

Pak, Windies eye WTC improvements

AFP, Multan

Pakistan and West Indies vowed a strong finish when they meet in the first Test in Multan on Friday despite dragging up the rear of the World Test Championship (WTC).

Pakistan, who finished sixth and seventh in the first two WTC cycles, are currently eighth in the 2023-25 cycle, with their rivals in last place.

"This cycle is finishing so this series is significant for us as we want to become a better team by being unbeaten in home conditions," Pakistan skipper Shan Masood said.

Pakistan ended a winless stretch of 11 home Tests by beating England 2-1 in October but lost 2-0 in South Africa this month.

"We won against England so it will be important we keep that momentum against the West Indies," Masood said.

West Indies finished eighth in both previous WTCs and skipper Kraigg Brathwaite wants to end on a positive note this time.

"I think this series is very important with two Tests left in this cycle... so we want to start the year strong and that is our focus," Brathwaite said.



English batter Graham Clark smashed a 50-ball 101, helping Chittagong Kings amass 200 for seven against Khulna Tigers in the evening game on the opening day of the Chattogram phase of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League yesterday. It was the sixth hundred in this edition -- equalling the tournament's record number of tons in a single season, with six tons also being scored in 2019. [Bottom] Meanwhile, Tamim Iqbal smashed a 48-ball 61 to help Fortune Barishal bounce back to winning ways with a resounding eight-wicket win over Dhaka Capitals in the day game.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Soumya seeking full recovery before CT

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Swashbuckling opener Soumya Sarkar, who has been out of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) since suffering an injury in the second T20I against the West Indies in St. Vincent, returned to practice with his franchise Rangpur Riders yesterday.

It was the first time the southpaw had undergone a batting session, and having been picked for the upcoming Champions Trophy, the Tigers' think tank will be closely monitoring how his condition develops.

Soumya, who had previously undertaken light running exercises since his finger dislocation, is hopeful of a complete recovery.

"It's definitely a good feeling to be back after such a long time. [I practiced one day earlier, and today [yesterday] is the second day. It feels great to do it with Rangpur Riders," he told members of the media.

"I'm sticking to my process and consulting with the physio. I'll also inform the BCB physio about my updates. The faster I adjust, the quicker I can recover. My job is to practice, while they handle mobilisation and other tasks. Together, the quicker I recover, the sooner I'll return to the field. For now, the biggest target is to recover completely," added the 31-year-old.

No plans divulged but Tamim shows SCOPE FOR WIDER RANGE

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram



Retirement from international cricket has not dulled Tamim Iqbal's competitive edge one bit as the Fortune Barishal captain got into an angry exchange with Dhaka Capitals' Sabbir Rahman during their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) match in Chattogram yesterday.

This was not the first time Tamim had an altercation in the current edition of the BPL, as earlier he had a heated exchange with Rangpur Riders' English batter Alex Hales after a match.

Tamim's trait of taking things head on could help him keep the fire in his belly burning to compete in domestic and franchise cricket moving forward.

Like the range of strokes he still has in his armory, he also wanted to be a smooth

administration. The question had been pitched to him before but was more addressable now since his retirement and after he recently got appointed as the president of the Chattogram Division of the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB).

But Tamim felt the time was not right and did not divulge anything on the topic, saying, "No, not at this moment."

Tamim did not disappoint the

Opener Tamim Iqbal surpassed star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in registering the most half-centuries for Fortune Barishal, notching up his seventh fifty (48-ball 61) for the franchise in an eight-wicket win over Dhaka Capitals in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture in Mirpur yesterday.

Tamim trumped Shakib in his 30th innings. The latter, however, took 22 innings to register six fifties.

Tamim also became the first player to score 1000 runs for Fortune Barishal in the BPL. Shakib sits second on that list with 659 runs in 22 innings.



While fielding against Tamim in the ninth over, Sabbir intentionally dropped the ball after collecting it at long-off, trying to tempt him to go for a double instead of a single.

In front of his home crowd, Tamim was not taking any prisoners and told Sabbir, "Don't try to mess with me Sabbir, don't. I'll straighten you out."

In the end, Dhaka captain Thisara Perera stepped in to keep Sabbir away and the situation did not escalate.

executioner at the press conference. On the question of continuing on with franchise cricket, he even added a quip.

"I will try to continue... I am retired now so I also qualify for the legends league. I will play those and if the Premier League takes place in time, will play that too. If fit, will try to go on playing as long as possible." Tamim said at the press conference yesterday.

Another big question was whether Tamim intended to be part of cricket

thousands who turned up at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium with a 48-ball 61 as Barishal returned to winning ways, chasing the 140-run target with four overs and eight wickets to spare.

Still, Tamim felt the victory could've come a few overs earlier, "I feel like we should have played a bit more quickly in the middle overs. We could finished in 14 overs, since we had wickets, I feel like we missed this trick. Other than that the batting was okay," he said.

BFF U-15 League to kick off nationwide on Jan 25

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is set to organise the BFF U-15 Football League across the country this month with district teams participating, in celebration of the 'Youth Festival' announced by sports advisor Asif Mahmud last month.

All 64 districts, divided into 11 zones, will compete in the league starting January 25, with the top team from each zone joining Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) in the 12-team final round, said BFF U-15 Football Committee chairman Manjurul Karim at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"We don't want a team to go back home after playing just one match; rather, we want each team to play at least three to four matches. So we've designed the preliminary stage of the league accordingly," said Manjurul, adding that initiatives would be taken to attract spectators to the matches.

Manjurul also informed that the zonal phase would begin in Sylhet, while the league's logo and groupings would be revealed on January 19.

The preliminary stage matches will be hosted by Narsingdi, Rajbari, Cumilla, Cox's Bazar, Jhenaidah, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barguna, Sylhet, Rangpur, and Mymensingh.

Cabrera set to be longest-serving Bangladesh coach

SPORTS REPORTER



Spanish coach Javier Cabrera is poised to become the longest-serving coach of the men's national football team, as Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) officially announced his contract extension until April 30, 2026.

The BFF also renewed the contract of SAFF Women's Championship-winning English coach Peter James Butler, extending his tenure to December 2026. BFF media committee chairman Amirul Islam Babu confirmed the reappointments yesterday, following approval from the federation's emergency executive committee on Wednesday.

Cabrera's extension will see him lead the men in red and green in six Asian Cup Qualifier matches starting next March, as well as the proposed home-and-away format SAFF Championship scheduled for June.

Appointed in January 2022, Cabrera's contract had been renewed twice, taking his tenure up to December 2024. With this latest renewal, he is set to serve for another 15 months.

The 40-year-old has so far managed the national team for three years -- nearly seven months less than English coach Jamie Day, who served Bangladesh from January 2018 to January 2022.

Notably, Cabrera is the first foreign coach to receive a third extension, despite achieving only eight wins in 29 matches between March 2022 and November 2024. None of his predecessors -- including Samir Shaker, Andrés Cruciani, or George Kottan -- received similar treatment, even though they had guided the team to SAFF Championship finals.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

'Lucky loser' Lys makes most of second chance

AFP, Melbourne

Eva Lys's bags were packed and her flight booked. But now the German is into the third round of a Grand Slam for the first time after making the most of her second chance at the Australian Open.

The 23-year-old "lucky loser" defeated France's Varvara Gracheva 6-2, 3-6, 6-4 on Thursday in the second round, falling onto her back on court after sealing victory.

"I don't think I have any words to describe it yet," Lys, who is ranked 128th in the world, said.

It has been a whirlwind few days for Ukraine-born Lys.

She lost in the final round of qualifying in Melbourne last week, her hopes of making the first major of the year seemingly over.

But she hung about on the off-chance that another player would drop out and 13th seed Anna

Kalinskaya did just that on Tuesday, suddenly giving Lys another Australian Open life.

She duly defeated home player Kimberly Birrell in straight sets in the first round of the main draw.

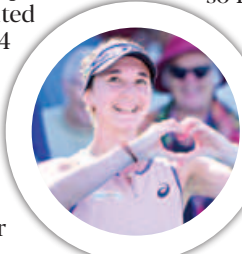
"I found out about it 10 minutes before the match so I didn't have time to get nervous," Lys, who lost in the first round at the Australian Open two years ago, said.

A "lucky loser" is a player who loses in qualifying but later gets a ticket into the main draw following another player's withdrawal, usually because of illness or injury.

"I was panicking a little bit because I didn't really prepare my drinks.

"I didn't have match clothes on so I went to the locker room, got changed straight away, and then they called my name."

Lys faces Romania's 82nd-ranked Jaqueline Cristian in the third round.



'SENSATIONAL'

Arsenal back in title race

Mikel Arteta warned Liverpool that "sensational" Arsenal are back in the Premier League title race after beating Tottenham 2-1 in the north London derby on Wednesday.

Desperately needing a win to close the gap on leaders Liverpool, Arteta's side staged a stirring fightback after Son Heung-min's early opener for Tottenham was cancelled out by Dominic Solanke's own goal before Leandro Trossard's strike put them ahead late in the first half at the raucous Emirates Stadium. Second-placed Arsenal's first win in four games in all competitions moved them within four points of Liverpool, who have a game in hand. "We were sensational. It was a big test after two games and not getting rewarded," Arteta said, referring to how they had been knocked out of the FA Cup third round by 10-man Manchester United on penalties on Sunday and a 2-0 loss at home to Newcastle in the League Cup semifinal first leg recently.

PHOTO: AFP

World number one and defending champion Jannik Sinner dropped a set for the first time in 14 matches but roared back to beat Australian wildcard Tristan Schoolkate 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-3 to make it into the Australian Open third round on Thursday.

Having raced past world number 49 Rebecca Sramkova 6-0, 6-2, Iga Swiatek set up a third round showdown with Britain's Emma Raducanu, who reached the third round for the first time at Melbourne Park by beating Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 7-5.

The Tunisian three-time Grand Slam finalist Ons Jabeur suffered an asthma attack in a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Colombia's Camila Osorio.