

This is a big thing for the country because he's [Hamza Choudhury] playing at the highest level – the English Premier League. It would be better for the country if we had three or four more Hamzas. Hamza coming to Bangladesh would be a good thing for everyone.

Bangladesh football team captain Jamal Bhuiyan



Jannatul Maoua celebrates one of her two wickets during Bangladesh's five-wicket victory against Nepal in their opening match of the ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup at the YSD-UKM Cricket Oval in Bangi, Malaysia, yesterday. Maoua claimed two wickets for 11 runs in her four overs while five batters got run out as Nepal were bundled out for just 52 in 18.2 overs, a total the young Tigresses overtook in 13.2 overs.

PHOTO: ICC

'I hope Tamim bhai wasn't saying it seriously'

After a training session at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday, most of the Dhaka Capitals cricketers had exited the ground, but not Sabbir Rahman. Sabbir, who remains a fan favourite despite not playing for Bangladesh since 2022, stayed back to work on his power hitting – something he has shown glimpses of in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). In an interview with **The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi**, Sabbir spoke about the Dhaka Capitals franchise, the state of domestic cricket in Rajshahi and an on-field incident involving him and Tamim Iqbal. Here are the excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): Your team Dhaka Capitals are having a rough campaign with just one win in eight games. But on a personal note, how has the experience been for you so far with the Dhaka franchise?

Sabbir Rahman (SR): Everything has been really well organised and I don't think anyone has any complaints. We are trying to win but unfortunately it hasn't happened for us. But I feel respected here and I feel proud to represent them. There have been no complaints regarding payments either. Fifty percent payment is done and we are regularly getting our daily allowances.

DS: You were one of the first power hitters from Bangladesh, how do you rate yourself as a power hitter now?

SR: When I started playing, Aftab Ahmed was there and he showed me how to do it. Junaid Siddique was there too. In the beginning, I learnt by watching and following them. I also try to utilise my strength. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

DS: How important was it to score that 82 off 33 deliveries against Chittagong Kings?

SR: I felt that it could be my last opportunity. I took it as a do-or-die match and I like taking that challenge. I was fortunate to pass that challenge.

DS: You were not selected in the Rajshahi squad in last

year's NCL. How do you feel about the state of cricket in Rajshahi right now?

SR: There are some people who are trying to ruin Rajshahi cricket. I hope the BCB will find them. In the past, Rajshahi players dominated in the domestic circuit and played for the national team. It doesn't happen now because local tournaments are not taking place. Obviously, there are people who don't want good things for others and bring bad things into the game.

DS: Fans at the venue hurled abuse at Liton Das recently in Chattogram. What are your thoughts on that?

SR: It's a franchise tournament, so some harsh words are expected. Obviously, Barishal fans would say the Dhaka players are bhua [bad] and our supporters would say that they are bad. It's nothing personal. I hope Liton does not think too much about it. For us, it doesn't matter who is saying what. It's important that we perform on the field.

DS: There was an incident between you and Tamim Iqbal during a match. Can you shed some light on it?

SR: Actually, I was pretty far away and couldn't hear what Tamim bhai was saying. I heard it later. But I feel he is my senior and a legendary player. We have a lot to learn from him and we learn every day. It happened in the heat of the moment. I obviously didn't take it personally and I hope Tamim bhai did not say it seriously.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Underused Rishad 'one hell of a talent'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHATTOGRAM

Rishad Hossain last year had secured clearance to participate in Australia's Big Bash League, but his tight schedule, balancing national team duties and Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) commitments, prevented him from taking up the opportunity. Despite his potential, Rishad has only featured in three of Fortune Barishal's six matches so far this season.

Rishad's Barishal teammate David Malan, appearing in his fifth BPL, knows a thing or two about being benched, as the former England batter has played in only one game this edition. During a press conference yesterday, Malan gave his views on playing in foreign leagues and on Rishad.

"We have a really big squad. Feels like we've got fifty players, and when you have so many players, it's tough to get a lot of them in," Malan said about his lack of appearances.

"You don't want to sign up for a tournament and then sit on the bench when you are competing with others. From that point of view, it's a bit frustrating. I guess that's the challenge for Bangladesh. If you want to attract the best players, they don't want to be sitting on the bench," he added.

A lot of Malan's early experience in the subcontinent was gathered in Bangladesh's Dhaka Premier League and BPL. He argued that Rishad should be playing in other leagues as much as possible.

"He [Rishad] is a hell of a talent, tall, turns the ball both ways, and has got a lot of skills. He can bat as well, which is a massive bonus.

"I guess the challenge is to get him to play as much as you can. The more competitions he can play, the more his development is going to progress. Same as me being able to play in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Big Bash. It develops your game in different conditions against different batters. Your bank of knowledge gets picked up. He should be encouraged that, when he is not playing in Bangladesh, he plays in every single league possible, because it's the only way to keep improving."



Tigresses aim series win in Windies for WC direct entry

SPORTS REPORTER

In a bid to secure a direct spot in this year's ICC Women's World Cup in India, Bangladesh women's team will take on West Indies in the opening game of a three-match WODI series in St Kitts today.

As per the tournament qualification rules, the hosts and the top five teams in the ongoing ICC Women's Championship will make a direct entry in the main event. Hosts India, Australia, England, South Africa and Sri Lanka have already qualified for the World Cup.

Bangladesh, who are currently seventh with 19 points, need to win at least two out of their three matches against West Indies to leapfrog New Zealand and ensure direct qualification to the tournament.

However, it will be a monumental task for the Tigresses, who are yet to win against the Caribbean side in any format despite playing four WT20Is and one WODI against them – all in ICC events. This will also be the first bilateral series between Bangladesh and West Indies, which consists three WT20Is as well.

Dhaka clubs boycott leagues over alleged 'conspiracies'

SPORTS REPORTER

The trophy unveiling ceremony for the upcoming Dhaka First Division Cricket League (DFDCL) 2024-25 was scheduled to take place at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) premises yesterday. However, despite captains from many of the 20 participating clubs showing up, the event could not take place as representatives and officials from clubs under the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) announced an indefinite boycott of all cricket leagues.

The protest has all but confirmed a delayed start for the DFDCL, which was initially scheduled to begin on January 20. The next edition of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), originally planned for late February, may also face similar delays.

Over the past week, club officials have raised concerns regarding certain proposals made by the constitution amendment committee, led by BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, which they believe could harm the country's cricket.

Club representatives yesterday met BCB president Faruque Ahmed, presenting him with a memorandum and requesting a meeting to discuss a three-point demand. This included the immediate cancellation of the proposed amendments, the dissolution of the committee, and the resignation of the committee convener.

Reports indicate that the proposed changes involve dissolving the CCDM, reducing Category 2 councillor positions to 30, and cutting the number of directors representing Dhaka-based clubs from 12 to 4.

Lutfur Rahman Badal, a club organiser, speaking to reporters in Mirpur yesterday, said: "If our demands aren't fulfilled, we will not play any game. We definitely want to play, but with the kind of conspiracies happening against us, we will not support cricket until this stop. And we won't be part of cricket in the future either."

Meanwhile, Rafiqul Islam Babu, another club organiser, informed that the BCB boss had assured them he would discuss the matter with other board directors soon, and they are now awaiting further communication.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Tien youngest since Nadal into last 16

Ruthless defending champion Jannik Sinner was in the zone Saturday as he powered into the last 16 with a straight-sets thrashing of American Marcos Giron.

In a one-sided battle of former US Open champions, Iga Swiatek romped to a 6-1, 6-0 triumph in a statement victory over Raducanu as she pursues a first Melbourne crown.

Swiatek faces world number 128 German Eva Lys, who beat Jaqueline Cristian of Romania in three sets to become the first women's singles "lucky loser" to reach the fourth round since the event moved to Melbourne Park in 1988.

AFP, MELBOURNE

Teenage qualifier Learner Tien said it was "pretty crazy" after becoming the youngest man to reach the Australian Open fourth round since Rafael Nadal in 2005 when he overcame Frenchman Corentin Moutet on Saturday.

The American 19-year-old won 7-6 (12/10), 6-3, 6-3 in Melbourne with Moutet collapsing clutching his leg in the third set before gamely carrying on.

The victory extended Tien's remarkable tournament after he stunned last year's runner-up and fifth seed Daniil Medvedev in a five-set thriller in round two.

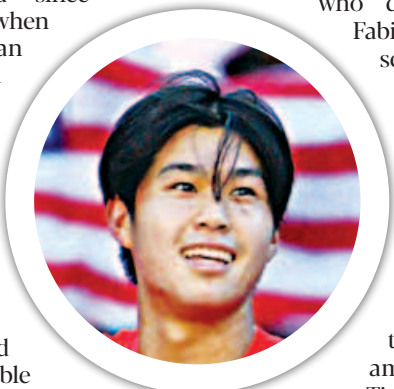
"Honestly it feels pretty crazy to be in the second week. Going through Qs

(qualifying)," he said.

No other American man his age has gone so far in Melbourne since Pete Sampras in 1990, with Tien's reward a clash against Italian Lorenzo Sonego, who dispatched Hungary's Fabian Marozsan in four sets.

"This has exceeded my expectations, what I was hoping for coming into this week," added Tien. "You go into every match believing you can win, but to be in the second week is amazing."

Tien is one of a trio of teens who set the Australian Open alight with wins over top-10 players, alongside Brazil's Joao Fonseca and Jakub Mensik, who have both been knocked out since.



Abahani keep up chase as Kings lose more ground

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani kept up the chase of leaders Mohammedan with a 1-0 win against Rahmatganj MFS while defending champions Bashundhara Kings lost more ground with a 1-1 draw against Fortis FC in the two matches of the Bangladesh Premier League yesterday.

Abahani, chasing a seventh professional league title, got the all-important goal through defender Shakil Hossain's volley from inside the box following a tee-up from Asaduzzaman Bablu in the 67th minute of the match at the Shaheed Bir Shrestha Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

Maruful Haque's charges, who have scored only 11 goals in eight matches, could have doubled the lead three minutes later Mahadi Yousuf Khan was brought down by Taaj Uddin inside the Rahmatganj box. But Mohammad Ibrahim, who has scored two goals in the league including a spot-kick, failed to keep his shot on target from 12 yards.



Despite the miss, Abahani held on to their slender lead and took their tally to 19 points from eight matches, five behind Mohammedan and four clear of Rahmatganj.

Five-time defending champions Bashundhara, meanwhile, were held by a spirited Fortis FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena.

Topu Barman gave the hosts an 11th-minute lead with a glancing header at near post on a corner from Miguel Ferreira for his second goal of the campaign but Mohammad Abdullah's fine finish in the 63rd minute – a curling effort from the left side of the box – earned Fortis their first points against Kings in the history of the Bangladesh Premier League.

Both teams had chances to get a winning goal in the frantic final stages of the match, but neither found the net as Kings fell 10 points behind Mohammedan with 14 points in fourth position. Fortis, meanwhile, moved to sixth with eight points from eight matches.