

LOCAL PLAYERS IN BPL SO FAR

- The 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League started with Durdanto Dhaka and Bangladesh's lead pacer Shoriful Islam bagging a last-over hattrick.
- Mystery spinner Aliss Al Islam's 4-17 saw Comilla Victorians bundle out Sylhet Strikers for 78 -- the lowest total so far in the tournament.
- All-rounder Nahidul Islam's 4-12 for Khulna Tigers against Chattogram Challengers is the best bowling figure recorded so far.
- Fortune Barishal's Mushfiqur Rahim, who has retired from T20Is, is the highest run-getter so far in this edition of BPL. The wicketkeeper-batter has two fifties and scored 202 runs at a remarkable 50.50 average in five games.
- Sylhet Strikers' Zakir Hasan, another wicketkeeper-batter, has been impressive with the willow as he remains second in the leading run-scorers chart with 189 runs at 47.25 average in five matches. The only time the 26-year-old went past the fifty-mark, he scored an unbeaten 70 -- also the second-highest individual score in this BPL.
- Rangpur Riders all-rounder Mahedi Hasan has been among the wickets, scalping seven in five games to be second in the top wicket-takers' list so far.



Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Towhid Hridoy -- two very important players of the Bangladesh national team -- have not yet found their feet in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), playing for Fortune Barishal and Comilla Victorians. They were in jovial and friendly mood during a break from their separate training sessions at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Both of them would want to get back into form as the Sylhet phase of the BPL resumes today after a two-day break.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘Mahmudullah good enough for three formats’

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I always say that Mahmudullah [Riyad] is good enough to play all three formats. It really hurts me that he doesn't play Tests. I still can't accept that he has retired [from Tests]. I still think that he has the ability to play Tests. Bangladesh needs an experienced cricketer like him. Maybe it is his age which is why he has shifted his focus to white-ball cricket. However, given his experience and the fact that he is in rhythm, I don't think any player can challenge him for his place.

KHALED MAHMUD SUJON, BCB director



Abahani hopeful of ending 10-year title drought

SPORTS REPORTER

The loud chants of “Abahani, Abahani” from fans brought life back to the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium on Thursday evening as the popular Dhanmondi-based outfit, in a bid to regain the prestigious Premier Hockey League title, were the first to turn up for the inter-club players' transfer.

Fans screaming and the commotion generated by the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) officials moving about gave a vibe that the top-flight hockey tournament, which has been reduced to a sporadic event as it is held once every two or three years instead of being held annually, is set to return after a two-year gap.

“We have formed a balanced squad with the target to become champions,” Abahani head coach Hedayetul Islam Razib clearly stated their intentions heading into the tournament.

“Having sorted out the problems we faced in the last edition, we roped in experienced and younger players who make all three departments – defence, midfield, and forward – balanced,” the Abahani coach added.

It is apparent that Abahani are adamant about getting their hands on the trophy for the first time in 10 years as they missed out on winning the title in the three seasons – in 2016, 2018, and 2021 -- that the league was held.

Abahani, however, emerged as the Club Cup champions in 2016 and 2018.

Ruman Sarkar, a player who has been playing in the top-flight league for Abahani since 2014, believes Abahani signed up the country's best players to end their long title drought while penalty corner specialist Ashraful Islam, who is the season's highest-paid player (Tk 10 lakh) so far and returned to Abahani after three seasons, is confident to deliver.

After the completion of six-day players' transfers on February 5, the hockey season will get underway through the Shaheed Dibosh Hockey Tournament from February 20, in which 11 premier league outfits will feature. The Club Cup is scheduled to start in the latter part of March.

From Twitter to ENGLAND TEST TEAM

STAR SPORTS DESK

The tales of captain Imran Khan plucking Wasim Akram and Inzamam-Ul-Haq from the streets and making them members of his World Cup winning Pakistan side in 1992 are the stuff of cricketing folklore.

But as Bob Dylan had prophesied, the times have truly changed, as a 20-year-old British-Pakistani off-spinner, Shoaib Bashir, is set to make his Test debut for England today after catching skipper Ben Stokes' eyes in X, formerly known as Twitter, of all places.

On June 11, 2023, the England County Championship posted a video of Bashir on its X-handle, where he was seen testing the veteran Sir Alastair Cook on his first-class debut.

Although Bashir took only



one wicket in that match, the 1:57 minute-long video was enough to convince Stokes that the off-spinner could become a vital part of the Test squad for next year's India tour.

“The first time I saw him was on Twitter. I think the County Championship [account] put a little clip together of him bowling against Sir Alastair,” Stokes told cricket website ESPNcricinfo.

“I'm in a WhatsApp group with Keyser [managing director Rob Key] and Baz [coach Brendon

McCullum]. I actually did forward the clip on and said, ‘have a look at this, this could be something we could work with on our India tour’ and it just progressed from there,” he added.

Although Bashir's first-class record is quite modest, having taken 10 wickets in six games at an average of 67, Stokes was confident that he would be a handful on Indian soil.

“I just saw something. The height he bowled from, it was very obvious that he put a lot of action, a lot of revolutions on the ball. It was something I looked at and thought, ‘This could be pretty good for India.’ I've played a lot of games out here. As a batter you know what is hard to face, especially from a spin point of view,” Stokes said.

Bashir made headlines before the series, after not being allowed to fly to India with the rest of his teammates following a pre-series camp in Dubai due to visa issues.

He finally landed in India on January 27, the third day of the Hyderabad Test, which the visitors won by 28 runs.

Bashir has been named in the playing eleven for the second Test starting today, in place of injured off-spinner Jack Leach. He will have the formidable task of bowling against a wounded Indian team but one thing is for certain, his captain will back him to the tilt.

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I've got the off-spinner, the undercutter, a side-spinner and an arm ball. And I am working on a carrom ball, too. So, I've got a few, and I think they would work quite nicely in India.

England off-spinner SHOAIB BASHIR



(From L-R) Captains of the four teams -- Bhutan's Kelzang Wangmo, India's Nitu Linda, Bangladesh's Afeida Khandaker and Nepal's Sarah Bajracharya -- pose with the trophy at a press conference at the Bangladesh Football Federation House yesterday ahead of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, which begins at the Birshreshtho Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur today. Bangladesh, the defending champions, will take on Nepal in the second game of the day after India and Bhutan lock horns in the opening match of championship.

PHOTO: BFF

Diawara pleads restraint to prevent repeat of tragedy

As Guinea hope to make more history at the African Cup of Nations, coach Kaba Diawara urged fans to conduct in a responsible manner if the result goes in their favour in Friday's quarterfinal -- reminding of the recent tragedies which unfolded in their capital Conakry.

With hosts Ivory Coast being a bordering country with Guinea, their last-16 win sparked frenzied celebrations in the stadium, but Diawara felt compelled to call for calm among supporters back home.

That was after six people were reportedly killed amid celebrations in the capital Conakry following the team's 1-0 defeat of Gambia during the group stage.

\*Read the full story on The Daily Star website

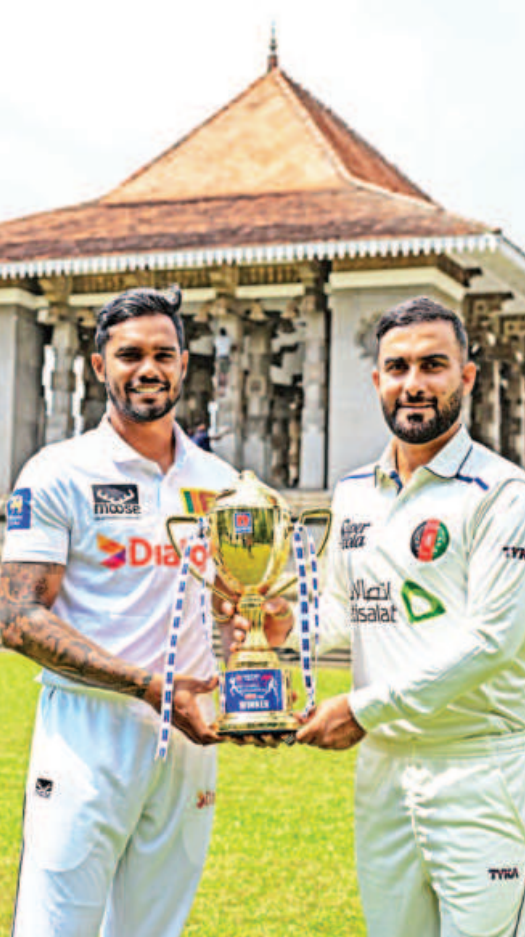


PHOTO: X

Sri Lanka captain Dhananajaya de Silva and his Afghanistan counterpart Hashmatullah Shahidi pose with the trophy in Colombo on Thursday, ahead of the one-off Test which starts today.