

## Taskin to be fit for England series

SPORTS REPORTER

National selectors are unworried by the fact that pacer Taskin Ahmed has been sidelined by an injury in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League and are hopeful the speedster will be available before the upcoming home series against England.

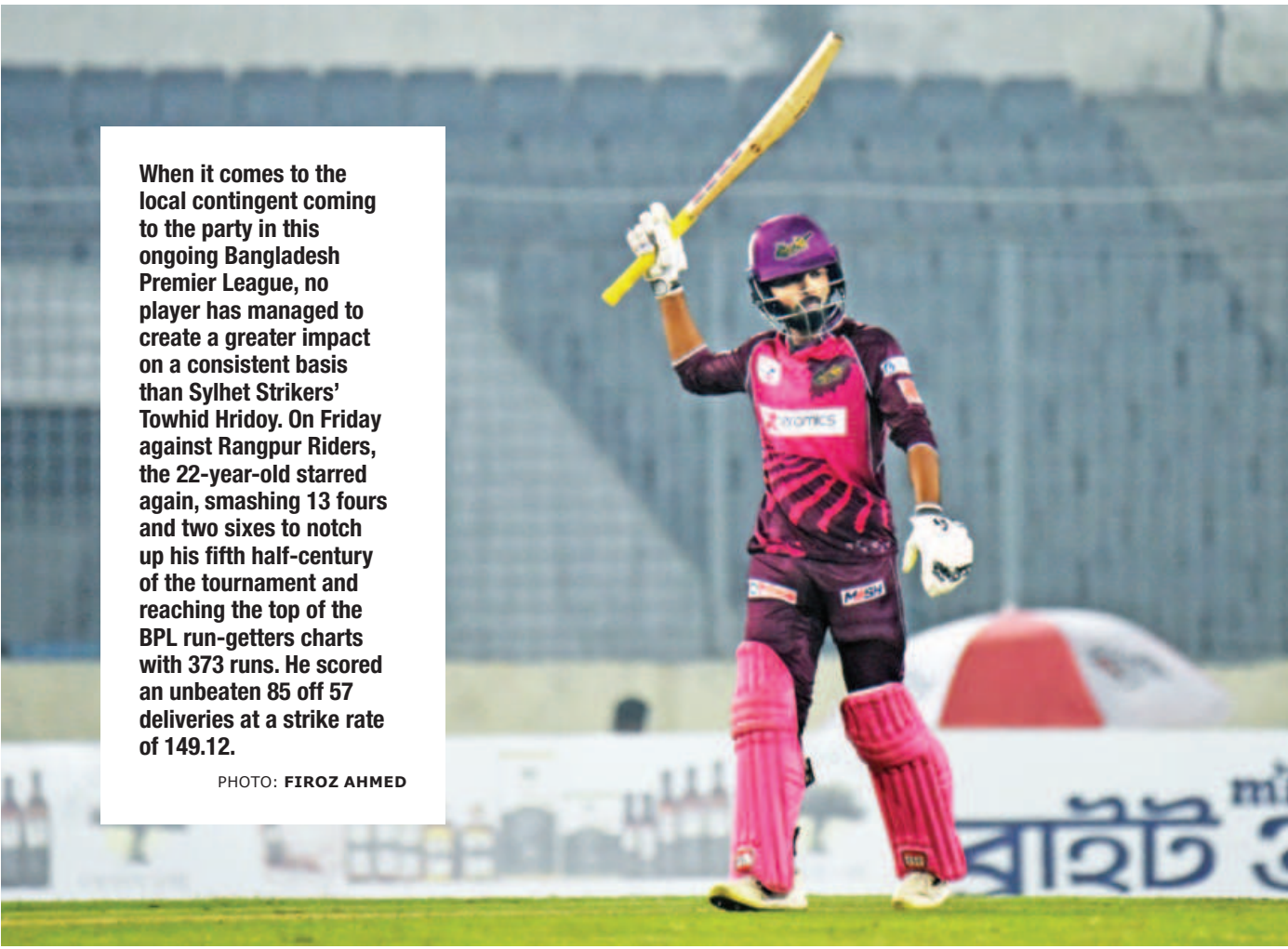
Taskin was sidelined after picking up a side strain during his last game for Dhaka Dominators, against Rangpur Riders on January 30 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

"We are not worried about Taskin Ahmed despite him not playing in the BPL because we were informed that he would be fit before the England series," chief selector Minhajul Abedin Nannu told the media yesterday.

However according to Dhaka Dominators team manager Mehrab Hossain Opee, the pacer is expected to recover ahead of their last group-stage game against Chattogram Challengers on February 7.

"We are hopeful that Taskin will be available for the last group game of the BPL on February 7. However, it all depends on the fitness test ahead of the game," Mehrab said.

A white-ball home series against England, including three ODIs and as many T20Is, starts from March 1.



When it comes to the local contingent coming to the party in this ongoing Bangladesh Premier League, no player has managed to create a greater impact on a consistent basis than Sylhet Strikers' Towhid Hridoy. On Friday against Rangpur Riders, the 22-year-old starred again, smashing 13 fours and two sixes to notch up his fifth half-century of the tournament and reaching the top of the BPL run-getters charts with 373 runs. He scored an unbeaten 85 off 57 deliveries at a strike rate of 149.12.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Abahani hand Sk Jamal season's first defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Abahani closed the gap with runaway league leaders Bashundhara Kings as they made Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club suffer their first defeat of the Bangladesh Premier League's ongoing season in Gopalganj on Saturday.

The 2-1 win takes still-undefeated Abahani to 18 points after eight games, six behind Kings, while Sheikh Jamal dropped close to mid-table, with 12 points in seven outings.

Elsewhere yesterday, at the Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka, Sheikh Russel KC edged past bottom dwellers AFC Uttara 1-0 and moved into fifth spot of the 11-team table, courtesy of a spot-kick conversion by Didier Brossou, while two goals by Almazbek Malikov and Mateo Palacios on either side of interval against Rahmatganj MFS in Mymensingh took Bangladesh Police level on points with Sheikh Jamal.

At the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium, the game was one-sided from the onset as Abahani created a flurry of chances, resulting in the first goal once Yousef Mohammad had the ball near the far-right touchline in the 10th minute. The Syrian midfielder easily left his marker on the ground with a feigned cross before whipping a left-footed curler, headed in by Peter Nworah.

Abahani widened the margin in the 34th minute with Nworah in the act again, assisting Daniel Colindres. Sheikh Jamal expressed themselves in the second half and were duly rewarded as their No.9 Cornelius Stewart coolly converted a penalty.

## Federer to return at Wimbledon?

AGENCIES, London

The last time Roger Federer visited Wimbledon – in late November – he was denied entry by an overzealous security guard who wanted to see his membership card.

The All England Club however, now finds themselves courting Federer for a commentary role at the tournament he won eight times.

Talks to bring Federer into a revamped BBC production are at an advanced stage, English outlets reported.

Federer hinted at his possible availability in September, on the eve of the Laver Cup event in London that saw him retire from professional tennis. "Commentating the odd match or giving back in this way, I guess I could imagine it," he told reporters. "Sometimes you watch matches because of the commentary and less about the match itself."

"Two different employers would help to cover Federer's costs, which – for a man who used to command at least \$1m per day for an exhibition event – are likely to be substantial," one report mentioned.

This year, the coverage will be missing Sue Barker – the evergreen presenter who retired last summer after 22 years in the anchor's chair – and Boris Becker, who is not expected to be re-engaged after being released from prison in December.

## 'A majority just don't use their brains'

SPORTS REPORTER

The main purpose of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) was to create a platform that local players could use to showcase their talents while also strengthening the national team's pipeline, but although a few young players have emerged, Comilla Victorians head coach Mohammad Salahuddin believes a lack of common sense from local cricketers is the biggest reason Bangladeshi players have not taken the next step.

The prominent coach highlighted the poor mindset of the local cricketers, especially among those who have experience and talent but have been unable to utilise opportunities, opining that not using their brains was the reason foreign players still towered above.

"What I expect from local players is to apply simple common sense. But I doubt whether they have that common sense. If you have been playing for over 15 years in domestic cricket in Mirpur, I think you need to know what to do in different situations. I am very disappointed by the mindset of the cricketers. At times, I wonder whether they even think about the game. If you compare our local players to Mohammad Rizwan, some have less limitations than him or maybe they can hit harder. But whenever they go out, things are quite the opposite," Salahuddin lamented.

"I have said previously that some players in our country play with their brain but a majority just don't. When the question is common, they do well. But if anything is from outside their syllabus, they can't. That is very disappointing. When you have been



playing for over 10-12 years you need to have some common sense."

When queried whether fears of losing their place in the team added extra pressure on the local players and perhaps held them back, Bangladesh's former fielding coach put the spotlight back on their knowledge of the game.

"I don't think it's the fear factor. They have less knowledge about cricket. They don't know what to do in different pitches and situations. When everything is in my control, why would I do something that could lead to trouble? Until you grow this awareness... I don't know when will they learn the game, only the Almighty knows."

In order to improve the quality of cricketers, Salahuddin urged drastic changes in coaching from the grassroots

levels, opining that the time had come for a complete reboot of the coaching system.

"If you have poor grammar, you won't be able to comprehend an English essay. A majority of players are dependent on coaches and follow whatever the coach says. But a coach won't go out and play. That is when their brains freeze. It's a failure of the system. I think the computer is not set properly. This needs to be done from childhood.

"If we are able to give them freedom, then this problem won't arise. I think the problem is more from the coaches' side. There is no point blaming the players if, at one point, the brain does not respond properly. If we can change the coaching methods from childhood, then things might work," he added.

## Milan in freefall ahead of Inter clash

REUTERS

Defending champions AC Milan play local rivals Inter on Sunday looking to emerge from a mid-season slump that has left them without a win in six games in all competitions and dropped them out of the Serie A title race.

Milan have won their last two Serie A derbies against Inter and are looking to make it three in a row against their rivals for the first time since a run of four straight league victories between 2002 and 2004.

After Milan prevailed 3-2 in the reverse fixture back in September, they could also do a league double over Inter for the first time since the 2010-11 campaign.

Yet Stefano Pioli's side are deep in crisis and without a win in four Serie A games, culminating in a 5-2 thrashing at home against 16th-placed Sassuolo in their last league outing.

Sunday's clash also comes a little over two weeks after Inter humiliated Milan 3-0 in Italy's Supercup. Pioli's side have conceded 12 goals in their last three games and let in 18 in the whole of January – the most they have ever conceded in a single month in all competitions.

Inter have had their own recent hiccups, losing 1-0 to mid-table Empoli, and drawing with Monza shortly after the season resumed in January. Yet last weekend's win over Cremonese moved them up to second in the standings.

"Derbies are special matches," Inter manager Simone Inzaghi said. "Milan is in a moment that is not positive, but we're talking about the Italian champions which made it to the Champions League last-16 after a long time." Inzaghi also mentioned that defender Milan Skriniar will no longer wear the captain's armband with the Slovakia international set to leave the Serie A club for free at the end of the season.

## London braces for Haaland-Kane showdown

AGENCIES

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola is relishing a battle of two of the best strikers in the English Premier League when his side travel to Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday.

City's Norwegian star Erling Haaland has been a hotshot in front of goal in his first season in the English top flight, leading the Golden Boot race with 25 goals so far, while Spurs' English talisman Harry Kane is second on 16.

Kane is also seeking to score one more goal to become Tottenham's outright top scorer of all time after he equalled Jimmy Greaves on 266 goals late in January.

The clash in north London will likely be one with plenty of firepower from both men, and Guardiola was full of praise for the duo, especially for Kane.

"We are extremely happy with Erling Haaland and, of course, I think Tottenham are extremely happy with Harry Kane," he said.

"What an exceptional player. What Harry Kane has done is amazing, the

goals, the quality he has. Harry Kane remains one of the best strikers I have seen in my life. Not even winning. It doesn't matter.

"I think Tottenham are happy to have him. We are extremely happy to have this young player like Erling that



I think is going to give us many good years."

City are hoping for a win to keep the pressure on Premier League leaders Arsenal but Guardiola has lost all four of his visits to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in all competitions.

When asked about his game plan to counter this, he simply said: "Because they were better than us.

We played decent games (but) missed penalties.

"Now with Antonio Conte (in charge), the quality they have up front, the organisation – they're a tough opponent, always have been in the last few years.

The City boss confirmed that Phil Foden is back in contention for the clash after recovering from a foot injury, while John Stones could be out for up to a month after suffering a hamstring issue in the FA Cup win over Arsenal on Jan 28.

"It's three weeks, one month (out)," said Guardiola. "Unfortunately, a lot of games."

Spurs boss Conte will be absent from the touchline as he recovers from a surgery to remove his gallbladder.

The Italian is recovering well, said his assistant Cristian Stellini, but there is no timeline for his return.

Conte joins long-term absentee Lucas Moura, who is still struggling with a tendon problem, in the treatment room while Richarlison is available after recovering from injury. On whether fullback Pedro Porro, who signed for Spurs on loan from Sporting Lisbon on deadline day, could make his debut, Stellini said the 23-year-old could be in contention.



James Tarkowski celebrates after his header gave Everton the perfect start under new manager Sean Dyche, beating Premier League leaders Arsenal 1-0 at Goodison Park yesterday. This was Arsenal's second defeat of the season while Everton got out of the relegation zone with their first win in 11 games.

PHOTO: AFP