



## HOSTS' FLYING START

Bangladesh Women's Emerging team players celebrate after a comfortable 54-run victory over visiting South Africa Women's emerging team in the opening match of the five match one-day series at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. The hosts rode on Fargana Hoque's unbeaten 72 to post 195 for 9 in 50 overs and then dismissed the visitors for 141. Salma Khatun bagged three while Jahanara Alam, Sanjida Akter, and Rumana Ahmed picked up two wickets each for Bangladesh.

PHOTO: BCB

## 'Clear skies' clouded fielders' perspective

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers returned to Bangladesh yesterday after a disastrous tour in New Zealand, where they continued a dismal run by being whitewashed in both the three-match ODI and T20I series. In doing so, they kept alive the embarrassing record of never having won a match in the nation against the hosts in 32 games across all formats.

The entire Bangladesh contingent, barring head coach Russell Domingo and fielding coach Ryan Cook, reached Dhaka yesterday while ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal and pacer Hasan Mahmud had returned after the ODI series.

Mustafizur Rahman was among those who returned with the team, but he never left the airport. The left-arm caught a flight for India to join up with Rajasthan Royals and take part in the Indian Premier League (IPL). The 25-year-old will join his side in Mumbai before quarantining for seven days ahead of the cash-rich tournament. The first game for Rajasthan is scheduled for April 12 and the pacer is expected to miss the first few games.

Bangladesh played poor cricket in all the three departments on their tour of New Zealand, with fielding emerging as the major concern after fielders dropped catches in crucial stages.

Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed, who made his T20I debut against the Kiwis, believed that the clear skies of New Zealand were one of the reasons the Tigers failed in the field.

"We had some problems in the fielding department. A reason for our poor fielding were the clear skies of New Zealand and another reason was the difference in weather. It's totally different in New Zealand and if we could have had the camp for another 15 days, we could have improved a lot," said Nasum.

The 26-year-old also pointed to the differences in the pitch compared to what cricketers get in Bangladesh as one of the reasons for the failure.

"I think we lagged behind New Zealand in terms of the pitch because the pitches we have at home are totally different. The pitch back there favours the seamers but still, we tried our best," he said.

**Mounting concerns over SL tour**  
Meanwhile, There are concerns over Bangladesh's upcoming tour of

Sri Lanka due to the recent rise in Covid-19 cases.

The Tigers are scheduled to travel Sri Lanka on April 12 to take part in a two-match Test series which is part of the ICC Test Championship.

It is still unconfirmed whether the Tigers will conduct a camp before leaving for Sri Lanka. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) suspended the ongoing National Cricket League due to the Covid-19 situation in the country after the government declared a seven-day lockdown from today.

"Since the team arrived from New Zealand today (yesterday), we will discuss the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka with the government authorities and will inform further decisions," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told media. It is also understood that the board is confident of hosting the ongoing series between the visiting South Africa Women's Emerging team and the Bangladesh women's emerging team.

The BCB is also keen to successfully host the Pakistan Under-19 team this month for a series of five one-day matches and a four-day game scheduled to begin from April 19 in Sylhet.

## Barty hits out at critics

REUTERS



Ash Barty dismissed suggestions that she had unfairly held on to the top ranking while opting not to compete on the WTA Tour for most of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the pandemic preventing many from competing on the tour since March 2020, the WTA tweaked the ranking system last year to ensure that players were not penalised for their no-shows.

The format allowed the Australian to stay on top of the world even though rivals such as Naomi Osaka won Grand Slam titles during Barty's absence.

"I never have to prove anything to anyone," Barty told reporters on Saturday after she retained her Miami Open title when Canada's Bianca Andreescu retired midway through the final due to an ankle injury.

"I know there has been a lot of talk about the ranking, but I didn't play at all last year and I didn't improve any of my points whatsoever. Yes, I didn't drop but I didn't improve any. I didn't play any at all.

"Everyone needs to understand that it's a pandemic. It's probably a once-in-a-lifetime thing for a lot of us to go through, so it's a bit of a difficult situation."



## Australia women set new world record

REUTERS

Australia's women cricketers surpassed their male counterparts on Sunday to set a new world record for the most consecutive wins in ODI with a six-wicket victory over New Zealand in Mount Maunganui.

The win, Australia's 22nd in a row, means Meg Lanning's team eclipsed the mark set by Ricky Ponting's men's side in 2003, having equalled the long-standing record back in October.

Set a target of 213 to win, the Australians rattled off the required total in just under 39 overs to secure a comfortable victory.

Ashleigh Gardner brought up the winning runs when she smashed a six off Amelia Kerr on her way to a personal tally of 53 not out, as her team set the new global benchmark.

## 'We are close to taking the crown'

REUTERS



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said his team were within touching distance of dethroning Liverpool as the new Premier League champions after Saturday's 2-0 win at Leicester City moved them 17 points clear at the top.

Benjamin Mendy and Gabriel Jesus scored at King Power Stadium to lead City to their 23rd win of the season, with Guardiola's side now needing 11 points from their remaining seven games to secure their third title in four seasons.

"The champions are Liverpool, they have the crown - but we are close to taking it," Guardiola said.

"I love the Premier League more than any other competition. We are close, very close."

Liverpool finally turned on the style to thrash Arsenal 3-0 and move into fifth place in the Premier League on Saturday with Diogo Jota netting twice after coming on as a substitute.

While their title is heading to Manchester City, the outgoing champions produced the kind of display that saw them romp to glory last season, albeit against a timid Arsenal.

City's victory at Leicester meant Liverpool can no longer defend their title, with Juergen Klopp's side 25 points behind the runaway leaders with eight games to play.



Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan listens to his Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Brendon McCullum during a practice session in Chennai yesterday ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL), which will kick off from April 9.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Zinedine Zidane marked his 250th game in charge of Real Madrid with a 2-0 victory over Eibar on Saturday afternoon and was congratulated by club president Florentino Perez with a commemorative shirt. Interestingly, the Eibar game was Perez's 1000th match as Real Madrid president. Zidane has won 165 of his 250 games in charge and has enjoyed the longest reign as manager behind Miguel Munoz (605 matches).

## 'Real are in a good moment'

AGENCIES



Real Madrid forwards Marco Asensio and Karim Benzema struck to give their side a 2-0 win at home to Eibar in La Liga on Saturday, keeping up the pressure on leaders Atletico Madrid ahead of Tuesday's Champions League clash with Liverpool.

With an eye on the quarter-final first leg at home to Liverpool, coach Zinedine Zidane shuffled his squad to rest defender Raphael Varane while starting without Toni Kroos and Vinicius, handing rare starts to Marcelo and Isco.

Sergio Ramos missed out after picking up an injury on international duty and is set to miss both games against Liverpool as well as next weekend's 'Clasico' at home to Barcelona.

"Today we made a few changes but it didn't affect us at all, we went for the game from the start and in the first half we were spectacular," said Zidane.

"The second half was different because of the storm and we had 20 difficult minutes until we scored the second goal.

Now we have to rest well because we have a busy week ahead."

"Now we have to rest and prepare well. We know where we come from, we've suffered a lot this season and now it's time to enjoy."

"We're in a good moment, because the results are good. We defended the goal very well and we're playing well, for us it's important."

"Now we have an important week, with a Champions League game and then a very entertaining league game. We have had difficult moments in the season and now we have to take advantage of this (period) that is good."

Zidane is hopeful of having Eden Hazard fit again in time to face Liverpool in the first leg of their upcoming Champions League quarter-finals tie.

Eden Hazard only returned to first-team action last month but was unlucky to pick up yet another injury, which kept him on the sidelines for another 20 days.

But the international break gave Hazard time to recuperate and he has now returned to full fitness sooner than expected.

## Shirin, Faisal shine on day of records

### HIGHLIGHTS

The Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games will continue as per schedule and follow Covid-19 guidelines despite the nationwide lockdown starting today.

Out of 31 disciplines, events in seven disciplines – gymnastics, fencing, bodybuilding, wrestling, shooting, kho kho and athletics – have already been completed.

To send athletes to their homes outside Dhaka, Bangladesh Shooting Sport Federation trimmed the time-frame of remaining events by deciding medals on qualification scores while Bangladesh Athletics Federation shifted all fourth day events to the third day.

Athletes of different disciplines including the ones completed yesterday were scheduled to leave the capital last night to avoid lockdown.

Four records – two in swimming, one each in athletics and cycling – were set on the fourth day.

Events in shooting continued to unearth new talents as star shooters fell by the wayside, with all four gold medals in men's and women's 10m air rifle and 10m air pistol events going to new shooters.

Twelfth-grader Anzila Amzad outshone experienced shooter Armin Asha and Ardina Ferdous to win gold medal in 10m air rifle event.

Commonwealth Games silver medalist Shakil Ahmed only managed a bronze in 10m air pistol event. His Army teammate Sabbir Alam, who had never played in senior national championships before, grabbed the gold.

Gymnast Nur Akter Banu grabbed a total of four gold medals after becoming first in floor beam event on the concluding day of gymnastics.

Border Guard Bangladesh kept their dominance in men's handball with a comfortable 36-26 win over Bangladesh Ansar in gold-deciding final.

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's fastest woman Shirin Akter finally showed improvement as she created a national record in the 200m sprint in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games yesterday.

Having equalled former fastest woman Nazmun Nahar Beauty's 100m sprint record on Saturday, Shirin of Bangladesh Navy yesterday broke Beauty's 200m record of 24.30 seconds set in 2006 with a hand-time of 24.20 seconds. Sharifa Khatun of Bangladesh Army timed 24.50 seconds to win silver made while Kabita Roy of Bangladesh Ansar won bronze with a time of 25.90 seconds.

"I have been trying to improve day-by-day and this improvement is the outcome of uninterrupted, hard training under the guidance of my coach Abdullah Hel Kafi," said Shirin, who has been training at BKSP since 2017. "I knew I would be able to better my timing because I was doing better in training. With this one, I have won a 10th gold medal in 200m and 12th gold in 100m," Shirin told The Daily Star.

At the Army Stadium, cyclist Biswas Faisal Hossain face no challenges as he scripted three national records. The 21-year-old from, representing Bangladesh Army, clocked 13.60 seconds for a new record in the 1000m sprint, eclipsing Tariqul Islam's 15.10 seconds in 2013.

The Bagerhat native had already made two new records in the 1000m Time trial and 1200m Olympic sprint. He will also participate in the 1600m team time trial and 4000m team pursuit today.

"Determination, practice and a good cycle are the instruments behind these results," Faisal told The Daily Star. "I want to produce good results in the SA Games and Asian Games if I am given the opportunity. There is little difference between Bangladeshi and Indian cyclists. If we are given high-standard cycles and velodrome facilities, we can easily reduce the gap," said Faisal.

On a day of records, Asif Reza and Sonia Akter became swimming's power couple at the Syed Nazrul Islam Swimming Complex, scripting records in the men's and women's 50m freestyle events respectively. In swimming's 200m freestyle, Mahfizur Rahman Sagar made yet another national record.

In Gazipur, archer Ashim Kumar Das made a national record in the qualification round of individual compound event by making 704 out of 720. The Previous best of 700 belonged to Sheikh Sajib.



Sprint queen Shirin Akter set a new national record in 200m sprint with a 24.20 second dash while Anzila Amzad was one of the youngsters to upend the established order in shooting events on the fourth day of the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BOA