

## Comilla play Barishal in Qualifier-1

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Shakib Al Hasan scored an unbeaten 29-ball 51 as Fortune Barishal consolidated top spot in the BPL with an eight-wicket victory over Minister Dhaka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

The ace all-rounder smashed six fours and two sixes as Brishal overhauled Dhaka's total of 128 in 15.3 overs with eight wickets in hand. The defeat left Dhaka hanging by a thread for a place in the four-team playoffs, as they have nine points from 10 matches. The Mahmudullah-led side will only go through if either of Khulna Tigers or Chattogram Challengers – both on eight points – lose their last match today.

Earlier in the day, Comilla Victorians ensured berth in the first Qualifier against Fortune Barishal, to be played on February 14 at Dhaka, with a convincing 65-run win against Khulna Tigers.



With the mega IPL auction set to take place today and tomorrow in Bengaluru, Shakib Al Hasan served a reminder of his prowess to the franchise owners with a blitzkrieg on Friday night. The all-rounder smashed an unbeaten 29-ball 51, following a one-for-21 with the ball, to lead Fortune Barishal to an eight-wicket victory over Minister Group Dhaka in a BPL encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Afghans due today

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Afghanistan squad will arrive in Dhaka today to play a three-match ODI series and a two-match T20I series against Bangladesh, slated to begin on February 23.

Leg-spinner Rashid Khan will not be travelling with the side from Qatar as he is expected to be with his PSL side Lahore Qalandars till February 19.

The Afghanistan side will set off for Sylhet after landing in Dhaka and are expected to begin training on February 14 following a day's quarantine. The team will then move to Chattogram, where all three ODIs will be played, with the second and third ODI scheduled for February 25 and 28.

Afghanistan stars such as Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Qais Ahmed, who are currently playing in the ongoing BPL, will join the Afghanistan camp following the completion of the stints with their respective BPL franchises.

Pace, swing and bounce. At the age of 18, Ripon Mondol already has all the qualities required to be a star in the future. The right-arm pacer was the only Bangladeshi representative in the ICC's Most Valuable Team of the Tournament from the recently-concluded ICC Under-19 World Cup.



**The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader** got hold of the youngster as he talked about his cricketing journey, his most cherished wicket in the tournament among other things. Here are the excerpts of the interview:

**The Daily Star (DS):** You scalped six wickets in 14 matches in the ICC Under-19 World Cup. How happy are you with your performance?

**Ripon Mondol (RM):** I am happy with my performance but not so much with the team's performance. Had we done better as a team, I would be happier. But we did try our best as a team but things did

not go our way this time. Let's take the quarterfinal against India for instance. It was important to win the toss. The wicket was wet in the beginning and had we won the toss, maybe the story would have been different.

**DS:** How did it feel to get a place in the team of the tournament?

**RM:** This felt great. When we landed in Dhaka from Dubai, I was overwhelmed to see a flurry of congratulatory messages after turning my phone on. My mentors also congratulated me so it was inspiring.

**DS:** Tell us about your rise to this level in cricket.

**RM:** I used to play tape-tennis cricket since my childhood. I knew Shorif bhai, who used to play in the first division. He told me: "You should get into a cricket academy. Hopefully, something good will come of it." Then I got into a cricket academy named Global Academy in Mohakhali, Dhaka. After that, I got called up for a team in the third division. I did not play any matches in the first season. The next year, however, I took 17 wickets in eight matches. Then I got Manjurul Islam Monju sir as my coach. He helped me get into the Surjo Torun Club in the first division. That year (2019) I took 27 wickets in 12 matches. I also became the highest wicket-taker in Dhaka first division. Then I got acquainted with

cricketer Nadif Chowdhury while bowling in the nets during the Dhaka Premier League. He helped me. He said: "Your age is below 19. I will talk to the selectors and ask them to give you a shot. The rest is up to you." This is how with everyone's help I was able to reach this level.

**DS:** Did you always want to become a pacer?

**RM:** Yes.

**DS:** In which area do you focus more?

**RM:** Our [one of the] coaches Talha Jubair made us work on our line and length more than anything. The aim was to make us able to bowl all six deliveries on the same spot. I was always able to generate pace. I clocked 136kmph in the World Cup.

**DS:** Which was your fondest spell in the World Cup?

**RM:** I got four-wicket hauls against Canada and India. Both these spells are very memorable to me.

**DS:** Taking whose wicket gave you the most pleasure?

**RM:** I really enjoyed taking the wicket of South Africa's [Dewald] Brevis. He is being called 'Baby AB'. I loved taking all the wickets but his one was special.

**DS:** What is your plan next?

**RM:** I will play in the Premier League next so I would like to do well there.

## Kremlin backing Valieva in doping row

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin said Friday it was fully behind Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva, whose Olympic gold medal hangs in the balance after she failed a doping test.

"We boundlessly and fully support Kamila Valieva and call on everyone to support her," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"And we say to Kamila: don't hide your face. You are a Russian -- perform and defeat everybody," Peskov added.

The IOC and the International Skating Union are appealing against Russia's decision to allow Valieva to continue competing in Beijing after the 15-year-old tested positive in December for trimetazidine -- a metabolic agent that is prescribed for the treatment of angina and vertigo. It is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency because it can increase blood flow efficiency and help endurance.

Valieva led the Russian team to gold in the team event with landing a historic quad jump.



## India sweep ODI series against Windies

AFP, AHMEDABAD

Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant hit half-centuries to set up a thumping 96-run victory for India in the third one-day international against the West Indies and sweep the series on Friday.

Iyer, who made 80, and Pant, who hit 56, guided India to 265 after they lost three early wickets while batting first in Ahmedabad.

Bowlers, led by pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj, then combined to bowl out the West Indies for 169 in 37.1 overs to seal their first ever ODI whitewash over their opponents.

Siraj and fellow paceman Prasidh Krishna took three wickets apiece, while quick bowler Deepak Chahar and left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav also claimed two each. But it was the 110-run fourth-wicket partnership between Iyer and Pant that made India bounce back from 43-3, having lost two key wickets of skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for nought.

Chahar and Washington Sundar, who made 33, got useful cameos before India were bowled out on the final ball of the 50th over.



## Premier League back in original format

**SPORTS REPORTER**

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is all set to return to the home-and-away format, as decided by the professional football management committee yesterday.

The ongoing league will feature six venues across the country from the fourth round onward, leaving Tongi's Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium behind.

Previously, citing the upsurge of coronavirus, the Bangladesh Football Federation started the professional football league's 14th edition in two venues -- Tongi and Munshiganj -- without the home-and-away concept, leading to dispute with the Archery Federation for occupying the Tongi Stadium. However, this time, they have decided to revert to the original format, citing the infection rate of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus had reduced drastically.

"The fourth round matches of the league will take place in six venues except Tongi," informed Abdus Salam Murshedy, the league committee chairman, after mentioning that the third-round fixtures will continue to take place in Munshiganj and Tongi. Murshedy proceeded to reveal the finalised six venues and their corresponding home teams.

"Every venue will have two home teams. Sylhet will have Abahani and Rahmatganj, whereas Gopalganj will be the home venue for Muktijoddha Sangsad and Uttar Baridhara.

"The Bashundhara Kings Arena will host Bashundhara Kings and Sheikh Russel KC while Sheikh Jamal DC and Saif SC will have Munshiganj as their home venue.

"Police FC and Swadhinata KS will use Rajshahi Stadium as their home venue and Cumilla will host home matches for Mohammedan SC and Chittagong Abahani," informed Murshedy.



Australia batsman Ben McDermott launches one against Wanindu Hasaranga of Sri Lanka during the first T20I in Sydney yesterday. The right-hander slammed 53 off 41 deliveries as the world champions beat the visitors by 20 runs in DLS method. Adam Zampa and Josh Hazlewood took four wickets each as Sri Lanka could only score 122 for 8, chasing a victory target of 150.

PHOTO: AFP

### What to WATCH

#### T SPORTS

##### BPL

Chattogram vs Sylhet  
Live from 12:30 pm  
Khulna vs Comilla  
Live from 5:30 pm

##### PSL

Islamabad vs Quetta  
Live from 8:30 pm  
T SPORTS & MTV INDIA

##### La Liga

Atletico Madrid vs Getafe  
Live from 2:00 am (Sunday)

##### MTV INDIA

##### La Liga

Villareal vs Real Madrid  
Live from 9:15 pm

##### TEN 2

##### Bundesliga

Bochum vs Bayern Munich  
Live from 8:30 pm  
Leverkusen vs Stuttgart  
Live from 11:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

##### EPL

Manchester United vs Southampton  
Live from 6:30 pm  
Everton vs Leeds  
Live from 9:00 pm  
Norwich vs Manchester City  
Live from 11:30 pm