

## Taijul nominated for December's POTM

ICC

A marvellous fast bowler-captain, a splendid spinner and an outstanding all-rounder were featured in the shortlist for the ICC Men's Player of the Month for December 2023.

Bangladesh left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was one of the nominees as he was rewarded for his pivotal role in the Tigers' maiden Test victory against New Zealand at home in December 2023.

The first Test of the two-match series witnessed both sides pulling the tug with equal strength. Mahmudul Hasan Joy's 86 was matched by Kane Williamson's hundred while Taijul's 4/109 cancelled Glenn Phillips' four for in the first innings.



Najmul Hossain Shanto's century helped Bangladesh set a total of 338 for New Zealand to chase in the final innings.

Taijul ultimately proved to be the difference maker between the two teams as he grabbed a scintillating 6/75 to help Bangladesh close a win by 150 runs.

Taijul's brilliance against New Zealand continued in the second Test as he plucked five more wickets albeit in a losing cause.

Taijul clinched the Player of the Match award in the first game and was named Player of the Series for picking the most wickets (15).

Alongside the Taijul, Australia skipper Pat Cummins and New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips were also nominated.



With just over a week left for the start of the Bangladesh Premier League, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan was not the one to waste any more time. The ace all-rounder was congratulated by the groundstaff as he arrived at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium for practice yesterday, just a day after winning from the Magura-1 constituency in the national elections. [Inset] Meanwhile, Tamim Iqbal was among a few other cricketers who also trained in Mirpur on Monday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Klaasen retires from Tests

REUTERS

South Africa wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen has retired from red-ball cricket despite the country's Test coach Shukri Conrad suggesting he would form part of his plans in 2024.

Powerful middle-order hitter Klaasen has become a mainstay of the South African white-ball side, with his record-breaking 174 from 83 balls against Australia in an ODI in September underlining his ability.

He played four Tests between 2019 and 2023, managing 108 runs at an average of 13.00, but was set to return to the team this year according to Conrad.

"After a few sleepless nights wondering if I am making the right decision, I have decided to retire from red-ball cricket. It's a difficult decision that I have made because it is by far my favourite format of the game," Klaasen said in a statement.

"But for now a new challenge awaits and I am looking forward to it."

The 32-year-old has not elaborated on what that challenge may be, but it appears he will feature prominently in the upcoming global leagues in the shortest format.

## BCB to focus on issues held up by polls

SPORTS REPORTER

Major issues like assessment of the ODI World Cup disaster, decision on captaincy and forming the new national selection panel had been put on hold by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) during the national elections.

Board president Nazmul Hassan Papon was contesting in the polls, hence the decisions on such important issues were put on pause till the elections.

But with the election now in the rearview mirror, it's time for the board to press unpause and solve the pending issues.

The three-member special committee to assess the World Cup disaster, which was formed on November 29, is yet to publish its findings.

There is also some ambiguity about the captaincy situation of the national team.

Regular captain Shakib Al Hasan, who also contested in the polls, missed successive home and away series against New Zealand due to injury, allowing Najmul Hossain Shanto to take over as captain.

Bangladesh went on to clinch their maiden ODI and T20I win in New Zealand against the hosts under Shanto's captaincy where the 25-year-old showed great promise as a leader.

Before the polls, BCB's cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus had said that the board will take a decision on the captaincy issue after discussing it with the all-rounder.

The national selection panel of Minhajul Abedin, Habibul Bashar and Abdur Razzaq has also completed their term on December 31, 2023.

The board needs to finalise the next selection panel, and Papon had hinted to the media that some changes may happen.

With the election over, Jalal said these issues will be discussed in the next board meeting which according to sources is expected to take place later this month.

"The elections just ended yesterday (Sunday) and I think it will take a few more days for everything to settle down. We have a few agendas in our hand and we are looking to finalise the date for the upcoming board meeting," Jalal told The Daily Star yesterday.

## Shakib rushes back to familiar grounds

SPORTS REPORTER

It took less than 24 hours for Shakib Al Hasan to shift his focus back to cricket, having won the national elections for his constituency Magura-1.

The ace all-rounder came to the indoor nets in Mirpur yesterday afternoon after several national stars had already left following respective individual sessions.

A majority of media personnel had followed suit as a result. While the remaining few were planning to exit the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS) shortly, Shakib's arrival thus caught them off guard.

However, no sooner had the news of his arrival broke out in local news sites, a throng of media personnel arrived, forced to stay till sunset which is when Shakib's training concluded.

He was congratulated by groundsmen with garlands of flowers. Preferring not to be counted as a politician in Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) premises, Shakib told the groundsmen: "This is not politics. This is the cricket field. I am still holding the same old position [as a cricketer]."

That he was eager to get going in familiar territory was apparent the moment he stepped down from his car, brandishing a brand-new bat which he carried to the indoor nets. His childhood mentor Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, who had arrived just earlier, oversaw Shakib's batting session.

Shakib had been out with a finger injury since the ICC ODI World Cup game against Sri Lanka and missed the Test series at home against New Zealand and the subsequent white-ball tour of New Zealand. In a recent interview with The Daily Star, he informed that he would be returning to action with the franchise-based Bangladesh Premier League, slated to begin on January 19, and his activity yesterday was part of that process.

Although his political engagements during his stay in Magura had kept him busy, he tried to keep himself physically active with a few sessions there as well.

Shakib was back to batting with cricket balls at the

**This is not politics. This is the cricket field. I am still holding the same old position [as a cricketer].**

Bangladesh skipper SHAKIB AL HASAN

nets for the first time yesterday. "Yeah, no complaints regarding his finger while he was batting," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I haven't seen him bowl yet but once he does that, I will be able to tell. His batting looked really good."

As reporters keenly watched him from afar, the sound from his bat showcased that he was enjoying his time back in cricket following the rigours of politics.

"Yes, there can be doubts within himself since he doesn't get this kind of gap [in cricket activities]. So, once he gets into his groove, it becomes okay in no time," Fahim added when asked whether removing rustiness from his batting was on the agenda.

The No.1 allrounder in ICC's current ODI and T20I rankings made his way to the SBNCS field to undergo some training exercises as he ran across the turf, catching his breath after each run.

He also used a soft ball, rolling his arm around to bowl a few deliveries which is part of the rehabilitation process for his injured left index finger.

A BCB official told The Daily Star, "There is still some pain in the finger but it's not a matter of concern since 70-80 percent of the pain has gone away."

"He has been busy for the last few weeks but now since he is free, he will focus on strengthening his finger. Since a substantial amount of pain has gone away so if he works on those things, he will be alright ahead of the BPL."



Premier League leaders Liverpool secured a 2-0 win over Arsenal in their FA Cup third-round encounter at the Emirates Stadium yesterday. The Reds, who also cemented a place in the semi-final of the League Cup, qualified for the fourth round of the competition having displayed solid bench strength as they came into the contest with as many as eight absentees, including star forward Mohamed Salah and skipper Virgil van Dijk. Juergen Klopp's side took the lead late in the game by virtue of an own goal by Arsenal defender Jakub Kiwior in the 85th minute before winger Luis Diaz doubled the score five minutes into stoppage time.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Pistol shooters fail in Jakarta

SPORTS REPORTER

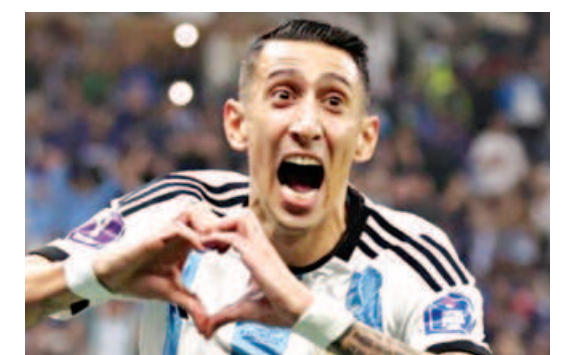
All three pistol shooters failed to transform their practice performance to the Asia Olympic Qualifying tournament with below-par performances in men's and women's 10m events in Jakarta yesterday.

Noor Hossain Alif finished 42nd among 55 participants with a score of 564 points while Piash Hossain became 49th after scoring 555 points. The eighth and final qualifier, Mukhaammad Kamalov of Uzbekistan, scored 577 points.

In women's event, Anjila Amjad Antu scored 552 points to finish second from bottom among 49 participants. Pakistan's Kishmala Talat was the eighth and final shooter to qualify for the final round with a score of 575 points.

"Piash had scored 578, Alif 571 and Anjila 573 in the pre-event training on Sunday but today they performed poorly," assistant coach Golam Shafiuddin Khan Shiplu told The Daily Star from Jakarta.

"There was initially no plan of bringing pistol shooters to the competition as we began pistol events with younger shooters. However, the head coach wanted to see match temperament of these shooters," Shiplu said, adding that coach Najafi Ahamed would work on improving the scores of the shooters.



## 'Enough public interaction' promised for Di Maria visit

SPORTS REPORTER

Angel di Maria, the World Cup-winning Argentina forward, will come to Dhaka in late May or early June, confirmed Kolkata-based sports promoter Satadru Dutta yesterday.

The 35-year-old forward, who now plays for Portuguese club Benfica, will be on a tour of the subcontinent, spending a day and a half each in Kolkata and Dhaka, informed Dutta over the phone from Kolkata.

Dutta had brought Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez and retired Brazilian forward Ronaldo last year, but those two visits became the subject of heavy criticism from media and the mass due to the private nature of the tours and the mismanagement of the events.

However, Dutta confirmed there will be no such issues this time around.

"Di Maria will spend a day and a half each in Kolkata and Dhaka, between May 20 and June 5," Dutta told The Daily Star. "This time it will be completely different. I have taken the responsibility on myself and will make sure Di Maria makes enough public interaction."

"Di Maria will be involved in a public appearance at a stadium, in meet and greet events, a session with women footballers, and a meeting with the Prime Minister," Dutta said.

The sports promoter, who had also previously brought Diego Maradona and Pele to Kolkata, said he is in contact with various agencies and corporates in Dhaka to finalise the deal and itinerary of the visit.

## KDB 'nowhere near' his best

AFP, London

Kevin De Bruyne admits he is "nowhere near" his best yet after the Manchester City midfielder made his return from a five-month injury absence.

De Bruyne came off the bench in the second half of City's 5-0 win against Huddersfield in the FA Cup third round on Sunday.

Playing for the first time since the opening day of the Premier League season against Burnley in August, the Belgium star was given the last 33 minutes and was quickly back in the old routine as he set up City's fifth goal for Jeremy Doku.

De Bruyne had hamstring surgery after aggravating a problem that had affected him in the latter stages of last season's treble-winning campaign.

"I worked hard and I'm happy to be back. I felt good so I'm pleased about that but I'm still nowhere near where I need to be," he said.

"It's a good continuation of the process of the last few weeks. I feel good, the movements were good, I felt comfortable in what I was doing and that was the only thing I was really looking for."

"To get that ovation after being away for five months gives you more of a boost. There will be moments I want to play every game but I know in the back of my mind I need to take care of myself."

"It's good being January where we have fewer games. I don't expect to be playing too many games and Newcastle next week is a big game so I'll expect to be back on the bench."