

'Too old but still here!'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova wrote "Too old but still here!" on the camera as she left court after beating Donna Vekic to reach her fourth Australian Open quarterfinal on Sunday.

The Russian 27th seed said she was surprised to make it to the last eight but thought the question of whether 33 was too advanced an age to compete was better directed elsewhere.

"I'm just having fun this year with this signing and calling myself too old to be on tour, which kind of part of it is true," she said.

"The question is to the young girls, because I'm still here and I'm in the quarterfinal."

Pavlyuchenkova said she sat her team down last year and explained that she would be taking a different approach to preparations for her 20th season as a professional.

## Djokovic sets up blockbuster ALCARAZ clash

**Irrepressible 10-time champion Novak Djokovic set up a blockbuster Australian Open quarterfinal Sunday with Carlos Alcaraz after downing Czech Jiri Lehecka. The 37-year-old Serb, who is gunning for a record 25th Grand Slam title, beat the 24th seed 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) on Rod Laver Arena.**

Djokovic has now made it into the last eight at Melbourne Park for the 15th time, a record he now shares with Roger Federer and one ahead of Rafael Nadal and John Newcombe.

Djokovic also extended his own all-time mark to 61 for most quarterfinal appearances at majors, three ahead of Federer.



In a blockbuster quarterfinal on Tuesday, Djokovic will square off against Alcaraz, who progressed after Jack Draper retired hurt during their last-16 match when the Briton was losing 7-5, 6-1.

Djokovic and Alcaraz have played each other seven times with the



Serb leading 4-3, including victory in their last clash in the Paris Olympics final.

Alcaraz is already a four-time Slam winner aged 21 but has never gone beyond the Australian Open quarterfinals.

## Competing leagues and exodus of stars creating humdrum BPL

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI, from Chatogram

Rangpur Riders star Alex Hales played his last game for the franchise in the current edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) on January 9 in Sylhet. Just three days later, he appeared for Desert Vipers against Abu Dhabi Knight Riders in the ILT20 in Abu Dhabi.

This is the life of a franchise cricketer in the current cricketing climate, one day you are here, the next day you are in some other place. Priorities change quickly for players while competition amongst leagues to attract the best players grows more intense every year.

"Alex would have stayed for the whole tournament if there was no scheduling clash with ILT20," a source close to the development said.

Even though Hales made just six appearances for Rangpur in this edition, he left his mark by scoring 218 runs at an average of over 54 and a strike rate of 140. The Englishman also scored an unbeaten 113 which lit up the tournament early on.

Hales' departure was another drawback to the excitement factor for the BPL which already suffers from a dearth of renowned T20 stars.

The Big Bash League, SA20 and ILT20 are the three marquee T20 leagues currently clashing with the BPL, of which the latter two have become the preferred destination



**Fortune Barishal opener Dawid Malan, one of the few big foreign players in the Bangladesh Premier League, helped his side to their fifth victory with a match-winning unbeaten half-century against Chittagong Kings in Chatogram yesterday.**

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

for most of the foreign stars.

Although South Africa's SA20 and the UAE's ILT20 are both relatively new leagues, they have the financial might to attract big stars, as seen with Hales.

Enamul Haque Jr, the assistant coach of Chittagong Kings, felt BPL had a scheduling issue.

"Definitely it's a scheduling problem since the big stars want to play in ILT20 or SA20. In 2012-13, many big stars played in the tournament here. In fact, I played alongside them for Chittagong Kings," Enamul said.

"If there is a scheduling clash with BPL, everyone would prefer to play in Dubai or South Africa. If we can shift it to December, this problem could be solved since the players would play here first before going there," he said when asked what BPL needs to do to draw bigger stars.

BCB's cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees informed that a schedule change remains unlikely in the near future.

"The January February window we use [from beginning] was approved by the ICC till 2027. So, our schedule partially clashes with SA20 and heavily clashes with ILT20. We can only change the window after 2027," he informed The Daily Star.

The excitement factor is mitigated if stars leave midway or after two-three appearances and it is one question that the BCB will have to address going forward.

BFF to hold U-17 team's training camp in Jashore

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-17 Men's football team's training camp ahead of their upcoming SAFF and AFC tournaments will be held in Jashore, announced the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday.

BFF vice president and development committee chairman Nasser Shahrear Zahedee disclosed it during the logo unveiling and grouping ceremony of the UCB BFF U-15 Football League at the BFF House yesterday, which is part of the country-wide Youth Festival.

"The development committee has decided to hold the training camp at Jashore's Shams Ul Huda Academy as part of their preparation for the upcoming SAFF U-17 Championship and AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers," Zahedee told the reporters.

## 'Arsenal deserved much more'

AFP, London

Mikel Arteta admitted Arsenal had to take blame for their damaging 2-2 draw against Aston Villa after they failed to keep pace with Premier League leaders Liverpool.

After Liverpool's 2-0 win at Brentford earlier on Saturday, the Gunners were left with no margin for error when they faced Villa at the Emirates Stadium.

Arteta's side were on course to move back within four points of Liverpool after Gabriel Martinelli and Kai Havertz scored to build a two-goal lead by the 55th minute.

But Arsenal collapsed midway through the second half as Youri Tielemans reduced the deficit before boyhood Gunners fan Ollie Watkins bagged the equaliser eight minutes later.

It was a hammer blow to Arsenal's hopes of a first title since 2004, with Liverpool now six points clear and holding a game in hand over the



second-placed north Londoners.

"Proud at the way the boys played and competed, the third time in six days. To deliver that dominance, that performance, they were outstanding. We deserved much more, that's clear," Arteta said.

"But the way we defended, especially the second goal, can't be part of our game. 'Conceding the two goals cannot be part of our game if you want to constantly win. It's nowhere near the standards of what we demand.'

Arsenal have won only one of their last five games in all competitions in a dismal streak that includes an FA Cup third round exit against 10-man Manchester United and a 2-0 League Cup semifinal first leg loss to Newcastle.

Wednesday's 2-1 win over north London rivals Tottenham looked to have revived Arsenal, but once again their inconsistent form this season reared its head at the worst possible time.

Conte pleased with Napoli growth

REUTERS

Napoli manager Antonio Conte praised his side following a narrow win over Atalanta at Saturday, highlighting the significant growth the team has shown over the past few months.

Romelu Lukaku's late header secured a 3-2 victory for Napoli, boosting their Scudetto hopes and avenging their 3-0 home loss to Atalanta in November.

"I had already said before the match that this team has grown a lot. Don't forget that just over two months ago, Atalanta put three goals past us," Conte told reporters.

"I think if we'd had even more time to go through the process, we'd have done even better. The team has above all grown in dealing with difficulties, that is what I want to underline."

## What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2 AND 5  
Australian Open  
4th round  
Live from 9:00 am  
T SPORTS  
BPL

Dhaka vs Sylhet  
Live from 1:30 pm  
Chittagong vs Rajshahi  
Live from 6:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS 2  
SA20  
Paarl Royals vs Joburg

Super Kings  
Live from 9:30 pm  
SELECT HD1  
Premier League  
Chelsea vs Wolves  
Live from 2:00 am  
(Tuesday)

## Allowance hike for Swadhin Bangla Football Team members

SPORTS REPORTER

National Sports Council (NSC) on Sunday decided to increase the monthly allowance from Tk 3000 to Tk 20,000 for the living members of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team, following a directive from the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Currently, 19 members of the Swadhin Bangla football team are alive.

The decision will come into effect from today. The Ministry of Youth and Sports formed a three-member committee comprising its joint secretary Dr Sheikh Mohammad Jubayed Hossain, deputy secretary of Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and NSC's finance director Saidur Rashid in regards to the matter.

The NSC has been disbursing a monthly allowance of Tk 3000 to the living members of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team from its own funds for the last 21 years but many members of the team had requested for a hike in the allowance.

The committee, which was formed on December 23, 2023 and submitted the report on January 13, 2025, said in its report that Tk 3000 allowance is negligible considering the current economic situation and inflation. The committee pointed out the fact that the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs disburses Tk 20,000 to each listed freedom fighter.

## Barca's Flick frustrated after Getafe draw

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick could not hide his frustration after his side were held to a 1-1 draw at lowly Getafe on Saturday, extending their winless run in LaLiga to four matches.

Flick lamented Barca's wasted chances in a game they dominated with almost 80% of possession and twice as many goal attempts as the home side.

"We wanted to win and we had chances to win. I'm very disappointed that we could not score more goals," Flick told a press conference.

"You can see what it's like to play here in Getafe. They defend well. We created chances, but we weren't on target. We have to keep going. I repeat that we had chances, especially in the first half. After that, I think we lacked a bit more passing accuracy."

"There was a lot of emotion in this

stadium, in all the actions, in the contacts. I have never experienced anything like this before. It's something new for me and I have to get used to it."

The febrile atmosphere of a sold-out Getafe Coliseum has been a problem for Barcelona who have failed to win at the South Madrid stadium for five consecutive seasons.

Barcelona are third in the standings on 39 points, four behind second-placed Real Madrid and five adrift of leaders Atletico.

Real, who have a game in hand, host Las Palmas on Sunday.

"If only we were able to score another goal, but there is nothing I can do now and have to accept the result," Flick said.

"But that is still a long way to go and we will fight until the end trying to win LaLiga. We missed two points but earned one so we have to look ahead and try to improve moving forward."



Off-spinner Sajid Khan celebrates with Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan after spinners ruled the roost in Multan to help hosts Pakistan thrash West Indies by 127 runs on the third day of the first of the two Tests on Sunday. Sajid took 5-50 for match figures of 9-115 while leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed snared 4-27 in the second innings as West Indies were dismissed for 123, falling well short of their victory target of 251. Pakistani spinners claimed all 20 West Indian wickets in the game, with left-arm Noman Ali claiming match figures of six for 83, while West Indies' left-arm Jomel Warrican had led the spin attack for the tourists with a career-best 7-32.

**PROCUREMENT OF  
CBS1 (95 GSM) CHEQUE PAPER**

Sealed quotations are inviting from any bonafide Indentors/suppliers/manufacturers against supplying of 10,000 (Ten thousand) reams CBS-1, 95 GSM (as per Bangladesh Bank specification) sensitized cheque paper having size 29.00X21.50 inches each sheet which must be imported from abroad. The tender schedule and particulars of quotation will be available at Central Accounts Division, Pubali Bank PLC, Head Office, 26 Dilkusha C/A on payment of Tk. 5,000.00 (Taka five thousand) only (non-refundable) in the form of payment order favoring "Pubali Bank PLC, Head Office, Dhaka" during the office hours till 27 January 2025.

**Mohammad Liton Miah FCA**  
GM, Division Head & CFO

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