



Mukul, Jesy in Lahore

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladeshi umpires Masudur Rahman Mukul and Shathira Jakir Jesy are among 10 umpires selected for officiating the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 Qualifier in Pakistan, scheduled from April 9-19.

Mukul has been a regular feature at ICC events in recent years, including the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cups of 2020 and 2024.

On the other hand, Jesy, who featured in two women's ODIs during her playing career, is looking forward to her maiden appearance at a senior ICC event.

Jesy officiated the ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup in Malaysia earlier this year and became the first woman umpire from the country to officiate in a Cricket World Cup at any level.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Jesy confirmed her arrival in Lahore for the six-team tournament.

"I arrived in Lahore yesterday [Wednesday]. Mukul bhai and I came on the same flight, but I am yet to know about the match allocations for me," she said.

Women's ODI WC Qualifiers 'We want to win all five games'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team head coach Sarwar Imran said that the Tigresses will take one game at a time but the aim is to win all five games in the upcoming Women's ODI World Cup qualifiers in Pakistan.

The Tigresses left the country yesterday for the all-important mission and with only two qualifying spots up for grabs, the competition is going to be intense, especially in presence of West Indies and Pakistan in the six-team qualifying tournament.

The Tigresses underwent a camp before and during the Eid festivities with match scenario-specific training. There were separate objectives regarding batting in the Powerplay, the middle overs and death overs. Sarwar said that if the wickets in Pakistan are batting friendly as they are expected to be, the team can score big totals.

But the bowling will be under



the scanner, given that there would not be much sideways movement for pacers and spinners cannot just rely on the surface and hit a certain length to keep opposition batters quiet.

Asked about the bowling, Sarwar said: "We are aware of it [difficulty in bowling on batting surfaces] and we underwent specific work in this regard during the camp. How to bowl

and bat on batting wickets, what the strike-rate should be were in focus during practice.

"If there are batting wickets, there will be 250-plus scores and I am hoping that our batters would be able to score 250-plus," Sarwar added.

It would be a huge challenge against Pakistan, who are hosting the qualifiers and West Indies, who beat Bangladesh at their home recently. But Sarwar backed his troop to attain maximum number of wins.

"We have five games there and one by one we want to win all five games. We have two strong teams in West Indies and Pakistan with us and the other teams like Ireland aren't ones we will be looking down upon. We want to fight with everyone one by one and win five games to qualify," he said.

The Tigresses will play a few warm-up matches before taking on Thailand in their first match in Lahore on April 10.

PSL-bound Rishad wants to be third-time lucky

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh's Rishad Hossain garnered global spotlight with an impressive haul of 14 wickets in seven matches in last year's ICC T20 World Cup, leading to the leg-spin all-rounder becoming one of the most sought-after names in franchise cricket.

Just after the end of the T20 World Cup, Rishad was picked for Global T20 Canada by Toronto Nationals, while he was also picked by Hobart Hurricanes for the Big Bash League 2024-25.

Coincidentally, both Toronto and Hobart became champions in their respective tournaments, but Rishad was unable to be part of any of these franchise meets due to separate reasons.

In a few days' time, the 22-year-old is set to embark on another major challenge as he prepares to leave for Pakistan to take part in the 10th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL), beginning on April 11. This time, he will be representing two-time champions Lahore Qalandars, a team stacked with stars like Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Daryl Mitchell, Sam



Billings, and Fakhar Zaman.

As Bangladesh have no white-ball fixtures during PSL time, Rishad has already obtained a full-season no-objection certificate (NOC) from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), and now he is eyeing to showcase his mettle in the star-studded team.

"I will be going to PSL on April 6 or 7. The flight timing is yet to be confirmed," Rishad told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Getting a chance on any side gives you great pleasure. I'm really feeling well to be part of the tournament... Actually, we are a very good side. Normally, it's difficult to get into a side like this. I will try my best to adjust to the team as early as possible," he said, adding that Lahore's new head coach, Russell Domingo, who previously worked as Bangladesh head coach, had already communicated with him.

"Yes, we have talked. Before the start of any tournament, coaches usually talk to their players, and it was no different," said Rishad, who also thinks that he will enjoy the battle against two of his national

teammates, Liton Das and Nahid Rana, who were picked by different franchises - Karachi Kings and Peshawar Zalmi, respectively - for the tournament.

Liton will leave for Pakistan on April 7 while Nahid will leave after the first Test against Zimbabwe (April 20-24).

"It's really an exciting matter. They are my national teammates, and in PSL, we will be playing in separate teams. I hope to enjoy the battle against these two."

Rishad, however, is not thinking too far ahead about the national team's next white-ball assignment in Pakistan in May, where they are expected to play five T20Is, as he is keeping his focus only on PSL at the moment.

"Actually, I'm not thinking about this at this moment. The national team matches are still far ahead. Now I'm only focusing on the PSL. Hope to deliver a good performance there," he added.

With his confidence high and ambitions set, Rishad is ready to embrace the PSL challenge, hoping that this time, luck will finally be on his side.

SHORT CORNER

FIFA plans 48-team Women's WC in 2031



FIFA president Gianni Infantino announced on Thursday that it has planned to increase the number of participating teams at the Women's World Cup from 32 teams to 48 in time for the 2031 tournament. The United States is the sole bidder for the 2031 Women's World Cup, and the United Kingdom is set to host the 2035 tournament, Infantino also said at the UEFA Congress in Belgrade on Thursday.

Bangladesh up two places in FIFA ranking

Bangladesh have taken a small but encouraging step forward in the latest FIFA Men's World Ranking, climbing from 185th to 183rd after their goalless draw against India in a AFC Asian Cup 2027 qualifiers fixture on March 25.

Prosecutors demand jail term for Ancelotti for tax fraud

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti's tax fraud trial wrapped up Thursday in Spain, with public prosecutors maintaining their demand he be jailed for four years and nine months for allegedly hiding income from the tax office. Ancelotti denied having intentionally committed tax fraud when he took the stand on Wednesday on the opening day of the trial at the High Court of Justice in Madrid, saying he "never considered committing fraud".

Messi and Miami stunned by LAFC

Los Angeles FC sent Lionel Messi and Inter Miami spinning to their first defeat of the season on Wednesday, scoring an upset 1-0 victory in their CONCACAF Champions Cup quarter-final first-leg clash. A 57th-minute strike from Los Angeles-born El Salvador international Nathan Ordaz handed LAFC a precious advantage heading into next Wednesday's return leg in Florida.

Mourinho grabs Galatasaray coach's nose after losing Istanbul derby

Fenerbahce manager Jose Mourinho could be in trouble again after grabbing the nose of the Galatasaray manager at the end of another fiery Istanbul derby in which his side lost 2-1 at home in the Turkish Cup quarter-final on Wednesday. A mass scuffle had broken out between both sets of players, with the referee sending three players off, two from Galatasaray, and after the final whistle Mourinho appeared to pinch Okan Buruk's nose who then fell dramatically to the ground.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

Too early for treble talk, says Flick

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick was keen to keep talk of trophies in check after his side booked their spot in the Copa del Rey final against rivals Real Madrid with a hard-fought 1-0 win at Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

Barcelona are on a 21-game unbeaten run across all competitions and are the only team in Europe's top-five leagues yet to lose in 2025 as they bid for three titles playing some of the best football the fans have seen this season. But Flick remained cautious about their chances of winning the treble and urged his players to maintain a next-game mentality, warning that the club have little margin for error.

"I know everyone wants us to talk about the final, it's a 'Clasico', I get that, but I don't live in the past or in the future and our focus should be Betis, who are our next opponents in LaLiga," Flick told a press conference.

"Yes, we are in a great moment but I've been in this business enough time

to know how everything can change in a heartbeat, so we need to keep focused.

"Dreaming is allowed but first we need to work really hard and stay focused so we can keep that dream alive."

Barcelona are top of the LaLiga standings with 66 points, three ahead of Real, with third-placed Atletico six further points back in the title race with nine games left. Real will travel to London to face Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-finals next week while Barca will host Borussia Dortmund.

They will meet in the Copa del Rey final on April 26 before they clash again at Barcelona on May 11 in a game that could decide the LaLiga title.

"Tonight I'll stick with this formidable win which made me really happy," Flick said.



Manchester City star Jack Grealish dedicated his long-awaited goal in Wednesday's 2-0 win against Leicester to his late brother. Grealish netted from close-range in the second minute at the Etihad Stadium, scoring in the Premier League for the first time in 16 months. It came on the 25th anniversary of the death of his younger brother Keelan, who died at the age of just nine months. "This day is always hard in the family, but I was happy to score," Grealish said. "My mum and dad were here. This day is always difficult in the family. So to score and to win was brilliant."

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rejuvenated Siraj praised for 'fire in his belly'

AFP, Bengaluru

Praise was heaped on Mohammed Siraj Thursday after his match-winning spell for Gujarat Titans at his former club Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL.

Siraj, who was dropped by India for the Champions Trophy, looked like a man with a point to prove to the national selectors and the RCB management as he took 3-19 at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Wednesday, a venue that was his home for seven seasons.

RCB released Siraj after last season and the India fast bowler was bought by Gujarat for \$1.4 million in the November auction. Siraj has begun to justify his price tag by taking five wickets in three matches this season, bowling with pace and accuracy.

Former India opener Virender Sehwag said Siraj's IPL form was motivated by his omission from the Champions Trophy last month, which India won in Dubai.

"Somewhere I feel he is hurt that he wasn't part of the Champions Trophy squad, and I saw that fire," Sehwag said on website Cricbuzz.

"That's what we expect from a young fast bowler: 'Yeah, you didn't pick me? Now I will show you.'"

New Zealand's Kane Williamson, commentating on JioStar, said: "He bowled with real fire in his belly, led the attack with aggression, and bowled with some excellent pace."

Siraj's bowling helped restrict Bengaluru to 169-8, a total Gujarat overhauled by eight wickets with 13 balls to spare as England's Jos Buttler hit an unbeaten 73 off 39 deliveries.

"(Siraj) was deservedly named player of the match," Williamson added.

"While Jos Buttler was outstanding and back to his best in the second innings, Siraj set the tone early on, making a significant impact."

Siraj, 31, removed left-hander Devdutt Padikkal with a delivery that nipped away to hit off stump.

He then bowled Phil Salt after the England batsman had hit him for a six on the previous ball.

Siraj finished his spell with the wicket of England's Liam Livingstone, caught behind for 54.

"It was emotional because I played for seven years here," Siraj said of returning to Bengaluru.

"There was some nervousness and some emotion but the moment I got the ball in my hand, it was full on."

It was Gujarat's second straight win and Bengaluru's first defeat this season.

