

## What to WATCH

### STAR SPORTS 1

India vs Australia  
Second Test, Day 2  
Live from 9:50 am

### STAR SPORTS 2

Women's T20 World Cup  
England vs India  
Live from 7:00 pm  
South Africa vs Australia  
Live from 11:00 pm

### SONY SIX & T SPORTS

PSL  
Karachi Kings vs Quetta  
Gladiators  
Live from 8:00 pm

### T SPORTS

BPL  
Sheikh Russel vs  
Rahmatganj  
Live from 3:15 pm

### STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

EPL  
Aston Villa vs Arsenal  
Live from 6:30 pm  
Chelsea vs Southampton  
Live from 9:00 pm  
Nottingham vs  
Manchester City  
Live from 9:00 pm

## Kings go 12 points clear of Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Bashundhara Kings almost made Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) a one-horse race after handing a 2-1 defeat to nearest rivals Abahani in Cumilla yesterday.

With Kings registering a maximum 30 points in 10 league games, 12 points now separate Kings and the six-time champions Abahani who, however, played a game less.

Abahani needed an outright win to keep the title race alive, but they fell apart under immense pressure in front of a full house at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium.

Having extended their unbeaten record over Abahani in the professional football league, Kings also remained unconquered this season -- with 18 wins and a draw across BPL, the Federation Cup and the Independence Cup. Meanwhile Abahani, after dropping six points in three drawn matches, tasted first defeat in the middle of the ongoing league to all but fall out of the title race.

In the match, Abahani got off to a commanding start by creating a few good opportunities but Kings took the lead against the run of play in the 25th minute when Brazilian Miguel Figueira side-volleyed home a cut-back from compatriot Robson De Silva. Abahani went on to equalise in the 36th minute with a header from Rezaul Karim off a Colindres corner kick.

After resumption, Abahani again created three more chances but failed to convert. They were eventually punished in the 71st minute when Miguel availed a defensive fumble before sealing the game off in Kings' favour.

In the day's other match, newcomers Azampur FC Uttara came from behind to hold Sheikh Jamal DC to a 3-3 draw in Gopalganj.



Marcus Rashford continued his electric form, delivering a scathing response to Barcelona's opening goal by lashing a shot into the back of the Catalans' net at the Camp Nou on Thursday. After scoring just five goals last season, Rashford has scored 22 goals this season, including 13 goals in the 16 games he has played since the 2022 World Cup. PHOTO: REUTERS

## ETH, Xavi unhappy with ref

AGENCIES

Players and officials of both Manchester United and Barcelona were not satisfied with the referee's decisions in their pulsating Europa League knockout round playoff first leg that ended in a 2-2 draw at Camp Nou on Thursday.

United manager Erik Ten Hag was furious in the second half when Rashford went down under a challenge from last-man Koukou.

"You can discuss if it's in the box or outside, but definitely it's a red card," Ten Hag told reporters.

Meanwhile, amid the end-to-end drama in the closing stages, Xavi was adamant his side should have been awarded a spot-kick for a shot that struck Fred on the arm.

"For me, the penalty is very clear," he told Movistar+.

## Bavuma makes history

AFP, Johannesburg

Temba Bavuma was on Friday named the first black African captain of South Africa's Test squad in what Cricket South Africa described as "part of a restructure within the leadership group of the national team".

Dean Elgar was axed as captain, although he remains a member of the squad which starts a series against the West Indies on February 28.

Chief selector Victor Mpitsang was another casualty of the shake-up, with CSA stating he had been "released" from the role.

Bavuma became the first black African to captain South Africa at cricket when he was named leader of the one-day international and Twenty20 international teams in March 2021.

At the same time Elgar was named Test captain.

Elgar's stint as captain started well with Test series wins against West Indies, India and Bangladesh and a shared series away against world champions New Zealand.

But they were heavily beaten in their two most recent series in England and Australia.

Bavuma, meanwhile, came under criticism for his poor batting form in T20 internationals, notably in the T20 World Cup in Australia last year.

According to Friday's statement, Bavuma will remain captain of the one-day team but will relinquish his role in the T20 side.

## Tigers ready for various conditions against England

SPORTS REPORTER

Low and slow tracks have been the norm when teams from outside the subcontinent such as England or Australia have toured Bangladesh for bilateral series, but with a balanced squad announced for the ODI series against England on Thursday, the team management is hoping not only to get good performances from the in-form ODI side, but preparing them for the challenges ahead with the ODI World Cup in eight months' time. Without a real shake-up, some players have been excluded as selectors look to add more options going forward.

The Tigers have recently beaten a strong India outfit 2-1 at home in ODIs and before that had beaten South Africa in South Africa on tracks that were fast and offered lots of runs. The management believes that the required balance is there to test England on the kind of conditions that will be on offer.

"We have a settled team that is performing. At the same time, England is playing a different kind of cricket and it won't be easy. It will be a good competition. Since we are playing at home, we are hopeful [of winning] but it will be tough," selector Habibul Bashar

due to the runs on offer, would

told The Daily Star regarding expectations following the announcement of the squad for the first two ODIs.

The Tigers' performances in ODIs over the past few years and the rise of a pace unit sees the selectors in good stead in ODI cricket and, with the ODI World Cup ahead, the set-up for the England series has been done with required balance for various kinds of conditions.

"Let's see what we decide. The World Cup will be played on such wickets [like BPL's]. Normally when teams like



"We haven't decided how to establish our home advantage yet [for the England ODIs]. If you look at the side, there are four pacers in the team and three spinners. We could go in any direction in terms of conditions after sorting out what might work best," he said.

With wickets in the just-concluded BPL impressing due to the runs on offer, would

the management prefer such wickets? A slower track has favoured Bangladesh here and may come into play given that the team wants to continue the winning habit. But the impending ODI World Cup means there is a possibility of different conditions.

"Let's see what we decide. The World Cup will be played on such wickets [like BPL's]. Normally when teams like



England come here, we have slow tracks to take advantage of the conditions and that could also happen since winning is a very good habit. But we also won in South Africa in their conditions so I don't feel there is a lot of thinking needed in this regard. We still have some time to decide the conditions," Bashar said.

The presence of Taijul Islam

instead of Nasum Ahmed also means that option of tried-and-tested spin conditions remain viable.

"Since we have Shakib [Al Hasan] and [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz, if there are turning tracks on offer, Taijul is more effective than other bowlers," Bashar opined on Taijul's inclusion.

"Hridoy didn't only get a chance due to his BPL performances. He has been with the High Performance team and last year he did well for the A side. If you look at his record, he scored lots of runs in first-class and BCL. His performance in the BPL was definitely extraordinary, but he has performed well in the last two years in both white-ball and red-ball formats," he said about Hridoy's inclusion.

The likes of Anamul Haque and Nurul Hasan were dropped for the likes of Hridoy. Anamul's exclusion came since selectors felt Najmul Hossain Shanto had made a mark. "Shanto has been batting well and is a good fielder and is a team man. So, from a strategic point of view, he is in Bijoy's place," Bashar said.

It was learned the Nurul's exclusion was not due to performance but because management preferred a shorter squad and did not need three wicketkeeping options.

## Sharma stung out of BCCI

AFP, New Delhi

India's chief cricket selector Chetan Sharma resigned Friday, an official told AFP, after a TV network sting caught him gossiping about players and claiming the widespread use of unsanctioned injections to pass fitness tests.

The 57-year-old had accused ex-captain Virat Kohli and former cricket board chief Sourav Ganguly of an ego clash in a candid conversation recorded on a hidden camera and aired by broadcaster Zee News.

Kohli felt he was "bigger than the board" but felt slighted after concluding that Ganguly had forced him out of the white-ball captaincy, Sharma said.

Sharma also claimed that doctors operating outside of the cricket board's oversight regularly gave Indian international players injections to help them pass fitness tests for selection, without giving further details.

"He has given his resignation and it has been accepted," a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Press Trust of India quoted an unnamed BCCI official who said Sharma's position had "become untenable" after the sting.

"He resigned voluntarily and wasn't asked to resign," PTI reported the official as saying.

Sharma was appointed chief selector in late 2020 and was reappointed in January after the BCCI sacked the entire selection panel following India's dismal T20 World Cup performance last year.

The former right-arm medium pacer represented India internationally until 1994 and in 1987 he was the first cricketer to take a hat-trick in a Cricket World Cup.

His exit comes in a bumper year for the international calendar, with India likely to make the World Test Championship in July and hosting the ODI World Cup from November.



Tiger Woods marked his return to competitive action by carding a two-under par 69 during the first round of the Genesis Invitational after firing three consecutive birdies on his last three holes. He finished with five birdies against three bogeys, remarking afterwards: "I happened to actually hit some good shots finally and made a couple of putts."

PHOTO: AFP

## Arsenal 'highly motivated' for title battle

AGENCIES

Arsenal are "highly motivated" to compete with Manchester City in the Premier League title race, manager Mikel Arteta said on Friday after his side slipped to second in the standings following their midweek 3-1 defeat to Pep Guardiola's team.

Arsenal lost the top spot, which they had held since August, to their opponents on goal difference with both teams tied on 51 points.

Arteta's side, though, have a game in hand and travel on Saturday to face Aston Villa, who are managed by former Arsenal manager Unai Emery.

"I know the right things we have to do to continue to be there (at the top)," Arteta told reporters. "We have seen where the level is and what we have to do to be at that level."

"There are a lot of positive things to take from the season so far. We know that the level of efficiency has to be good with every single game to beat them (City) at the end. We are highly motivated to do that."

Arteta urged his side to be more efficient after they picked up only one point in their last three league games.

"With the amount of play and situations we generated we haven't had enough points. That is down to us, we have to improve on that because we want to win more games."

Arteta has also urged the Premier League to offer clubs protection from being forced to kick off early on Saturday after playing on Wednesday evening.

Premier League teams competing in the Champions League are not scheduled in the 1230 GMT slot on Saturdays if they played in Europe the previous Wednesday.

However, Arsenal face Aston Villa in a crucial Premier League fixture on Saturday morning, just 63 hours after the full-time whistle blew in their defeat against Manchester City.

While it is too late to help Arsenal on this occasion, Arteta wants the Premier League fixture schedule changed in future to offer protection to all clubs, rather than just those in the Champions League.

"There are certain rules with the Champions League. When you are playing on Wednesday night and then you cannot play (on Saturday lunchtime). So I think that should apply to any competition," Arteta told reporters on Friday.

