

### Rajshahi miss another payment deadline

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League franchise Durbar Rajshahi have missed another payment deadline yesterday.

A press release from the Ministry of Youth and Sports said on Monday that the owner of Durbar Rajshahi, Md Shafiq Rahman – who was picked up by law enforcement agencies on the same day for unpaid dues – had promised to clear “all dues of the team in three instalments of 25 percent each on February 3, 7 and 10.”

Rajshahi players, who had received 50 percent of their dues before February 7, did not receive the third instalment of payments yesterday, several Rajshahi players claimed.

“They didn’t give us the payment today [yesterday]. We have been told [by the team officials] that we will be paid on Tuesday,” a Rajshahi player, on request of anonymity, told The Daily Star yesterday.

It was learnt that Rajshahi requested the Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud on Thursday for a 10-day extension to clear the third instalment.

## FORTUNE BARISHAL RETAIN BPL CROWN



Fortune Barishal skipper Tamim Iqbal (R) hit a brisk 54 off 29 balls and formed a 76-run opening stand with Towhid Hridoy (32 off 28 balls) to set up the base for their three-wicket win over Chittagong Kings in the final of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

### Fate of women’s football in Tabith’s hands

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabith Awal will make a call on the report prepared by a seven-member special committee regarding the ongoing impasse over women’s football team’s camp, even though it is uncertain whether the president will declare the findings of the report today or will take more time before making it public.

BFF’s senior vice-president and head of the probe committee Imrul Hassan on Thursday night told reporters that they had forwarded the report to the president, who he said would either discuss it with the executive committee or will himself take a decision on delivering the verdict on the feud between 18 senior players and the head coach Peter Butler.

Hassan also said that discipline was the key factor in considering the recommendations made in the report while acknowledging the contribution of the players in bringing success for the nation.

The Daily Star tried to reach Tabith, also a politician and a businessman, for a comment but he did not answer the calls and the text messages.



The 18 senior players led by captain Sabina Khatun have been boycotting the national team’s training camp since Butler took over the camp on January 29 after returning from the UK. The senior players, who had a public rift with the coach during last year’s successful title defence of SAFF Women’s Championship, blamed the coach of driving a wedge among the players, of bodyshaming them and of questioning their personal lives. They also threatened to retire *en masse* if the Englishman was not removed from the job. Butler, meanwhile, has publicly announced that he would not stay in charge if the boycotting players were brought back into the camp.

The Daily Star contacted a number of members of the special committee, who interviewed 30 squad members as well as the coach before preparing the recommendation report. And the common impression from them is that a middle-ground might be reached.

A member of the special committee told The Daily Star that the BFF president will sit with both the players and the coach before making a final call on the issue.

“It’s not matter of leniency or strictness. It’s a matter of well-being of women footballers in general and of course of our women footballers. Hence I believe whatever our president will decide, will be best for football,” said Fahad Karim, a member of the committee and a BFF vice-president.

Sayed Hasan Kanon, a former national team player and member of the committee, said he believed no harsh measures will be taken for the good of women’s football.

“These girls are our national asset. They have done a lot for the country,” Kanon said. “They may have done something wrong and breached discipline which they shouldn’t have. But we are considerate about them. We don’t want the careers of these girls spoil.”

With both parties seemingly rigid in their stance and with two important international matches lined up later this month, this is the first real challenge for Tabith as the president of the federation. And only a sensible and accommodating approach from him might help him and the country’s football overcome the challenge.

## BPL 11: Chaos, drama and cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

As the dust settles on what has been a train wreck of a season of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the time for retrospection has begun.

It would be unfair to say that nothing of note has happened on the field in the 11th edition. Taskin Ahmed’s record breaking 25-wicket season, Nurul Hasan chasing down 30 runs in the final over to pull off a miracle for Rangpur Riders, and the last-ball finish in the second qualifier that saw Chittagong Kings overcome Khulna Tigers and reach the final were all memorable events.

However, after 46 matches spanning 40 days across three venues, cricket still remained as an afterthought in the country’s premier franchise competition. On-field action got pushed out of the spotlight while the many off-field shenanigans took centre stage.

Here, The Daily Star takes a look at some of the more notable incidents of the outgoing edition:

### Morning shows the day

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had announced plans to introduce a full-fledged e-ticket system for the 11th edition.

However, till noon of the day before the opening contests, tickets had not been put up for sale.

Hundreds of fans had arrived at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on December 29, to purchase tickets only to see that the booths were closed and found no clear communication from the board about where and how they can buy tickets.

Some irate fans then tried to break Gate-1 of the venue and the law enforcement officers had to use force to disperse them. Later in the day, the BCB

sent a press release, detailing where fans can buy physical and online tickets and also the prices.

### The Rajshahi fiasco

On January 15, Durbar Rajshahi players boycotted a scheduled training session in Chattogram, protesting unpaid wages. The Rajshahi officials managed to appease their players and convince them to train and play. But the saga did not end there.

On January 26, the overseas recruits of Rajshahi boycotted their match against Rangpur Riders, again alleging unpaid wages. Rajshahi then sought and received



a special approval from the BPL technical committee to field an all-local XI, a never before occurrence in the BPL.

The non-payment issue kept getting uglier as the days progressed as local players complained the cheques they had received bounced. Even the hotel accommodating the team and the team’s bus driver complained of non-payment.

The situation worsened to such a degree that the government had to step in, with law enforcement agencies picking up and interrogating Rajshahi owner Md. Shafiq Rahman in the early hours of January 3.

In the interrogation, the owner promised to clear all payment in three instalments by February 10. But whether he will be able to keep his promise is anyone’s guess.

### ‘Self satisfaction’

Chittagong Kings owner Sameer Quader Chowdhury got in hot water on January 24, after he told The Daily Star he did not pay his team’s opener Parvez Hossain Emon any portion of his payment because he was not ‘satisfied’ with the player.

This comment was panned by all and BPL governing council member secretary



Nazmul Abedeen Fahim later said that Sameer expressed his regret over the comment.

### Wide, Wider, Widest

The elephant in the room in this year’s BPL were the many sketchy on-field occurrences that raised fears of fixing.

Wides missing the pitch and going to the boundary, sometimes even from spinners, giant no balls, strange bowling changes and the fact that many of these events matched what the online betting agencies had predicted, all were ominous signs.

The BCB-ACU has already singled out suspicious eight matches, flagged 10 cricketers and the BCB has formed an independent inquiry committee to aid in the investigation.

The investigations has just begun and this saga is far from reaching its conclusion.

### The tree falls, but makes no sound

In an attempt to make this BPL standout, the sports ministry organised a countrywide ‘Festival of Youth’, which ran co-currently with the tournament.

Kabaddi, athletics, chess, swimming, archery and many other sporting bodies held regional and divisional age-level competitions, rallies and educational institution in all 64 districts held sports events as part of the festivities.

However, as these events were not integrated with BPL, these competitions gained very little traction. For a lack of coordination, a novel and seemingly earnest attempt did not completely succeed.

### The one-match disasters

Rangpur Riders, reeling from four defeats in a row in the league phase and pitted against Khulna Tigers in the eliminator, flew in heavyweight replacements in Andre Russel, Tim David and James Vince from the IIT20 in Dubai on the morning of the match.

However, this trio collectively made just 12 runs off 25 balls as Rangpur lost the match by nine wickets.

### Runs flow and crowds turn up

In a tournament where most things have gone wrong, there were two big positives. Firstly, the pitches on average were much better, allowing batters to score big and secondly, fans in the stands, who turned up in big numbers in Sylhet and Chattogram. Even in Dhaka, the attendance was better than recent editions.

## Hurting Talha ‘living the dream’ of forging fast bowlers

A dramatic last-ball boundary shattered Khulna Tigers’ Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) campaign to a heartbreaking end on Thursday. Yet, head coach Talha Jubair deserves credit for guiding a team lacking star power to the penultimate hurdle, marking another chapter in the former national pacer’s coaching journey. The 39-year-old spoke to **The Daily Star’s Samsul Arefin Khan** about why he prefers being a bowling coach, the evolution of Bangladesh’s pace bowling and more. Here are the excerpts from the interview:

**The Daily Star (DS):** It must be difficult to get over such a heartbreaking defeat to Chittagong Kings.

**Talha Jubair (TJ):** What I felt was that we were kind of relaxed after Chittagong lost a couple of quick wickets. Jason Holder then conceded a six and a four in the 18th over. If we had 30 runs to defend in the last over, we could have bowled the 19th over with Musfik [Hasan] and kept the last over for Hasan [Mahmud]. But when it required only 21 runs, [Mehedi] Miraz didn’t take that risk... I’m not blaming anyone. The way our players played in the tournament, I’m so proud of them.

**DS:** At one stage, it looked like you guys wouldn’t be able to make the playoffs. Then you won back-to-back matches to reach the knockouts and also beat Rangpur Riders in the Eliminator. What was the team’s mindset during

that phase?

**TJ:** Actually, we never thought of losing the game against Rangpur. The way we batted, especially [Mohammad] Naim, was absolutely awesome. In the Eliminator, if I told you that we planned to beat Rangpur in a similar way, I would be lying. When I heard that Sunil [Narine] didn’t come and Itikhar [Ahmed] wasn’t playing, I became confident but the way we beat them, I couldn’t even have imagined.

**DS:** Can you describe your coaching journey so far?

**TJ:** I couldn’t lengthen my career as it should have gone. That disappointment will remain until my death. So my main purpose right now is to help produce more pace bowlers for Bangladesh.

My wife has sacrificed a lot to help me take up coaching as a profession. Khaled Mahmud Sujon bhai gave me a big break by allowing me to work with Dhaka Dynamites when I had just come into coaching. I also worked for Abahani in the same year as a bowling coach. Then Sujon bhai made me the head coach of Shinepukur Cricket Club for the next season. I also worked as the head coach of Dhaka Metro. Then I got U-19 responsibilities. I feel so proud that I’m living my dream of working with the pacers.

If anyone proposes that I become a head coach and another offers me the role of bowling coach, I may choose the second option. I prefer being a bowling coach because I own that place.

**DS:** Has your disappointment from your playing days subdued to some extent now that you’re in coaching?

**TJ:** To be honest, it has reduced quite a bit. But when players like Nahid [Rana], Ripon [Mondol], Ashikur Zaman, Musfik, Shoriful [Islam], Khaled [Ahmed], and even Taskin [Ahmed] play really well, I feel so proud. The more pace bowlers I produce, the more my disappointment will reduce gradually.

**DS:** What are the differences you see in current pacers compared to your generation or before?

**TJ:** I think currently, players face pressure situations more than at any other time, and that improves their game sense. That’s why they think about the game so much, because they know that without work ethic and hard work, they can’t reach the next level.



Australia wicket-keeper Alex Carey celebrates with Steve Smith after scoring a century during Day 2 of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Galle yesterday. Carey remained unbeaten on 139 at stumps and had Smith not out on 120 at the other end as Australia finished the day at 330-3, leading by 73 runs.

PHOTO: AFP