

## Shoriful relishes Taskin alliance

SPORTS REPORTER

If one thing that Bangladesh missed more than anything else during their Test series against South Africa is the productive partnership between pacers Shoriful Islam and Taskin Ahmed.

The Tigers were whitewashed in the two-match series. While batting failure was the main reason behind the debacle, it was evident that the Tigers' pace attack looked a bit pale compared to how it performed during the historic Test win over New Zealand in January this year.

What Taskin and Shoriful have been doing in recent matches, regardless of formats, is



what Bangladesh have been craving for long -- a partnership that yields wickets for the team in crunch situations.

"We always try to create the partnership with dot balls. When we fulfil that target, all the bowlers bowl well and then there is a chance to take wickets," Shoriful explained yesterday while talking to the media.

How crucial the partnership between the two is can be gauged from the fact that they accounted for three top-order South Africa batters while giving away just 17 runs in 30 deliveries in the initial phase of the first ODI, which helped the Tigers register their maiden ODI victory away to South Africa.

"It's a good thing that in the last few series, I have been able to strike a very good partnership with Taskin bhai. He talks positively which is useful for a bowler and when we talk positively with each other, good results come," Shoriful added.

Both pacers, though, are uncertain for Bangladesh's upcoming two-Test home series against Sri Lanka due to injuries.



Prime Bank's left-arm spinner Taijul Islam leaps in the air to celebrate one of his two wickets during a 42-run victory against Abahani in their first Super Six match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Meanwhile, (bottom) Sabbir Rahman scored a century for Legends of Rugganj against Rugganj Tigers at BKSP.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB

## Abahani succumb to spin

SPORTS REPORTER

Prime Bank opted for the tried-and-tested strategy with their spinning options and it paid dividends as they thrashed Abahani Limited by a massive 142 runs in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) Super League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday.

At the end of the match, Abahani cricketers looked dejected as they headed into their dressing room following a big loss that shifts momentum away from them. And not far away, pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja was heading back into his side Prime Bank's dressing room but he also wore a similar expression to some of the Abahani stars when a journalist waved at him. Raja, the sole pacer in the Prime Bank unit, bowled just two overs while the spinners ran riot.

The national team's problems with spin has been under much focus since the South Africa tour of late. Liton Das, Najmul Hossain Shanto starred in the star-studded Abahani lineup but fell prey to spin yesterday.

Prime Bank began their bowling innings in defence of a 274-run target with spinners from both ends. Left-arm spinner Rakibul Hasan operated from one end with Mahedi Hasan, the right-arm off-spinner bowling from the other and the pressure was applied from the very beginning. Rakibul picked up the wicket of Jaker Ali, who went for an eight-ball duck and made further inroads by trapping Shanto leg-before with a delivery that kept so low, it almost caught the batter on the ankles. Overseas recruit Dhananjaya de Silva, too, could not make an impact on his first match of the season, edging one through to the wicket-keeper.

Afif Hossain was introduced by Abahani to unsettle Mahedi but the bowler responded to a four by allowing the pitch to do the talking as Afif mistimed one in the eighth over to give a simple catch. Liton had applied himself well with wickets falling around him but when Taijul Islam's arm delivery slid through under



death as Abahani were bowled out for 131. Earlier, Anamul Haque Bijoy kept showing his tremendous form with a vital 85-ball 77 for Prime Bank. He and other opener Shahadat Dipu, starred in a 97-run stand. Bijoy missed out on a ton but Mohammad Mithun's 44 and Yasir Ali's run-a-ball 43 saw Prime Bank reach a challenging score of 273 for 9 with Mahedi's 27-ball 34 cameo also leaving a mark. Saifuddin finished as Abahani's best bowler, picking up two for 35 while Dhananjaya bagged three for 57 runs.

It will be a tough road for Abahani in terms of defending their title as Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club romped to a 72-run win against Gazi Group in the Super League game at BKSP with Parvez Rasool starring with both bat and ball. Parvez strung together a 141-run stand with Nurul Hasan for the fourth wicket as his 64-ball 73 and Nurul's 72-ball 73 saw Sheikh Jamal reach 271 for 5. Gazi were bowled out for 199 with Ebadot Hossain and Parvez scalping three wickets each.

In another Super League game at BKSP, Sabbir Rahman struck his third List A ton, reaching three figures for the first time in three years since his ton against New Zealand in Dunedin. Sabbir's 111-ball 125 and Chirag Jani's stormy 66-ball 95 saw Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Legends of Rugganj reach 325 for five. In reply, Rugganj Tigers reached 270 for 9 after Saeed Naseem's ton as spinner Nabil Samad picked up a fiver to give Mashrafe's side a 55-run win.

Elsewhere, Khelaghar Samaj Kallayan Samity usurped City Club at Fatullah in the Relegation League game by 85 runs. Amite Hasan struck his second List A ton this season during a 113-ball 101 to help his side in the crucial game.

## Abahani brace for Mohun Bagan challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will be looking to give their best in order to advance to the group stage of the AFC Cup when the Sky Blues take on hosts ATK Mohun Bagan in the playoff at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata today.

Six-time Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) Champions Abahani became the first Bangladeshi club to become group champions in the AFC cup and advance to the zonal semifinals in 2019. Since then, Abahani could not even make it to the playoffs.

However, Abahani are hopeful of making it to the group stage this time around.

"The last time was a lesson for us. We made some mistakes and we can learn from them. However, it is a completely different playoff game because there were home and away matches last time. But this time there will be just this one game. It is like a final and we will have to do everything we can to win it," Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos told The Daily Star over phone from Kolkata yesterday.

Since finishing their Indian Super League campaign in the middle of March, ATK Mohun Bagan have been in fine form after registering a massive 5-0 win over Sri Lanka's Blue Star in the preliminary-2 round match.

Abahani, meanwhile, advanced to the playoff stage after Club Valencia of Maldives withdrew from the tournament.



Abahani, however, have been in action in the BPL. Moreover, Lemos had previously guided Abahani to wins over Indian clubs during the 2019 AFC Cup campaign and the Portuguese coach will be hoping to repeat the feat against Mohun Bagan, who beat Abahani 3-1 and drew 1-1 in the 2017 AFC Cup campaign.

"The overall condition of the team is good and we are ready to play the game," said Lemos.

"Of course it is a challenging match because Mohun Bagan is a good team. I believe we have to play our best football to win this match," he added.

As Abahani's reliable Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes is doubtful for the game, Lemos will bank on Bosnian forward Nedo Turkovic upfront. He will also be anxious about his backline following a couple of suspensions and injuries.

"We have to be very organised and disciplined. We cannot give space to Mohun Bagan during the game," said Lemos.

Mohun Bagan captain Pritam Kotal also believed that the best side will come out as winners in the tie.

"Tomorrow is the final for us. They are a good team and we respect them. We will play our game and they will play theirs. It is going to be exciting and the better side will win," Kotal told the media at the pre-match press conference.

## Klopp expects Man United to 'go for it'

REUTERS

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp described Tuesday's game with Manchester United as a clash between "two of the biggest clubs in the world" and said his team were in for a stern test despite the opposition's struggles this season.

Second-placed Liverpool trail Premier League leaders Manchester City by one point while United are fifth, three points behind Tottenham Hotspur who occupy the last Champions League spot.

"It's a big game, a massive game, two of the biggest clubs in the world. Always we have to learn to deal with it," Klopp told reporters on Monday. "The Man United we will face, they will go for it. They want to go to the Champions League. It will be an intense 90 minutes... it's an incredibly important game again for both teams. That says it all. Both teams are fighting."

The German also commended his opposite number Ralf Rangnick for the job he had done since taking over on an interim basis at Old Trafford last year.

"I haven't spoken to him since he has been in England out of respect, but you can see the changes he has made there and the parts he has improved," said Klopp of his compatriot.

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah will be looking for his first goal from open play since Feb. 19 against United at Anfield but Klopp added he was unfazed by the Egyptian's barren spell.

"It's a completely normal spell he is going through. We've spoken about the physical demands. I liked the game against City (FA Cup semi-final) a lot, it was a really good football game, only a question of time before he scores again," he said. "We have had plenty of talks over the time we have worked together and at this specific moment there is no need to talk about the situation."



Karim Benzema (L) once again came to Real Madrid's rescue with a last-ditch winner against Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium on Sunday. The French striker scored the winner two minutes into stoppage time after the league leaders had erased a two-goal lead taken by the hosts early in the first half.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ajax out to keep Ten Hag

REUTERS

Ajax Amsterdam are doing "everything possible" to retain head coach Erik ten Hag, who has been linked with a move to Manchester United next season, the Dutch club's technical manager Gerry Hamstra said.

United are looking to appoint a permanent manager with interim boss Ralf Rangnick's tenure set to end after this season.

Ten Hag was appointed by Ajax during the 2017-18 campaign.

"There is interest for Erik ten Hag, that is normal. He has done fantastic," Hamstra said on Sunday before the Dutch Cup final, which Ajax lost 2-1 to PSV Eindhoven.

"We hope he stays ... We did everything possible. We were very busy with that. He reacted that he is focusing on Ajax now. Now we are preparing for two scenarios, Ten Hag might stay or might leave."