

**HOCKEY**  
**CHAMPIONS TROPHY**

**Venue:** Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium in Dhaka  
**Tournament duration:** October 28 – November 17  
**Teams:** Six franchises  
**Matches:** 34  
**Local players:** 78  
**Foreigners:** 24+ from 9 countries  
**Payment range of a local player:** Tk 1-5 lakh  
**Champions prize money:** Tk 15 lakh  
**Runners-up prize money:** Tk 10 lakh  
**Budget of each franchise:** Tk 1.25 crore

**TEAMS:**

**Walton Dhaka**  
**Foreign icon player:** SV Sunil (India)  
 "I believe the introduction of this league will strengthen the national hockey team," said Ashraf Islam, Dhaka's local icon player

**Saif Power Group Khulna**  
**Foreign icon player:** Guido Barreiros (Argentina)  
 "It feels like Eid festival because we are going to play the domestic competition after a long gap. I still can't believe our dream of the franchise league is going to happen," said Biplob Kujur, Khulna's local icon player.

**Acme Chattogram**  
**Foreign icon player:** Devinder Walmiki (India)  
 "All teams of a tournament were never seen to be this balanced, so every match is going to be competitive," said Rezaul Karim Babu, Chattogram's local icon player.

**Metro Express Barishal**  
**Foreign icon player:** Juan Martin Lopez (Argentina)  
 "There are many things to learn from the foreign players by sharing the dress room experience," said Roman Sarkar, Barishal's local icon player.

**Rupayan City Cumilla**  
**Foreign icon player:** Pardeep Mor (India)  
 "It is a matter of regret that former players will miss the opportunity to perform on such a big stage," said Sohanur Rahman Sabuj, Cumilla's local icon player.

**Monarch Mart Padma**  
**Foreign icon player:** Chinglesana Singh (India)  
 "Hockey Champions Trophy is going to open a new era to revive the country's hockey to what it had been in the 1990s," said Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Padma's local icon player.



## Hockey Champions Trophy breeds fresh hope

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Bangladesh hockey is set to step into a new era when the inaugural Hockey Champions Trophy gets underway at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today, with six franchises vying for the trophy.

Despite showing potential at the international level, hockey in Bangladesh hit a glass ceiling, remaining at the level it was at pre-independence as the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) lacked proper planning and failed to hold the domestic league on a regular basis.

As the country's top-flight Premier Division Hockey League has been irregular, being staged once every two or three years, players have long demanded the introduction of a franchise-based league so they can hone their skills as well as earn their bread and butter.

Although the initial steps to starting a franchise-based league went in vain after Bashundhara Group were inspired by legendary hockey player Abdus Sadeque and sent a proposal to BHF, the determination of the federation's new president Air Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan has brought that franchise-based league to the light.

The agreement with the BHF states that the league will be held five times over the

next five years, instilling belief in players that hockey in Bangladesh may enjoy a renaissance.

After posing alongside the trophy on the blue turf at a new-look Maulana Bhasani, all six captains promised to entertain spectators although most players, barring only those in the national side, will get their first taste of action in 11 months, since the completion of the Premier Division Hockey League in November, 2021.

While the Premier Division Hockey League title has mostly been confined to two or three clubs, the race for the Hockey Champions Trophy looks to be wide open, with each team forming well-balanced sides. Besides the inclusion of foreign players, all six teams will be guided by foreign coaches for the first time, with the country's top coaches assisting them.

"It is really hard to predict who the favourites are because I have never seen such balanced teams compete for the title before," said Acme Chattogram captain Rezaul Karim Babu, adding that their target was to clinch the title.

Saif Power Group Khulna captain Khorshehur Rahman said: "It is a great initiative and we are really excited because we will be a part of history tomorrow. I hope we start our campaign with a

victory."

"It is the country's second franchise-based league after cricket, and we are fortunate to get such an opportunity. Players who have already retired also regretted not getting such an opportunity. Some people even requested hockey sticks because they want to play," said Rupyan City Cumilla captain Sohanur Rahman Sabuj.

Monarch Padma captain Imran Hasan Pintoo informed that Shakib Al Hasan, one of owners of the team, kept in touch and motivated them regularly despite being at the ICC T20 World Cup.

BHF acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf informed that they had taken all necessary precautions after their experience hosting the Asian Champions Trophy.

"As we are holding this tournament jointly, there may be some creases. But everything is ready for the Hockey Champions Trophy," Yousuf said, adding that they had spoken to the concerned authorities about holding matches under the floodlight.

Acme Chattogram will take on Saif Power Group Khulna in the opening match at 6:30 pm under floodlights before the second match between Rupayan City Cumilla and Monarch Padma at 8:15pm.

## Mamun hits maiden first-class double ton

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Rangpur Division opener Abdullah Al Mamun set the stage alight with his maiden first-class double hundred against Sylhet Division in their Tier 1 National Cricket League encounter against Sylhet Division at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Thursday.

Mamun's unbeaten 210, laced with 16 boundaries and 13 maximums, saw Rangpur post 405 for seven before declaring. The fixture that saw the first two days washed out due to rain, however, ended in a stalemate.

The 18-year-old began the fourth day on 79 not out with experienced Naem Islam at the other end. The duo put together a 150-run stand before Naem was dismissed for 65.

Sylhet pacer Abu Jayed Chowdhury was the pick of the bowlers as he scalped four wickets for 71 runs.

In reply, Sylhet batters ended the final day on 119-2. Opener Taufiq Khan Tushar top-scored with 92 for the home side.

The other Tier 1 match between Dhaka Division and Chattogram Division also endured the same fate. In reply to Dhaka's 158-5d, Chattogram scored 50-2 as the rain-hit encounter ended in an expected draw.

Meanwhile, Barishal Division beat Dhaka Metro by four wickets at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi. Chasing a target of 214, Barishal went across the line on the back of opener Rafsan Al Mahmud's 71-run knock.

The other Tier 2 affair between Khulna Division and Rajshahi Division at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium Academy Ground ended in a draw as Rajshahi managed 124-1 on the final day in reply to Khulna's first innings total of 267.

## Messi-appreciated artist to colour Qatar

**REUTERS**

Lili Cantero, a 29-year-old Paraguayan artist famed for painting intricate and personal soccer boots for stars including Lionel Messi and Ronaldinho, is preparing a new colorful show of her work to take to the World Cup in Qatar.

The Asuncion-born artist is painting some two dozen sets of boots, balls and canvases, many inspired by the Middle Eastern nation and its capital Doha, which will host national teams from around the world next month to compete for the World Cup crown.

Cantero made a name for herself painting soccer boots, including a pair she sent to Argentine star Lionel Messi when he was playing at Barcelona, lovingly detailed with a gallery of black and white images of the striker and his family.

She hadn't known if he would even receive them, but to her surprise she received a photo of Messi, one of the world's best soccer players, holding the boots. That marked a turning point for Cantero at a time she had almost decided to stop painting.

"Messi's boots marked a before and after," said Cantero, who wants to create her own sportswear brand and bring Paraguayan art to major global events. "It was a nice moment because thanks to that many doors were opened and my career really started."



## Barca drop down to Europa again

**AGENCIES**

Barcelona exited the Champions League at the group phase for the second season running on Wednesday, a 3-0 home defeat by Bayern Munich rubbing salt in the wound after their fate was sealed 700 kilometres away.

Inter Milan beat Viktoria Plzen at San Siro before kick-off at Camp Nou, ensuring Barcelona would drop into the Europa League again despite their lavish summer expenditure on Robert Lewandowski, Jules Kounde, Raphinha and other players.

With the club 1.3 billion euros (\$1.31 billion) in debt at the end of 2021, Barcelona president Joan Laporta pulled "palancas" — levers — all summer long, like a Las Vegas slot machine, until he had cashed out the 865 million euro jackpot he was looking for.

In came those star names, plus a raft of other signings including Franck Kessie, Andreas Christensen and Marcos Alonso, as coach Xavi Hernandez and the board revamped their squad, hunting for instant success.

The cost of their deals was 49 percent of their production arm Barca Studios sold to Socios and Orpheus Media, raising 200 million euros, and 25 percent of their La Liga television rights for the next 25 years sold to US investment firm Sixth Street across two deals, for around 665

million euros.

Enthusiasm soared in Catalonia and attendances rose after the disillusionment of last season, with 84,000 at Camp Nou on Wednesday, despite the improbability, and quickly, impossibility, of the Bayern match being anything beyond an exercise to salvage some pride.

Change has come slower than Barcelona hoped for in Europe and their only win in five group stage matches was over Viktoria Plzen. The Czech minnows' defeat by Inter left Barcelona with the ignominy of being able to watch in the dressing room as their fate was sealed even before they took to the pitch.

"We didn't compete today, being knocked out before the game affected us," Xavi said.

"It was a difficult group and everything went against us. It was cruel."

According to Xavi, Barcelona needed a beating in order to grow.

"This is our reality and we have to face it. Maybe that's what we needed, to be given a beating in order to grow," Xavi added.

"Today it was already over, too late to do anything. The main reason that we got to this situation was because of our own mistakes in the previous games, we failed to be effective up front.

"We go out with a really bad feeling but we need to reset and reconnect to fight for the other trophies left."



PHOTO: BAYER LEVERKUSEN  
 Atletico Madrid needed a win to keep their Champions League destiny in their own hands going, but a 2-2 draw against Bayer Leverkusen saw them eliminated from Europe's elite competition. Diego Simeone's side had an almost miraculous chance to secure victory as they were awarded a penalty after the final whistle following a VAR review, but Lukas Hradecky denied Yannick Carrasco from the spot.