

## 'The biggest hockey event in Bangladesh' kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER



Asian Champions Trophy, the most prestigious hockey tournament of the continent, will kick off at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium in Dhaka today.

This is the first time in its sixth edition that Bangladesh will host the prestigious event and will also be a part of it.

Bangladesh, the lowest-ranked side in the five-team tournament, will play their first match against joint-defending champions India tomorrow. The opening day, though, will feature South Korea against India at 3:30pm followed by Japan against Pakistan at 6:00pm.

All the matches of the tournament -- scheduled to end on December 22 -- will be telecast live on Star Sports Network.

The trophy for the tournament was unveiled at the match venue in presence of all five team captains and organisers.

All the teams, except for the hosts, expressed their desire to lift the title.

India and Pakistan have won the title three times each, the two neighbours jointly lifting the trophy in the last edition in 2018 after heavy rain forced cancellation of the final.

### HERO ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY EDITION: SIXTH

**Most champions:** India, Pakistan (3)  
**Defending champions:** India, Pakistan  
**Highest-ranked side:** India (3)  
**Lowest-ranked side:** Bangladesh (38)  
**Bangladesh's record:** Debut campaign

This time, though, India are the overwhelming favourites as they come into the tournament on the back of a bronze medal in Tokyo Olympics and third position on the latest world rankings.

India captain Manpreet Singh, while talking at the trophy unveiling, said that they were happy to be here and had prepared well to pose a challenge for the title.

Bangladesh captain Ashraful Islam, though, was more realistic about the team's ambition and expectations.

Following the Asian Games in 2018, Bangladesh have not played an international match, in the process dropping to 38th position in world ranking from the late 20s.

"We have played two practice matches

before this tournament which will help us have some idea about how to play against these top teams," Ashraful said.

"India are the bronze-medallists from the Olympics. The other teams, too, are very good. We will try to compete with each team according to our ability," the Bangladesh captain added.

Meanwhile, Asian Hockey Federation CEO Tayeb Ikram was happy to see the event finally roll on the field after the pandemic had thrice forced its deferment from the original schedule of early 2020.

"After two years of fight against Covid, we have the top teams here. It is very important to bring our heroes, our athletes to the field. It is unfortunate that Malaysia couldn't come due to Covid issues, but that won't impact the tournament," Tayeb said.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation's vice-president Abdur Rashid Shikdar said that this is a great opportunity for our players to rub shoulders against top athletes.

"We hosted the Asia Cup twice, but this one is by far the biggest hockey event for Bangladesh. In the Asia Cup, we don't get to play against all the teams, which we will get here. So this is a great opportunity for our team to improve themselves," Shikdar said.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Bhutan thrashing pleases Choton

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Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton expressed his satisfaction over the team's performance following a 6-0 thrashing of Bhutan in their second match of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Coming on the back of a goalless draw against Nepal, the defending champions took only 90 seconds to open the scoring and ended the game with a healthy scoreline, which might come in handy if the equation for the finalists comes down to goal-margin following a round robin format among the five teams.

Tohura Khatun and Shaheda Akter Ripa scored a brace apiece while Maria Manda and Rituporna Chakma scored one goal apiece against Bhutan, who had thrashed Sri Lanka 5-0 in the tournament opener on Saturday.

"I am very happy with the performance of the players today. They were unlucky against Nepal but today the players improved on the areas that we made mistakes in that match. There is nothing to complain about today's performance," Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton said.

The Bangladesh coach started with three

changes from the previous game, bringing in Ripa and Anuching Mogini in attack and Afeida Khandaker in defence.

Whether or not the changes were made keeping in mind the strength or lack thereof of the opposition, those didn't harm the team performance as Bangladesh got the breakthrough in the second minute, a Bhutan defender blasting the ball against Tohura in an attempt to clear danger but conceding an own goal in the process.

Ripa got in on the scoresheet with a fine diagonal shot from inside the box in the 41st minute before Tohura made it 3-0 with a header on a cross from Ripa in the stoppage time of the first half.

Ripa got her second of the game two minutes after restart, the Bhutan goalie fumbling a weak attempt from the edge of the box.

Rituporna scored the fifth goal with a powerful left-footer from inside the box on 69 minutes before captain Maria wrapped up the victory two minutes into stoppage time, poking home from a goalmouth melee.

The Bangladesh coach made a number of substitutions throughout the match in an attempt to save legs for Friday's crucial match against India, but the ones that stepped in impressing equally.



PHOTO: STAR

## Independence Cup semifinals today

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Defending champions Bashundhara Kings will take on Bangladesh Police FC in the second semifinal of the Riviera Independence Cup today in what will be a rematch of the 2019 Federation Cup last-four battle, which Kings won 3-0 on way to establishing themselves as the new powerhouse of domestic football.

This time Police are expected to be a tougher challenge for the champions following their 1-0 win over former champions Sheikh Russel in the quarterfinals, thanks to a headed goal from Amiruddin Sharifi.

Kings, though, have a 100 percent record, having won all three group matches before dispatching Sheikh Jamal 4-0 in the last four. Following a goalless first half, Kings turned on the style, with Jonathan Fernandes scoring twice while Robson Robinho and Alamgir Kabir Rana added one apiece.

The match will kick off at 8:00pm at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium after the first semifinal between Abahani and Saif SC at the same venue at 5:15pm.

Abahani, who won the title only once back in 1990, will look to get past first-time semifinalists Saif SC to book a final berth for the first time since 2016.

## Broad and Anderson fit for Adelaide Test

REUTERS

England fast bowlers Stuart Broad and James Anderson are fit and available for the second Ashes test against Australia in Adelaide, head coach Chris Silverwood said on Sunday.

Broad and Anderson share 1,156 Test wickets between them but they were rested for the opening Test in Gabba, which England lost by nine wickets to trail 1-0 in the five-match series.

The second match, a day-night contest, starts on Thursday at Adelaide Oval.

"They are available, yes," Silverwood told British media on Sunday. "Jimmy will be fit and ready to go for the second Test, as will Stuart. (But) I have not told anyone they are playing yet."

Australia have won every day-night Test they have played, including the last Ashes clash in Adelaide during the 2017-18 series.

Meanwhile, Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood will miss the second Ashes test in Adelaide with a side injury, Cricket Australia said on Monday.

Hazlewood's injury during the nine-wicket win over England at the Gabba opens the door for Jhye Richardson or Michael Neser to bowl for Australia at Adelaide Oval.

Hazlewood bowled sparingly during England's second innings of the series-opener and headed home to Sydney for scans on Sunday rather than travel with the team to Adelaide.

The hosts also have injury concern with opener David Warner struggling with bruised ribs.



## Mithun, Mizanur star in triple-century opening stand



PHOTO: BCB

SPORTS REPORTER

The third-highest opening stand in country's first-class cricket history, of 327 runs, courtesy of centuries from Mohammad Mithun and Mizanur Rahman, helped Walton Central Zone take a huge first-innings lead of 211 runs over BCB North Zone after the second day of the Bangladesh Cricket League at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

Mithun was eventually dismissed after scoring 176 off 257 balls, featuring 21 fours and two sixes while Mizanur departed on 162 off 243 balls, striking 21 fours and three sixes, as Central Zone ended the day at 430 for 2. Salman Hossain and Soumya Sarkar will resume the third day on 40 and 39 runs, respectively.

Beginning play at 61 without loss, both Mizanur and Mithun played shots freely as the latter was the first to reach his 13th first-class hundred off 145 balls. Interestingly, Mithun opened the innings for the first time in first-class cricket after his teammate Abdul Mazid tested positive for Covid-19 at the last moment.

### BANGLADESH'S HIGHEST FIRST-CLASS OPENING PARTNERSHIPS

- 350- Rony Talukdar and Abdul Mazid- Dhaka Division v Chattogram Division- Fatullah, 2018
- 341- Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mizanur Rahman- Rajshahi v Dhaka Metro- Chattogram, 2018
- 327- Mohammad Mithun and Mizanur Rahman- Walton Central Zone v BCB North Zone- Chattogram, 2021

Mithun was dropped in all formats from the Bangladesh team this year and had a tough time during the National Cricket League, scoring just 158 runs in nine innings with the best score of 46.

"Obviously it feels good when you score runs. We both were set at the crease and my target was to put up a big partnership and Mizanur batted really well. It's just the first innings with a long way to go still, so I'll try to keep the consistency in the coming days," said Mithun.

On the other hand, Mizanur, who was

involved in the second-highest opening stand of 341 runs with Najmul Hossain, resumed the day on 18 and remained cautious early on before taking on the bowlers.

The right-hander eventually reached his 12th first-class hundred with a six over deep square leg to Tanbir Hayder after facing 163 deliveries.

"It becomes easy to bat with an experienced player like Mithun. We have a good understanding from playing together for a long time. Obviously, my aim is to become the highest run scorer in the league after becoming the top scorer in BPL's last season," said Mizanur.

At Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi, BCB South Zone took the first-innings lead of 21 runs in reply to Islami Bank East Zone's 260.

Opener Anamul Haque scored 88 off 156 balls which featured 14 fours and a six. Zakir Hasan and Mahedi Hasan remained unbeaten on 91 and 28, respectively, as South Zone will resume the third day at 288 for 6.

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan bagged three wickets while Mohammad Ashraful scalped two for East Zone.