



The 11th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League created a buzz, pulling fans of various age groups (Top Right) to witness the opening day's action at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The cricket on the field also matched the hype, with defending champions Fortune Barishal starting the tournament with a four-wicket win over Durbar Rajshahi in a high-scoring thriller – thanks to cameo knocks from Mahmudullah Riyad and Faheem Ashraf (Left). In some separate incidents, fans gathered complaining of not being able to secure tickets online and from Modhumoti Bank PLC -- the designated places for ticket collection -- while some fans highlighted the absence of ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan [bottom] through placards.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BPL CORNER

“Mahmud [Mahmudullah] bhai is magic. When I went to the pitch, in the first seven to eight balls, I could score only one run. Then I asked him what’s happening. He told me just to stay there. When such experienced player is with you at the crease, whether you are experienced or not, you will get this sort of motivation. After that, I absorbed the pressure and things became easier.”

Fortune Barishal all-rounder
Faheem Ashraf

“Actually we haven’t received our salaries but I feel the BPL just started so we don’t want to raise questions or create complications.”

Durbar Rajshahi captain
Anamul Haque

“We have gotten great response with tickets. What I want to say to all is that in any system there are some flaws at the beginning. So, please have patience. After seven days, this will be clearer and understood by all and everyone will reap the benefits.”

BCB president
Faruque Ahmed

BPL begins with a bang

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The 11th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 got off to a flying start at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Fans were treated to high-scoring matches, while off-field drama surrounding ticketing issues added intrigue to the tournament’s opening day. Eventually, brilliant performances on display from both local and foreign players.

Ticketing chaos and fan protests
For the second straight day, fans’ hue and cry over ticket shortages continued. Hours before the opening match between defending champions Fortune Barishal and Durbar Rajshahi, large crowds gathered at the stadium gates, with some breaking through in frustration. The Bangladesh Army intervened to disperse the angry fans. Later, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed addressed the issue while speaking to official broadcasters, promising improvements to the ticketing system within a week and urging fans for patience.

Packed galleries light up the stadium
Eventually, despite the chaos outside, the galleries inside were packed, creating a vibrant atmosphere uncommon for weekday matches. Long queues stretched at the gates, as eager fans flooded in to catch the action live.

Short but meaningful opening ceremony
The BCB held a brief yet symbolic opening

ceremony, where the BCB boss and special guests released balloons and pigeons to mark the start of the tournament. Injured victims from the July uprising were also honoured, adding a poignant touch to the event.

Bijoy’s kit trouble at toss
Durbar Rajshahi skipper Anamul Haque Bijoy turned up for the toss in his training



kit after angry fans blocked the team bus carrying their match jerseys. A Rajshahi team official later informed that the kits were delivered through an alternate route, saving Rajshahi from further awkwardness. Adding a touch of novelty, both captains -- Bijoy and Tamim Iqbal -- exchanged saplings during the toss, as part of government’s initiative in raising environmental awareness.

Rishad left out of Barishal XI
Bangladesh’s rising leg-spinner Rishad Hossain, who recently earned a place in Hobart Hurricanes’ squad for the Big Bash League but opted to play in the BPL, was notably absent from Barishal’s playing eleven. Despite becoming a mainstay in the national side, Rishad found himself benched during his team’s campaign opener. Given Barishal’s star-studded line-up and the BPL’s history of under-utilising leg spinners, he may struggle for game time throughout the tournament.

Improved facilities, but old habits die hard
For the first time, the BCB arranged free water for the spectators at the stadium, introducing “Mugdho Water Corner”, while a “Zero Waste Area” was in place for proper waste disposal. While fans appreciated the amenities, many littered the premises, leaving the area messy.

High-scoring opener thrills fans
On the ground, the Rajshahi and Barishal played out a nail-biter. After reigning champions Barishal were reduced to 61-5 in reply to Rajshahi’s 197 for three, -- courtesy of a brilliant batting performance by Yasir Ali, who struck 47-ball 94 -- it seemed like a matter of time for an upset to materialise. However, Mahmudullah played a gem of an innings, remaining not out on 56 off 26 balls, while putting up an unbroken stand of 88 runs with Faheem Ashraf (54 not out off 21 balls) to propel their side to clinch an emphatic victory with four wickets in hand and 11 balls to spare.

Youthful Air Force clinch maiden hockey title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Air Force emerged champions in Paragon Group Victory Day Hockey Tournament with a 5-4 win over holders Bangladesh Navy in a pulsating final at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Forward Rakibul Hasan slammed a hat-trick to deliver the maiden trophy for Bangladesh Air Force at any level of hockey but it was the under-21 team forward Obaidul Hossain Joy, who stole the show with a goal and three assists in the enthralling final.

The final was also a battle between the experienced national players of Bangladesh Navy and young and promising players of Bangladesh Air Force.

Navy were the favourites coming into the final, having won two consecutive Victory Day hockey titles and boasting a bunch of national players but they were stunned conceding two goals within seven minutes. They, however, recovered to make it 3-3 at one stage but the feeble Navy defence conceded two more goals in a span of eight minutes in the fourth and final quarter as Rakibul completed his hat-trick.

Navy, who pulled one back in the penultimate minute, lashed their anger at the umpires, complaining that Shabbaz Ali did not award them



a legitimate a penalty corner in the final quarter. However, the performance of the players in the final was enough evidence of what difference players’ fitness and proper training makes.

“I think the fitness of our players were better than the opponents, who just could not match our players’ speed,” Air Force coach Hedayetul Islam Razib said after the match.

“We started the tournament with a defeat but we grew in confidence after beating Bangladesh Army. Today the players really wanted to deliver the trophy to Air Force and they played out of their skin,” said the former national player.

Bangladesh Navy forward Rasel Mahmud Jimmy was not happy with some decision of umpires, saying, “Green card has been withdrawn from Bangladesh hockey as the umpires showed only yellow and red cards.”

“Apart from umpiring decisions, we could not play our natural game because we failed to keep the momentum despite coming back in the match,” Jimmy said. “It was not a matter of fitness. It was really tough to fight with the shortage of one or two against 11 players.”

“People abroad will be shouting that we had an easy draw. Well, I’m not going to apologise for that. We’re just thrilled that we can be at Lord’s next year.”

South Africa coach **Shukri Conrad** brushed off criticism about the uneven scheduling of the World Test Championship after his team qualified for the final with a dramatic two-wicket win over Pakistan on Sunday to earn their sixth successive Test win.

Slot rounds off almost perfect year

REUTERS, London

Replacing Kop idol Juergen Klopp at Anfield looked to many like a mission impossible for Dutchman Arne Slot when he was named as the German’s successor in May.

Now the appointment looks like a masterstroke halfway through his maiden Premier League campaign.

Liverpool’s 5-0 thrashing of West Ham United on Sunday put Slot’s side eight points clear of surprise second-placed side Nottingham Forest and 14 ahead of champions Manchester City.

They have lost only once in all competitions this season and Slot can look back on an almost perfect 2024.

The only side to get the better of Liverpool this season are Nottingham Forest and the way Slot’s side have ended the year, a 20th title for the club now looks in their grasp.

“Compliments to Nottingham Forest. They were the one,” Slot said after his side’s rout of West Ham at the London Stadium.

While Slot inherited a high-quality squad and has not had to instigate a major rebuild, the tweaks he made have put Liverpool in total control of the table. They are a little more pragmatic than they were under Klopp’s high-octane pressing game, but Slot has still retained Liverpool’s attacking verve -- they have scored 45 goals in 18 games including 14 in the last three.

The 46-year-old has benefited hugely from Mohamed Salah having what promises to be his best-ever season at Liverpool despite the ongoing saga of the Egyptian’s contract talks.

The 32-year-old Salah has been involved in 52 goals in all competitions in 2024 (29 goals, 23 assists), which is more than any other player in Europe’s big five leagues.

“Mo and the word extraordinary is something I’ve heard a lot in the last six months,” Slot told reporters.

Australia win MCG thriller

Australia ripped out seven Indian wickets in the final session of a dramatic fourth Test in Melbourne on Monday to win a thriller by 184 runs and go 2-1 up in the five-match series. India crumbled to 155 all out with just 12.5 overs left in the match and will need to win the final Test starting in Sydney on Friday to level the series and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Third umpire Sharfuddoula Saikat of Bangladesh caused a stir when he overturned the on-field umpire’s not-out decision against India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal. He relied on visual evidence, showing a slight deviation after the ball had passed the bat, rather than Snicko -- a system used to determine whether the ball has taken an edge -- to signal out after Australia called for a review.

Yashasvi Jaiswal’s impressive 1478 runs in 2024 places him third on the list of most runs in a calendar year in Tests for India. This places him behind only Sachin Tendulkar (1562 in 2010) and Sunil Gavaskar (1555 in 1979).

India’s Rohit Sharma has been dismissed by Australia’s Pat Cummins six times in Tests, setting a new record for a captain dismissing an opposition captain. In the ongoing Border-Gavaskar series, Cummins dismissed Rohit four times in four innings, conceding just 11 runs off 44 balls.

If Australia win the Sydney Test against India, they will be in the WTC final regardless of results in their upcoming two-match series in Sri Lanka.

A draw in Sydney will keep Australia ahead of India, but it would leave the door open for Sri Lanka to sneak through. If Australia were to lose in Sydney, they would need one win in Sri Lanka to qualify.

India, meanwhile, must need to win the Sydney Test to stay in contention for the WTC final.



PHOTO: AFP