



Mehedi Hasan Miraz (R) took three wickets in the morning session as Bangladesh made light work of the New Zealand lower order before making a commanding start to their innings during the second day of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Murad four-for keeps BCL final in balance

SPORTS REPORTER

South Zone posted 261 for five on day one of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) final against Central Zone yesterday with the five-day affair finely poised after Central Zone were able to fight back following South Zone's brilliant start, thanks to left-arm spinner Hasan Murad's four-wicket haul.

Having been put in to bat, South Zone openers Pinak Ghosh and Anamul Haque dictated proceedings in the morning session with a 137-run stand. With South Zone looking comfortable, Pinak was the first to depart after a patient 161-ball 65 as Hasan came to the fore with a gem



of a delivery in the 52nd over that beat Pinak all ends up and castled him. Amite Hasan came into the final on the back of two tons in the previous two games but he mistimed a pull off Abu Haider to depart after scoring 10 before lunch was called. Anamul was patient during a 171-ball 76, laced with six four and a six but Hasan got the better of him after lunch in the 60th over, trapping Anamul in front of the stumps.

A beautiful lighted delivery saw Murad remove Towhid Hridoy before he picked up his fourth with the scalp of Mahedi Hasan. Zakir Hasan's 46 and skipper Forhad Reza's 46 in an unbeaten 80-run stand saw South Zone claw back in.

## MSC KO Ctg Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

A couple of fortunate strikes took Mohammedan SC to the semifinals of the Federation Cup with a 2-1 win over Chattogram Abahani in the first quarterfinal at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Eleven-time Federation Cup champions Mohammedan, who last played the Fed Cup semifinals in 2019-20 season after beating the same opponents 2-0 in the quarterfinal, can count themselves lucky to score with two fortunate strikes in the second half while they also survived a scare when they could have gone down a man after goalkeeper Sujon Hossain handed the ball outside the danger area 35 minutes into the game.

Last edition's semifinalists Chattogram Abahani appeared to have the upper hand against Mohammedan from the outset. The port city outfit could not hurt the Mohammedan backline comprised of two foreign defenders. Chattogram controlled the

midfield and forced Sujon to handle the ball outside the box in order to take it away from the feet of Ctg Abahani forward Koushik Barua.

2017 Federation Cup runners-up Ctg Abahani started afresh in the second half and kept mounting the pressure but their forwards squandered two opportunities in the start of the second half before Mohammedan dealt first blood with a fine move from the right flank.

Following a few exchanges, the ball fell to Shahed Miah who saw his drive hit the back of the Abahani net following a big deflection off Chattogram midfielder Arafat in the 65th minute.

Mohammedan doubled their lead with another fortunate strike when Ctg Abahani defender Kamrul Islam's attempt to release a long ball was intercepted by Shahriar Emon. The ball looped up to find the back of the net, out of goalkeeper Saiful Islam's reach in the 73rd minute.

Ctg Abahani coach Marful Haque soon brought two changes upfront, sending in Nigerian striker Ebimobowei Thankgod and Ariful Islam in order to control the match. Thankgod reduced the arrears in stoppage time with a header.

## ‘Full credit to Bangladesh batters’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were faced with the tough challenge of tackling the New Zealand seamers at their den and the appreciation from the left-arm pacer Neil Wagner towards the two young batters Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Najmul Hossain Shanto was certainly the biggest takeaway.

After bundling out the number one ranked side on their lowest first-innings total of 328 against Bangladesh, the Tigers rode on Joy's unbeaten 70 and Shanto's fifty to end the second day on 175 for 2. Joy, playing just his second Test match, alongside Shanto displayed great character when Wagner was charging in and asking questions with his swing and accuracy.

“The younger guys today [yesterday] played phenomenally. I thought they played patiently and didn't really give too many opportunities. They hung in there and left the ball quite a lot,” said Wagner, who picked the two Bangladesh wickets that fell on the day.

“They played really well, full credit to them. I thought when the ball was there to be scored, they scored. They also left well and defended well,” Wagner reiterated.

Despite a shaky start, Shanto batted with authority. His gorgeous straight drive to Trent Boult reflected his class as a proper number three.

“The younger guys today [yesterday] played phenomenally. I thought they played patiently and didn't really give too many opportunities. They hung in there and left the ball quite a lot.”

Joy, on the other end, had good fortune by his side as Wagner had opted not to review a close leg-before appeal anticipating an inside edge. However, the replay later showed it would have been curtains for the youngster.

Joy was determined enough to place a high price tag on his wicket as the right-hander went on to face 211 deliveries which happened to be the first instance by a Bangladeshi opener to face over 200 balls in New Zealand.

Probably the biggest setback for Bangladesh over the years has been the lack of mental strength to absorb pressure in tough situations. According to prominent coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, the absence of that fear factor among the youngsters made the difference.

“It was vital how Shadman Islam and Mahmudul Hasan Joy put up the partnership which gave the comfort in the dressing room. It never seemed that Joy was nervous despite the fact that he was playing just his third innings in the longest format. It's the mentality that sets him apart as the confidence that he has been carrying from the age level was crucial,” opined Fahim.

“He felt he belongs to this level which is important and there was no sign of negativity during his long stay at the crease. He went through different phases whether it's with the new ball or with the old ball. New Zealand did not imagine they will be in such a position after the second day and I think New Zealand will surely come down hard. There will be mind games and I think there will be pressure on us to keep the momentum,” Fahim added.

Youngsters performing is nothing unusual for an international team willing to raise the bar. However, Bangladesh cricket really needs to develop a culture where the likes of Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal would be made to work harder whenever they return to the team.

## Can India break final frontier?

AFP, JOHANNESBURG

Indian captain Virat Kohli has every reason to be confident his team can seal an historic Test series win in South Africa when they face the hosts in the second Test at the Wanderers Stadium on Monday.

“It's a ground we all loving playing on and we are looking forward to it,” said Kohli after India won the first Test at Centurion by 113 runs on Thursday.

The numbers bear out Kohli's optimism. India have yet to be beaten in a Test match at South Africa's premier cricket stadium and have a record of two wins and three draws since their first tour of South Africa in 1992/93.

Despite the Wanderers being renowned as a ground favouring fast bowlers — which should have put India at a disadvantage on some of their earlier tours, before the emergence of their potent current pace bowling attack — India have performed consistently well in Johannesburg.

The ground holds particularly happy memories for some of the Indian touring party.

A series win in South Africa remains a final frontier for India, who now have the opportunity to wrap up an historic triumph with a match to spare.

India were superior in all departments at Centurion, although South Africa's fast bowlers came back strongly after a poor first day.

The home side's batting was inadequate against a well-disciplined Indian bowling attack.



## Moulvibazar, Jhenaidah win kabaddi titles

SPORTS REPORTER

Moulvibazar and Jhenaidah emerged champions in the boys' and girls' sections of the IGP Cup National Youth Kabaddi Championships after beating their respective rivals in the finals at the makeshift courts in Paltan Ground yesterday.

Moulvibazar retained their title after thrashing Chattogram by a comfortable 29-15 points as the winners clearly kept their dominance over the port city side throughout the match in which they led the first half 10-7.

In the girls' section, Jhenaidah surprisingly beat tournament favourites Narail by 25-19 points after leading the first half by 14-12 points. It was a sweet revenge for Jhenaidah, who were humiliated 57-20 in the last edition final held in 2018.

Wajuan Marma of Chattogram was adjudged the best player of the tournament in the boys' section while Mohammad Jubair and Tajuddin of Moulvibazar were named the best raider and the best defender respectively. Tajuddin was also named the best player of the final.

Anjuman Ara Ratri of Jhenaidah was adjudged the best player of the girls' event and the best player of the final while Chanda of Narail, Sumaiya of Jhenaidah were named the best raider and the best defender.

## Imranur in focus in nat'l athletics

SPORTS REPORTER

England-based Imranur Rahman is all set to vie against local athletes in 100m sprint event when Sheikh Kamal 45th National Athletics Championships gets underway today at the Army Stadium in Banani.

The 28-year-old, who entered athletics at the age of 16 in England, took part in British University Indoor Athletics competitions, winning 60m sprint by clocking 6.68 seconds. He took 10.40 seconds in 100m sprint trial at BKSP last year.

Some 400 athletes will compete in 40 events under electronic timer with four new events — 5000m, 10,000m, 400m hurdles and triple jump — being introduced.



World No. 1 Ashleigh Barty catches a cricket ball at a training session prior to the Adelaide International WTA tennis tournament in Adelaide on Sunday as the Australian prepares for her home Grand Slam at Melbourne Park, which starts on Jan. 17.

PHOTO: AFP