

## Comilla's fifth or Barishal's first?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) awaits a spectacle as the tournament's top two sides – Comilla Victorians and Fortune Barishal – meet in the final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

All the top players are available and both sides have winds in their sails, providing them the needed momentum going into the final.

David Miller remains a crucial component for Barishal, vying for their maiden trophy. Miller was set to miss the all-important final due to his wedding, which, according to the franchise's owner, was scheduled for March 3. However, Barishal confirmed Miller's participation in the final yesterday afternoon.

There was good news on Comilla's front too.

Comilla, the most successful side in the tournament with four titles and a perfect record in finals, held a practice session on Thursday and coach Mohammad Salahuddin said that Mustafizur Rahman, who suffered a blow to the head during the Chattogram phase, will be available.

There rarely has been a void of dramatic events surrounding the country's only franchise-based tournament, and the final's eve was no different. Neither Comilla skipper Liton Das nor his counterpart Tamim Iqbal, captain of Barishal, were present at the pre-final BPL trophy photoshoot with captains event, held at Ahsan Manzil Museum in Islampur.

Comilla sent in Jaker Ali Anik while Mehedi Hasan Miraz came in Tamim's

**Comilla Victorians are the most successful side in the BPL, winning the title a record four times. They have also won every final they ever played (2015, 2018, 2022, 2023).**

**Winning the final today will see Comilla completing a three-peat.**

**The Barishal franchise played the final three times (Barisal Burners in 2012, Barisal Bulls in 2015, and Fortune Barishal in 2022) but could never win it.**

**Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim, both playing for Barishal this season, are the only two among the five Bangladesh stalwarts – also including Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza – to have never won the championship. Both Mushfiqur and Riyad played the final twice.**



stead.

While Tamim clarified in a social media post that it was "not possible" for him to attend the event, having played the second qualifier just the night before, and apologised for the inconvenience, Comilla head coach Salahuddin gave his version of why captains did not show up.

"Tomorrow, we have a final and my captain would have had to commute for two-and-a-half to three hours before he could have arrived here [in Mirpur for practice]. Instead of going there to see the trophy [yesterday], it's more important for him to prepare for lifting the trophy [today]. If it was a proper place which was nearby, I think both captains would have been there," Salahuddin said.

The place and 10:00am time for the photoshoot was announced to the media just a day before and questions could be raised as to how much sense it made to have picked a venue that was at a considerable distance from the team hotels.

Meanwhile, Jaker, who attended the presser as Comilla's representative, said that Comilla's knack for big matches made them optimistic ahead of the final.

"The one thing is that Comilla are used to such big matches, so as a team, we know how to perform in these kinds of matches," he said.

On the other hand, Miraz expressed his desire to lift the trophy for the first time.

"I haven't won the trophy before and I will be a first-time champion [if Barishal win]. I played two finals before [for Rajshahi Kings in 2016 and Khulna Tigers in 2020] and hope to be a champion this time," he said.

### SHORT CORNER



#### Sri Lanka arrive for Bangladesh tour

The Sri Lankan team arrived in Bangladesh ahead of the T20 opener against the hosts on March 4. The visitors travelled straight to Sylhet which will host all three T20s. The second and third matches will be played on March 6 and 9 before the action shifts to Chattogram for the three-match ODI series.



#### Was Mushfiqur forced to retire from T20s?

Bangladesh's star batter Mushfiqur Rahim has hinted that he was forced to retire from T20 format. The 36-year-old veteran retired from T20s on September 4, 2022 following the Asia Cup in UAE, just ahead of the T20 World Cup in Australia that year.

#### Bumrah back for fifth England Test

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will return for the final Test against England after missing the team's series-clinching win in the fourth match, the country's cricket board said Thursday. Bumrah was rested in the previous Test, which India won by five wickets in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

#### Late Casemiro winner sets up Man United for Liverpool clash

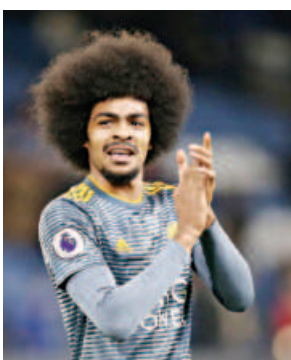
Brazilian Casemiro struck late to send Manchester United into the FA Cup quarterfinals with a 1-0 victory over Nottingham Forest. Erik ten Hag's side will now take on Liverpool who eased their way into the quarters, courtesy of teenagers Jayden Danns and Lewis Koumas, who found the net in a 3-0 win over Southampton.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.



I think we have to be very positive about the situation with Hamza. Obviously, the management and the federation [BFF] will be able to give you more information, but to me, it is not relevant whether he [Hamza] is playing for us now, rather what is relevant to me is that it could become a reality sooner rather than later. Hopefully, we can have someone like him in the national team sooner.

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera about Hamza Choudhury's prospects of playing for the country



## Jamal can still deliver for Bangladesh: Cabrera

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh football team head coach Javier Cabrera said that captain Jamal Bhuiyan still has a lot to offer despite not getting regular game time for his Argentine club and rarely playing the whole match for the national team in recent times.

Since making his debut for the Bangladesh team in August, 2013, Jamal was a regular feature in the playing eleven and rarely got substituted till 2022.

But since 2023, the defensive-midfielder has only twice stayed on the pitch for the entire duration of the game, has been substituted 10 times and brought in as a second half substitute once.

Most recently, he got substituted in the second half of Bangladesh's two FIFA World Cup pre-qualifier matches against the Maldives and the qualifier matches against Australia and Lebanon.

Jamal has also been out of competitive football for nearly three months and has mostly been cooling his heels for his club Sol de Mayo – a third-tier club in Argentina.

Still, Jamal was named in the 15-man squad for Bangladesh's two FIFA World Cup qualifiers matches against Palestine this month, as Cabrera believes the 33-year-old is



still warrants a place in the team.

"He [Jamal] has been in training and has played friendly games for Sol de Mayo. We know he is fit. He lacks in competitive game time but that's because of the situation of the league in Argentina," Cabrera told reporters yesterday.

"I am convinced that Jamal can still deliver for the team as captain. He is the most experienced player and we didn't have any doubt about naming him in the list," he added.

The Spanish coach also believed that despite not being on the pitch for the entire match, Jamal is still the ideal candidate for captaincy.

"He has been a great professional; he is a very good example. I said before that a lot of young players in the squad have a good reference of Jamal to follow," Cabrera said.

Meanwhile, Jamal arrived in Dhaka in the early hours of Thursday. He is expected to join Abahani Limited from the second leg of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) after severing his contract with Sol de Mayo, said Abahani manager Nazrul Islam. The team will leave for Saudi Arabia for a two-week preparation camp on March 2 ahead of the Palestine matches on March 21 and 26.

## Pogba's career in jeopardy

AFP, Rome

France's World Cup winning star Paul Pogba has been given a four-year ban from football by Italy's anti-doping tribunal after testing positive for testosterone last August, Juventus said on Thursday.

A spokesman for the club told AFP it had been notified of the decision against the 30-year-old, who had been provisionally suspended in September.

"We received notification from the tribunal this morning," the spokesman said. Italy's anti-doping body did not respond when contacted by AFP.

A source close to Pogba confirmed to AFP that he would appeal the ruling, which risks bringing a premature end to his career. It means Pogba will not be able to play again until the 2027/28 season, by which time he will be 34.

Anti-doping prosecutors had called for the four-year ban to be imposed on the midfielder, who tested positive following Juventus's opening match of Serie A season against Udinese on August 20, during which he was an unused substitute.

## Abahani face Mariners in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani Limited edged Mohammedan SC 3-2 in the Club Cup Hockey Tournament, setting up a final against Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, who thrashed Usha KC 8-4 in the other semifinal at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium in Dhaka yesterday.

For Abahani, Rumman Sarkar scored a brace and Pushkar Khisa Mimo netted one goal while Amirul Islam and Charl Ulrich scored once each for Mohammedan.

Amirul gave Mohammedan the lead in the fifth minute but Pushkar equalised three minutes later and Rumman made it 3-1. Charl scored a consolation goal four minutes from time. Mariner and Abahani will face off in the final on Saturday.



Abahani midfielder Rumman Khan celebrates after scoring his side's second goal in a 3-2 win over archrivals Mohammedan SC in the semifinal of the Club Cup Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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