



## UNSTOPPABLE SPEED forged by a basic desire

MINTU DESHWARA

12-year-old Sonia Akhter drew the applause of thousands as she finished top among 30 jockeys in one of Bengal's traditional events, the ancient competition of horse racing.

The only female amongst the lot and driven by the need to bear the expenses for her education, she stormed to the five-mile finish line "at unstoppable speed, well ahead of the pack", according to chief guest Abdul Qadir Laskar, Chunarughat Upazila Parishad Chairman.

The competition was organized by the locals of Shailghat in Chunarughat upazila of the Habiganj district on Saturday. Competitors came from all over including from Satkhira, Bogura, Tangail and Habiganj and brought with them thousands of enthusiastic



spectators.

Sonia said that continuing her education had been uncertain due to her family's financial situation, so she has been competing in behalf of others in exchange for compensation.

She added that she was now bearing the cost of her own education and lending a helping

hand to her family.

Sonia's father Matiur Rahman said that he had traveled with the sixth-grader from Bakla village of Comstapur in Chapainawabganj.

He added that his daughter began watching the events at the age of six and absorbed knowledge, assisted by a close relative.

Sonia raced on behalf of Abul Hashem from the village of Sakhipur in the district of Tangail. Hashem's patronage to others also frosted rewards as his other hickies finished scooped second and third and for their efforts won a refrigerator and television.

Former Chunarughat Upazila chairman Abu Taher said that once there were lots of horses in the area and competition thrived. He lamented that it now finds itself on the brink of extinction.

## Joy's century seals Wolves whitewash

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahmudul Hasan Joy's century helped the Bangladesh Emerging team get a six-run win in the fifth and final one-dayer at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium and complete a 4-0 series whitewash against Ireland Wolves.

The first match was canceled due to Covid-19-related issues.

Chasing a target of 261, Ireland came agonisingly close before eventually ending up on 254 for 9 in 50 overs.

Needing eleven runs off the last over, Ireland kept their hopes alive by a thread. Benjamin White needed to hit a six off the last ball off Rejaur Raja to tie the game but the right-hander could only manage to score a single from a leg-by.

Opener Stephen Doherty was the top scorer for Ireland with 81. Bangladesh skipper Saif bagged three wickets.

Ireland, who had played a four-day game and four unofficial ODIs, were supposed to play two T20 games but had to cut their tour short due to Covid-19 restrictions in their country.

They will return after playing just a sole T20 scheduled to take place tomorrow.

## Jamal wins hearts in Kolkata



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team captain Jamal Bhuiyan will be in the hearts of Kolkata Mohammedan Sporting Club, the club's coach said

yesterday while lavishing praise on the midfielder ahead of his last match for the outfit.

Kolkata Mohammedan will play against I-League leaders Churchill Brothers and that match will be the Jamal's last appearance for Kolkata Mohammedan as he will leave Kolkata on March 18 to join the national team in Nepal.

Ahead of the match, the team's coach Sankarlal Chakraborty heaped lavish praise on Jamal, who was by his side at the official press briefing yesterday.

"We will miss him. He will be in our hearts forever," Chakraborty said after deliberating on Jamal's impact on the team.

"Jamal has been an integral part of the team. He was one of the key members of the leadership group. He always ensured that the dressing room atmosphere was good. I wish Jamal all the very best with the Bangladesh national team," said the Mohammedan coach.

Jamal joined the Kolkata outfit in January, on loan from Saif Sporting Club, and played in one all but one of their 10 matches, missing one match due to an injury. Even though the Bangladesh captain did not set the I-League on fire in his debut campaign, it has been an impressive one for the 30-year-old.

Initially, Jamal found it a bit difficult in Indian football, coming off a lengthy layoff due to testing positive for coronavirus. But with every passing game, his influence and impact on the team increased. The midfielder is satisfied with what he has done with Kolkata Mohammedan.

"Overall, it has been a good experience for me," Jamal said. "When I came it was very hard for me because of my [being infected with] coronavirus and the team was new and we didn't practise much together. After some time, I found it's a good group and I'm proud to be here."

Playing in a deep-lying playmaker role instead of the conventional central defensive midfield, Jamal had little opportunity to score but was one of the central figures of the team as the Black Panthers tried to build up their game from the back.

Mohammedan, as a team, were erratic throughout the campaign, managing to squeeze into the super six stage following a string of victories but are currently languishing in sixth position.

But it was not due to any lack of effort from the Bangladesh skipper, as the club's designated set-piece specialist showed his class with his great control on the ball and wide range of passes. Instead, his performances got better and better as Chakraborty took over following the sacking of former coach Jose Hevia in the middle of the campaign.

Jamal may be leaving Kolkata with a bit of regret for not scoring a goal or earning an assist, which he might want to achieve if he gets another call from this team or any other team. He left the door open by saying, "I cannot say what the future holds, but if I get the opportunity, why not?"

But after today, Jamal will be shifting his focus to a different challenge and a different responsibility to lead Bangladesh in the tri-nation tournament in Nepal, a responsibility he wants to wear with pride.

"Always want to give my best for the national team. You have to be proud, give your best and you have to enjoy the moment because once your career is finished, you will miss those things. So always try to give your best," Jamal said.

## 9TH BD GAMES Eighteen stars to relay with torch

SPORTS REPORTER

Eighteen former sports stars will carry the torch of the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games from Tungipara in Gopalganj to the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka, a meeting of the media and publicity committee of the games decided yesterday.

The meeting decided that the torch will be lit by the Bangladesh Olympic Association president and Army chief General Aziz Ahmed on the morning of March 30 at the Bangabandhu Mausoleum Complex in Tungipara and will be handed over to the association's secretary general Syed Shahed Reza. The torch will be received at the BNS by golfer Siddikur Rahman and swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila.



(L) Sourav of Bangladesh Police tries to get the better of Mamun of Dhaka District in a match of the Independence Day Open Wrestling Competition in Paltan yesterday. Bangladesh Ansar emerged champions, Bangladesh Army became runners-up and Bangladesh Police finished third in both men's and women's competitions. (R) Players of Narail team celebrate one of their goals during a 4-0 win over Jashore in the opening match of the Walton Women's Development Independence Cup Hockey Competition at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. Namita Karmakar scored a hat-trick for Narail. Later, Jhenaidah beat Thakurgaon 1-0 in the second match of the day, with Nadira scoring the decisive goal.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Local cricketers breathe sigh of relief

Dhaka Premier League to begin on May 6

SPORTS REPORTER

Although things appear to be picture-perfect for the Bangladesh national cricket team on their tour of New Zealand, the scenario is at stark contrast with the circumstances of a majority of domestic cricketers.

Local cricketers have endured a long wait for the resumption of the Dhaka Premier League, (DPL) which was suspended after the first round since the pandemic started back in March last year.

Although the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) arranged two domestic competitions on a limited scale as the sport began to re-emerge during the pandemic, the majority of local cricketers -- who mainly rely on the DPL -- faced financially and mentally pressures.

Finally they can breathe a sigh of relief as the DPL is set to begin from May 6 with a new format.

The club-based domestic competition will now be played in the T20 format, informed chairman of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) Kazi Inam Ahmed after a meeting yesterday. "We have decided to start the Dhaka

Premier League once more and we have decided to begin from May 6. It's a difficult situation since the schedule is very tight. It will be a T20 format. The matches [the league was halted after one round of matches] that were played last year, we decided to abandon then and start fresh," said Inam.

Six days after the beginning the tournament on May 6, there will be a break for Eid and the Tigers' Sri Lanka series.

The ODI series against Sri Lanka is expected to begin on May 20 and the DPL is expected to resume after the three-match ODI series.

Local cricketers, who were getting desperate during the pandemic with no matches taking place, began to breathe a little easier.

"It is a huge relief," said Taibur Parvez, a regular performer in the domestic leagues. He went on to add: "I think we were all waiting for the league to resume and finally the board took the initiative and made it happen. We should thank the BCB. We were having a tough time since the coronavirus started last year and although international cricket resumed and the leagues of the other cricketing nations also resumed, we were still waiting for cricket to return to Bangladesh," Parvez added.



## La Liga title race wide open as Atletico lose steam

AGENCIES



La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid drew 0-0 away to struggling Getafe on Saturday, despite playing the latter stages of the game with an extra man, offering renewed hope to title rivals Real Madrid and Barcelona.

Real Madrid's Karim Benzema rescued Real Madrid again by scoring two late goals to snatch a 2-1 win at home to Elche in La Liga on Saturday and revive his side's hopes of catching leaders Atletico Madrid.

The victory lifted Real into



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema celebrates his second goal with Rodrygo during his side's 2-1 win against Elche in La Liga on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

second in the standings on 57 points, reducing the gap behind Atletico from eight points to six and are one point ahead of third-placed Barcelona, who host Huesca tonight.

The last-gasp victory also gave Real an emotional boost ahead of Tuesday's Champions League last-16 second leg with Atalanta, which they go into holding a 1-0 advantage. "This win is very positive for us, it was vital we kept

up picking points for our league campaign and also to prepare for Tuesday's game," he said. "We're a team with character, we're alive in two competitions and we're going to keep fighting hard and keep believing in ourselves."

"We have two monsters behind us who want to be where we are and it's normal that they're putting the pressure on us, we have been leaders for a long time," said Atletico Madrid coach Diego

Simeone.

"Madrid are winning games, Barcelona are full of hope and enthusiasm but we'll continue to take each game as it comes."

Atletico had been denied all three points in last week's derby at home to Real by an 88th minute equaliser from Karim Benzema but earned a significant 2-1 victory over Athletic Bilbao in Wednesday's game in hand to cement their advantage at the top.

This felt like a step back and Simeone conceded his side had not played well in the first half. "We were excited about the prospect of winning and

POINTS TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	P
Atletico Madrid	27	19	6	2	+32	63
Real Madrid	27	17	6	4	+24	57
Barcelona	26	17	5	4	+35	56

maintaining our advantage but our first half was not good, we couldn't get the ball moving well, we couldn't counterattack and we were not direct enough," he added.

"We improved in the second half and had many chances to score and overall I feel we are playing well."