunners the lead just before half-time. Nicolas Pepe's second half goal sealed Arsenal's second win in their last six league games.

The north Londoners' stirring escape act left Leicester in third place, trailing leaders Manchester City by 13 points with 12 games remaining.

After Thursday's shock Europa League exit against Slavia Prague, it was a week to forget for Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers.

Arsenal have virtually no chance of finishing in the top four, but this was still a significant result as it underlined the potential in Arteta's team.

With Arsenal languishing in mid-table, Arteta has prioritised winning the Europa League as his side's only hope of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Having picked his best team for the dramatic come-from-behind 3-2 win against Benfica in the last 32 second leg on Thursday, Arteta made six changes.

The reshuffled line-up initially lacked cohesion and Leicester took advantage to open the scoring in the seventh minute.

Tielemans was gifted time and space by the lumbering Granit Khaka to break into the Arsenal area. Pablo Mari was slow to react to the danger, allowing the Belgian midfielder to advance unchecked before drilling a low strike into the far corner.



Alexandre Lacazette celebrates his side's second goal as Arsenal came back from a goal down to beat Leicester City 3-1 in their Premier League fixture at the King Power Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Arteta's men thought they had earned a penalty when referee Paul Tierney pointed to the spot after Pepe's run was ended by a combined challenge from Tielemans and Wilfried Ndidi.

But VAR checked the incident and changed the decision to a free-kick as Ndidi made the first contact with Pepe just outside the area.

Willian has endured a difficult first season at Arsenal after his move from Chelsea. The Brazilian winger finally enjoyed a moment to savour as Arsenal drew level in the 39th minute.

Willian's out-swinging free-kick arched towards Luiz and the defender stooped to direct a powerful header past Kasper Schmeichel from 10 yards.

Arsenal had barely finished celebrating when promising midfielder Emile Smith Rowe limped off injured.

They ignored that setback to take

the lead in first half stoppage-time.

Pepe's cross hit Ndidi's out-stretched arm and VAR ruled the block had taken place just inside the area. Lacazette stepped up to slam the penalty past Schmeichel for his 11th goal of the season.

There was another blow for Leicester -- already without the injured James Maddison -- when Harvey Barnes was stretched off with his left knee heavily wrapped early in the second half.

Leicester were on the ropes and Arsenal landed the knockout punch in the 52nd minute with a superb counter-attack. Khaka found Pepe wide on the right and the Ivorian picked out Martin Odegaard on the edge of the area.

Odegaard clipped a deft pass to Willian and his cutback was perfectly placed for Pepe to tap into the empty net. It was Pepe's fourth goal in his last seven league starts, underlining a long-awaited improvement from the winger.

## 'Like being in jail'

SPORTS REPORTER

The visiting Bangladesh team underwent a second round of Covid-19 testing in New Zealand yesterday and all members of the squad returned negative tests.

The Tigers completed the fifth day of a 14-day mandatory quarantine period yesterday and were even given a daily opportunity to walk in the hotel premises for thirty minutes.

"Time wasn't moving initially. The first three days we couldn't meet anyone, just had conversations over the phone. It felt like I was in jail. Felt a little frustrated, to be honest," Mehedi Hasan Miraz told BCB in a recorded video message yesterday.

After completing seven days in isolation, cricketers will be allowed to practice in small groups and also work in the gym till the end of the 14-day period.

"We are being allowed half-an-hour outside in the hotel each day after the first three days. This helps us feel fresh and enjoy the weather and environment. Once we start doing group gym sessions, we will feel even better," he added.

After completing mandatory quarantine, the visitors will be allowed to mix with locals and roam freely around the country.

The Tigers are also expected to conduct a five-day training camp on Queenstown, but it is yet to be confirmed. The three-match ODI will begin on March 20 in Dunedin.