

### Babar ends drought of tons

AGENCIES

Babar Azam's glorious unbeaten 102 kept Pakistan alive but Australia remained on course for victory in the second Test in Karachi on Tuesday.

Set a record victory target of 506, Pakistan lost two quick wickets but Babar would not go down without a fight.

The right-hander combined with opener Abdullah Shafiq in a 171-run unbroken partnership for the third wicket in a spectacular rearguard spread over nearly 60 overs. Pakistan finished day four on 192-2.

Babar's sixth Test century, first Test hundred in two years, contained 12 fours. Babar last century came against Bangladesh in Rawalpindi in February 2020.

### Ashraful drives BD into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

A hattrick from penalty corner specialist Ashraful Islam steered Bangladesh into the semifinals of the AHF Cup with a 6-2 win over Iran in their third pool match in Jakarta yesterday.

Apart from Ashraful, Khorshedur Rahman, Milon Hossain and Roman Sarkar netted one goal apiece to take Bangladesh to the top of Pool B with nine points from three matches, with their last pool match against Oman slated for March 17.

Bangladesh conceded the lead in the fourth minute but equalised five minutes later, with Ashraful converting a penalty corner. The same player then gave Bangladesh the lead in the 29th minute before another penalty corner specialist, Khorshedur Rahman, made it 3-1 in the 34th minute. Milon then changed the direction of a fierce hit from Rasel Mahmud Jimmy to make it 4-1 two minutes later.

Ashraful completed his hattrick in the 39th minute before Iran made it 5-2 in the 41st minute. However, Roman completed the rout from a penalty corner in the 53rd minute.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty looked in good mood after a historic nine-run win against Pakistan on Monday in the ICC Women's World Cup. She posted a picture of herself on Facebook yesterday while relaxing in a picturesque place in Mount Maunganui. The Tigresses will play their next match against West Indies on Friday at the Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui; a venue where the Tigers, led by Mominul Haque, earned their historic maiden Test win in New Zealand in January this year. Meanwhile, Australia routed the West Indies by seven wickets in Wellington yesterday to maintain their perfect record at the mega event.



Rupganj Tigers opener Zakir Hasan cancelled out Abahani opener Mohammad Naim's brilliant hundred as the left-hander struck a 116-ball 117 to help his side secure a seven-wicket victory in their debut Dhaka Premier League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mizanur, Zakir outgun Naim's Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Naim punched the air in celebration upon reaching his ton yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur against newly-promoted Rupganj Tigers in the first day's fixture of the Dhaka Premier League.

The batter had been lacking in runs in the T20 format recently, domestically and for the national team, and the relief he felt after getting some much-needed confidence by coming into some runs with a big knock was apparent.

However, neither him nor his side Abahani Limited had the last laugh as the defending champions slumped to a surprise defeat by a big margin, losing by seven wickets against a side playing their first-ever DPL match.

If it was a show of power between the two sides' openers, Rupganj Tigers came up trumps as Zakir Hasan and Mizanur Rahman assailed the challenge posed by Abahani bowlers on a pitch that became easier to bat on as the day progressed.

Mizanur pulled one in front of square for four from a Kamrul Rabbi delivery in the second over before Zakir's cover drive in the same over showed their composure early. The duo found boundaries early every other over and dominated proceedings in chase of Abahani's challenging 255 for nine.

Mizanur was the aggressor during an 82-ball 93, laced with 12 fours and three sixes. He and Zakir put on 166 for the opening stand before Mizanur departed to an ill-conceived scoop off Rabbi. Zakir carried



on, hitting Mosaddek Hossain for four over mid wicket to bring up his first List A ton in 76 innings.

He departed with his side close to the win, getting an inside-edge onto his stumps after a 116-ball 117. Skipper Marshal Ayub's unbeaten 23 then saw them coast to win with seven wickets and eight overs to spare.

Earlier, Abahani were in early trouble against pacers Shafiqul Islam and Muktid Islam Mugdho, slumping to 48 for four inside 13 overs.

Naim stitched a vital 77-run partnership with skipper Mosaddek, who struck 37 off 58. Shamim Hossain then fell to a Mohammad Sharifulah delivery but Naim was able to accelerate late on in the innings, finding boundaries against Shafiqul to complete his ton. He fell to Forhad Reza after a brilliant catch in the deep from

Ariful Haque after a 132-ball 115, laced with 10 fours and two sixes. Mohammad Saifuddin's steady 40 saw Abahani manage 255 for nine, but ultimately it was not enough.

In the other match at BKSP, Prime Bank posted 265 for eight courtesy of Anamul Haque's 60 and Shamsur Rahman and Alok Kapali's 40-odd knocks. Mahedi Hasan clinched wickets at the top to finish with three for 53 as Prime Bank won by 50 runs.

Legends of Rupganj picked up a big 147-run win against Gazi Group Cricketers after posting 291 for seven, thanks to skipper Naeem Islam's 92. Sabbir Rahman made a quickfire 42 off 25 deliveries later down the order. Qazi Onik picked up three for 36 as Gazi Group were bowled out for 144.

## Donald, Morkel join ODI practice

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh ODI team practised at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday as they geared up for the upcoming ODI series against the hosts, slated to begin with the first ODI on March 18.

Acc all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had joined the Tigers a day prior and did some running exercises on Wednesday. He batted during the practice game, looking to get back into the flow of things after having suggested that he was suffering from 'mental and physical' exhaustion following the Afghanistan series at home.

Allan Donald, who was appointed bowling coach, joined the Tigers in training yesterday while the BCB also drafted in former South Africa all-rounder Albie Morkel as a power-hitting coach for the upcoming series.

Donald meanwhile got a first look at the pacers, who went through the grind of trying to adjust to South African conditions as quickly as possible.

"Morkel was drafted in for five days for the ODI series. He has been appointed chiefly for power-hitting since his experience in that regard is quite a lot. The head coach also wanted him with us and he will be with us for five days," team director Khaled Mahmud said in a video message to the media.



## MARAZ, ISA rewarded

SPORTS REPORTER

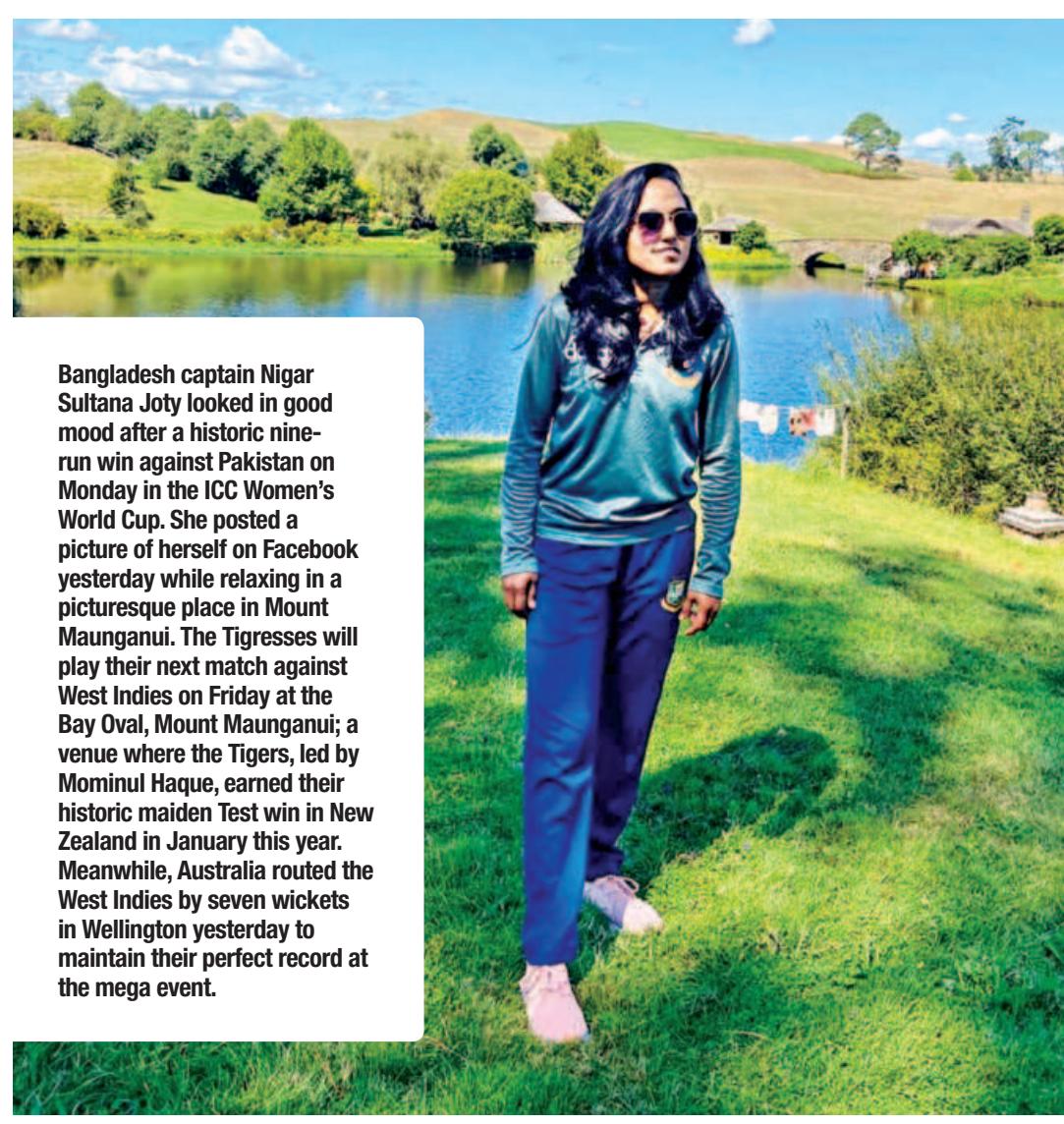
Maraz Hossain and Isa Faisal are the two new faces called up by Bangladesh national team's coach Javier Cabreria in the 23-member squad for two FIFA friendly matches against Maldives and Mongolia this month.

Saif Sporting Club's attacking midfielder Maraz represented Bangladesh in U-16, U-19 and U-23 teams while Bangladesh Police left-back Faisal represented Bangladesh in U-18 and U-23 teams. Both of them, however, first caught attention in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup primary school football tournament.

"It's a great opportunity to learn from big brothers, I will try my best if I get a chance to play," said Maraz, who has scored five goals this season – two each in the Independence Cup and the Federation Cup and one in the Bangladesh Premier League.

"This is beyond my expectation as I only concentrated on giving 100 percent for Bangladesh Police. Every player has different qualities and I have too. I will try to secure a place in the playing eleven with my own quality," said Faisal.

Cabreria dropped 12 players from the squad that last played in the Four Nations Cup in Sri Lanka in November last year. Those 12 have been replaced by the two new players and 10 proven campaigners.



## Benzema becomes all-time top French goalscorer

AGENCIES

Karim Benzema became the highest French goalscorer in history on Monday after his double gave Real Madrid a 3-0 win over Mallorca, sending them 10 points clear at the top of La Liga.

The 34-year-old was already riding on a massive high after his hat-trick helped Real Madrid complete a stunning come-back in the Champions League over Paris Saint-Germain last week.

His unstoppable form continued as the 34-year-old's penalty against Mallorca took his career tally to 412 goals, putting him one above Thierry Henry in the all-time list of French scorers. Benzema then made it 413 for him and three for Madrid with a superb header late on.

Benzema is also the current top scorer and assists provider in La Liga with 22 goals and 11 assists in 25 games. He is now the third highest-scoring player in Madrid's history with 311 goals, while Di Stefano finished his career on 308. Spain great Raul is still above Benzema



with 323 goals, while Cristiano Ronaldo is top of the list on 451.

But the Frenchman had to go off late on with what looked like an injury in his lower left leg, giving Madrid a serious headache before Sunday's Clasico against Barcelona. Vinicius Junior, who opened the scoring, and Rodrygo also suffered problems in the second half.

"They don't seem like very serious things. Rodrygo was a knock, Mendy

has felt something in his adductor and Karim, after a jump, didn't feel good. We'll see if they can recover for Sunday," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Carlo Ancelotti's side moved on to 66 points from 28 games, extending their lead at the top to ten points over second-placed Sevilla, who were held to a 1-1 stalemate at Rayo Vallecano on Sunday, a sixth draw in their last eight league matches.