

BCB 'relieved' after Indo-Pak ceasefire

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday expressed relief after India and Pakistan agreed to a "full and immediate ceasefire", while two Bangladesh players returned home safely from Pakistan.

The Tigers are due to tour Pakistan later this month for a five-match T20I series, starting in Faisalabad on May 25. However, following the ceasefire, BCB officials voiced renewed optimism about the Pakistan series.

"We are definitely much relieved now. It's not only for being Bangladeshi; overall, the people of the whole sub-continent are relieved," BCB's media and communication chairman, Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, told The Daily Star yesterday after board directors' meeting at the BCB office.

Earlier in the day, BCB's cricket operations department held a separate meeting with the players to gather their views on touring Pakistan. "The BCB wishes to reiterate that... all decisions concerning the tour will be made with careful consideration of the current situation in Pakistan," stated the BCB press release, a few hours before the ceasefire decision came to light.

Bangladesh's two-match T20I series against the UAE, preceding their Pakistan tour, had remained unaffected. BCB president Faruque Ahmed also noted that the situation "has become easier" comparatively following the ceasefire.

The Tigers are set to depart for UAE on May 14.

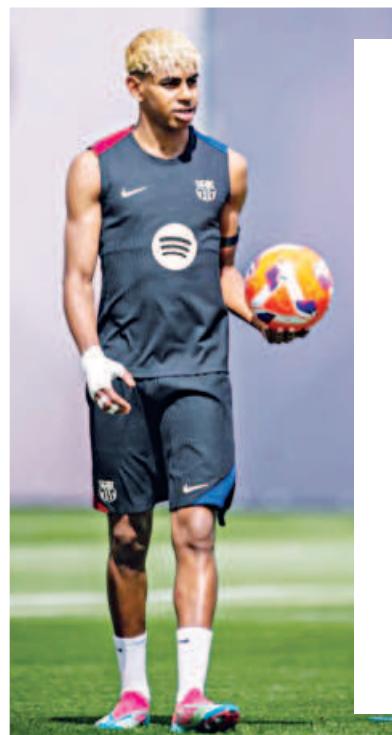


Bangladesh pacer Nahid Rana and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain and two journalists, who were in Pakistan for the Pakistan Super League, returned home in the afternoon yesterday after the tournament got postponed on Friday due to the conflict between Pakistan and India. However, hours after their return, Pakistan and India agreed to a ceasefire.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

EL CLASICO

Real Madrid's last ROLL OF THE DICE



- Barca have won all three Clasico meetings this season, having only once beaten their rivals in four consecutive competitive games.
- Barcelona have not lost any of their last 15 games in La Liga (W13 D2).
- Kylian Mbappe has scored 36 goals for Real Madrid this season, and needs just one more to equal the best scoring record for a player in their first season with the club.

"This year they [Real Madrid] can't handle us."

Barcelona forward Lamine Yamal

"Despite all our problems, the fact we are here and we can fight in this match is something beautiful."

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti

AFP, Barcelona

Real Madrid's season appeared disastrous a few weeks ago but if Carlo Ancelotti's side can finally beat rivals Barcelona in Sunday's LaLiga Clasico, their title defence will be resuscitated.

Madrid were left licking their wounds after a Champions League quarterfinal thrashing by Arsenal, and coach Ancelotti is poised to depart at the end of the season, but it could yet be with a major trophy in his hands.

Barcelona's European exit at the hands of Inter Milan on Tuesday brightened spirits in the Spanish capital and if Madrid can overhaul the Catalans at the top of the table, they could transform their season.

The nature of Madrid's rivalry with Barcelona means winning LaLiga could either feel great or overwhelming, depending on how their nemesis fares in Europe.

With Barcelona's quadruple dream crushed by Inter, should Madrid defend their title they could even classify their season as a success.

The Catalans, who currently lead by four points with four matches remaining, would be left with only the Copa del Rey and Spanish Super Cup, both of which they won by beating Real Madrid in the final.

To do that, Madrid must manage something they have not been able to pull off all season – winning a Clasico.

"We will have a great opportunity, we have to prepare well – it's an almost decisive match," said Ancelotti.

The teams have faced off three times and Barcelona triumphed on each occasion, in the two aforementioned finals and in the first league clash at the Santiago Bernabeu in October.

Barcelona netted 12 goals across the four games, conceding four, with Hansi Flick's side outplaying Madrid on each occasion.



Despite winning the series, seeing many top DPL performers struggling to deliver in familiar conditions and in their favourable format against a new opponent once again raised the question about the standard of Bangladesh's domestic scene.

Arsenal aim to harness pain of honour guard Newcastle, Chelsea chase CL entry

AGENCIES

Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to channel the frustration of giving champions Liverpool a guard of honour on Sunday into fuel for next season's Premier League title bid, while Eddie Howe has challenged Newcastle to meet expectations by securing Champions League qualification.

Arsenal, destined to finish the season without silverware after falling short in the title race and crashing out of the Champions League semifinals, travel to Anfield still nursing wounds from their Paris defeat.

The Gunners, still waiting for their first league title since 2004, face the uncomfortable task of honouring Arne Slot's Liverpool, who clinched the title two weeks ago, leaving Arsenal trailing in second.

"Something has to drive you, motivate you, and pain for this is a good one to use, when you really want to do something. It's the right thing to do, usually as a motivation for next season," Arteta said of Sunday's guard of honour.

Meanwhile, Newcastle host fifth-placed Chelsea at St James' Park, knowing victory would significantly boost their hopes of returning to Europe's elite competition.

The Magpies, level on points with Chelsea but ahead on goals scored, are locked in a tight battle for a top-five finish alongside Manchester City, Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa.

Although Newcastle lifted the League Cup in February, ending a 56-year trophy drought, Howe insists their ambition remains high.

"We feel an expectation, certainly internally, to try to deliver Champions League football," said Howe. "Winning the cup final gave us a freedom and a new-found confidence... but that feels like it was, in football terms, quite a while ago."

Guards of honour date back as early as 1955, when Manchester United formed one for Chelsea.

Arsenal endured a bitter moment in 2013 when they formed a guard of honour for Manchester United, whose ranks included their former captain Robin van Persie after his switch that season.

Liverpool's most recent guard of honour came in 2020, with Manchester City, Aston Villa, Brighton, Burnley, Arsenal, Chelsea and Newcastle United all lining up to applaud the champions as they emerged from the tunnel.

'A' team win series but DPL star batters flop

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Many of the top performers of the recently-concluded Dhaka Premier League (DPL) couldn't deliver impactful performances for the Bangladesh 'A' team in their three-match one-day series against New Zealand which concluded yesterday in Sylhet.

The hosts lost the last game by four wickets but still won the series 2-1 courtesy of dominating victories in the opening two games.

Despite winning the series, seeing many top DPL performers struggling to deliver in familiar conditions and in their favourable format against a new opponent once again raised the question about the standard of Bangladesh's domestic scene.

Anamul Haque Bijoy, who was the top scorer in the league with 874 runs at an average of 79.45 and even earned his place back into the Test team with his DPL exploits, could make only 79 runs in three innings against New Zealand 'A'. He got starts in the opening two matches, making 38 and 39 respectively, but couldn't kick on.

Another top-performer Mohammad Naim, who finished as the third highest scorer with 618 runs, also disappointed in the series, making just 62 in three innings.

Mosaddek Hossain, who made 487 runs and took 30 wickets in the season, made just 17 runs in two innings but impressed



with the ball, finishing the series as the joint highest wicket-taker with five scalps.

Former national selector Hannan Sarkar, who coached some of these cricketers during his recent successful DPL campaign with Abahani Limited, reiterated what is time again said about Bangladesh's domestic cricket while trying to explain these poor performances.

"Of course, there is a difference between our domestic games and international matches. There is nothing to hide because it's an open secret," Hannan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We can't ignore or overlook the big gap between domestic and international matches. We always talk about this in discussions. And it has once again come to the light."

Hannan, however, tried to bat for the players, saying, "Many of the players were

STAR SPORTS SELECT	Live from 7:15pm
HD 1	Liverpool vs Arsenal
English Premier League	Live from 9:30pm
Newcastle vs Chelsea	STAR SPORTS SELECT
Live from 5:00pm	HD 2
Man United vs	English Premier League
West Ham	Nottingham vs
	Dortmund
	Live from 7:30pm

SHORT CORNER

Kohli wants to retire from Tests: Reports

India's veteran batter Virat Kohli has told the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) that he wants to retire from Tests, reports multiple Indian news outlets. According to The Indian Express, the 36-year-old recently expressed his desire to retire from the five-day format and top BCCI officials have asked him to reconsider.

U-19s look to bounce back

Bangladesh will look to bounce back from the disappointment of being held to a 2-2 draw by Maldives when they take on Bhutan in their second and last group match of the SAFF U-19 Championship in Arunachal Pradesh, India today. The match will kick off at 4:30pm Bangladesh time.

Inter reset for league title push

Inter Milan came through a dramatic Champions League semifinal but need to put the euphoria quickly behind them as they bid to haul in leaders Napoli and retain the Serie A title. A win for Inter on Sunday would put pressure on Napoli who host Genoa later on the night.

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BPL

Chittagong Abahani relegated

SPORTS REPORTER

Chittagong Abahani's demotion to the Bangladesh Championship League was confirmed after Young Men's Fakirpool Club beat Rahmatganj MFS 2-1 in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture in Munshiganj on Saturday.

The port city outfit, who patched up a squad with very little finances following the political change in August last year, have only three points from 14 games. With only four matches remaining, they cannot catch up with eighth-placed Fakirpool, who now have 16 points.

Winners of the inaugural Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup in 2015 and the Independence Cup the following year, the port city outfit had been a constant fixture in Bangladesh's top-flight football since 2013-14 season. This promising era had come after a few struggling seasons since the beginning of the professional league in 2007, eventually culminating in them being relegated at the end of the 2010-11 season.

Meanwhile in yesterday's match, Irfan Hossain gave Fakirpool a 26th-minute lead before Mosharaf Hossain Shanto doubled the advantage eight minutes after restart. Although Rajon Howlader reduced the arrears in stoppage time, the Old Dhaka outfit could not avoid defeat against a side they had beaten 6-1 in their first meeting of the league.

In the other match of the day, Dhaka Abahani failed to gain ground on runaway leaders Mohammedan with a goalless draw against Bangladesh Police in Mymensingh.

The six-time professional league winners started the day eight points behind Mohammedan following the Black and Whites' draw against Fortis FC on the previous day, but could only reduce the gap to seven points, with only four matches still remaining.

The Sky Blues, with 28 points from 14 matches, are three points ahead of third-placed Bashundhara Kings.

Barcelona's European exit at the hands of Inter Milan on Tuesday brightened spirits in the Spanish capital and if Madrid can overhaul the Catalans at the top of the table, they could transform their season.

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"We can't ignore or overlook the big gap between domestic and international matches. We always talk about this in discussions. And it has once again come to the light."

Hannan, however, tried to bat for the players, saying, "Many of the players were

out of the international scene for a long time. It won't be right to judge them by two or three matches."

"We can't say that Naim has done too badly. In the first two innings, he couldn't extend his innings. Today [yesterday], he failed but in the first two matches, he got starts but could not convert... So, I don't want to judge these players by one, two or three innings," he said.

Hannan felt if these players get to play in more such series in the coming days, it will get easier for them to perform well at the international level.

"We are lucky that our A team programme is running and we can get some international flavour there to some extent... If they get more such series and come back in the team after performing well in those, it will help them to perform well in international cricket."