



#### SCORES IN BRIEF

##### Pakistan

178-7 in 20 overs (Farhan 63, Ayub 21, Hasan Nawaz 33, Mohammad Nawaz 27; Taskin 3-38, Nasum 2-22)

##### Bangladesh

104 all out in 16.4 overs (Naim 10, Saifuddin 35 not out; Miraz 3-19, Ashraf 2-13, Mohammad Nawaz 2-4)

##### Result

Pakistan won by 74 runs.

##### Player-of-the-match

Sahibzada Farhan



I feel it's a positive win [to win the series 2-1], we are heading in the right direction.

Bangladesh T20I captain Litton Das, after losing the final T20I against Pakistan

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Test of bench strength GOES WRONG

#### SPORTS REPORTER

The third and final T20I against Pakistan in Mirpur yesterday presented the Tigers a luxury they don't often get – an opportunity to test their bench strength, having already taken an unassailable lead in the series by winning the opening two matches.

The Bangladesh management had two options – go in with their main XI in a quest to seal their maiden 3-0 clean sweep over Pakistan in T20Is or test their bench strength as this will be their last match before the Asia Cup T20, likely to be held in September.

Historically, Bangladesh aren't known as a side who test their bench strength. But this time, the think tank chose the second option.

Even though it did not go smoothly for the team, as they lost the match by 74 runs, it provided the think tank clarity over who should be part of their plans for the Asia Cup, and who should not.

In the third T20I, Bangladesh had rung in five changes in the playing XI from the previous game, as Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Mohammad Saifuddin, Taskin Ahmed and Nasum Ahmed came in for Parvez Hossain Emon, Tawhid Hridoy, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Mustafizur Rahman and Rishad Hossain.

Among the additions, Tanzid and Taskin are first choice cricketers in T20Is but the

remaining three – Miraz, Saifuddin and Nasum – are not.

So, for these three players and opener Mohammad Naim, who received a second game in a row, this was a chance to prove their mettle. However, not all of them could cash in on the opportunity.

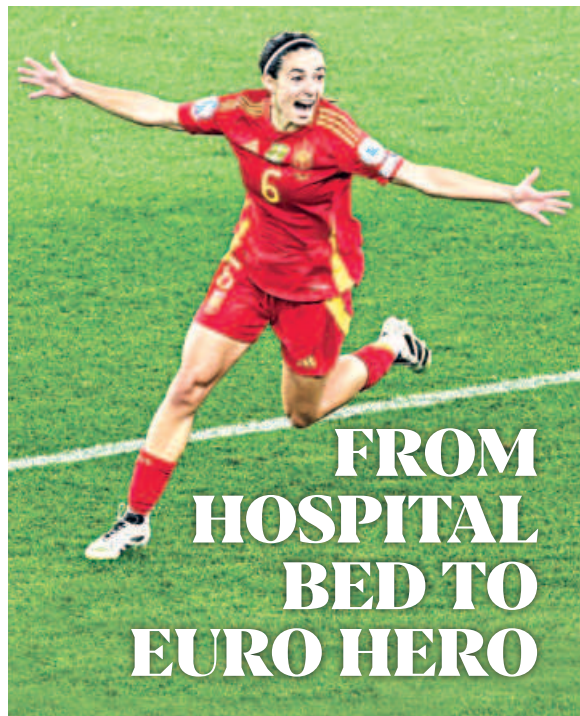
ODI captain Miraz, who is often criticised for not being up to par in T20Is, went for 14 runs in the first over and wasn't brought back by skipper Litton Das again. As a batter, he made an eight-ball 10 before getting caught at mid-off with a mistimed pull against Faheem Ashraf.

Naim, who had only made three runs in the second game on Thursday, could only make a 17-ball 10 while chasing a target of 179.

But it was not all gloom for the backup players as Nasum, who was playing a T20I after a year, finished with the best bowling figures for Bangladesh (2-22) on the day.

Saifuddin was economical, finishing with 1-28 in four overs, and also scored an unbeaten 34 ball 35, highest in the side, to push Bangladesh's total to 104 from 41-7. Although both Nasum and Saifuddin's performances were nowhere enough to make up for the shoddy display from the rest of the side, the duo has put forth a good showing to put themselves in line for a spot in the Asia Cup bound squad. Miraz and Naim, meanwhile, have done the exact opposite.

Including yesterday's game, Bangladesh were asked to chase 150 or more in 10 T20Is in Mirpur – and the Tigers have failed to win any of those matches.



## FROM HOSPITAL BED TO EURO HERO

"You could write a book about this," said Aitana Bonmati on Wednesday as she reflected on the last few weeks in her life after scoring the goal that took Spain into the final of the Women's Euro 2025. At the end of June, the reigning Ballon d'Or winner was lying in hospital with viral meningitis, and it looked like she might not be able to play for Spain at the tournament in Switzerland. Now she is preparing to lead her team into Sunday's final against England in Basel, in a rematch of the 2023 World Cup decider, which Spain won, after converting the only goal of the last-four clash with Germany late in extra time.

PHOTO: AFP

## ACC AGM wraps up without decision on Asia Cup

#### SPORTS REPORTER

After much speculation, the much-anticipated Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) was successfully held in Dhaka yesterday. However, one of the main agendas of the event, finalising the dates of the upcoming Asia Cup, was left undecided.

Among the 25 member nations, representatives of around 20 countries attended the meeting in person while India, Hong Kong and a few others joined virtually.

After the meeting, ACC president Mohsin Naqvi confirmed that all members participated in the meeting either physically or virtually and expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the AGM.

"First of all, the AGM meeting went very well... I am thankful to all the members who came here and all the members who attended the meeting through Zoom," Naqvi told reporters at the InterContinental Dhaka yesterday.

"I really want to thank Aminul [BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul] bhai for his hospitality. The way they looked after us, we had amazing two days," he added.

Regarding the upcoming Asia Cup, Naqvi informed that the official announcement for the competition will



PHOTO: BCB

be made after the resolution of some issues with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"That will also be announced soon [regarding Asia Cup]," Naqvi said. "We are in the consolidation with BCCI. We will hopefully resolve it also very soon."

According to a few Indian outlets, however, after Thursday's meeting, the BCCI, who has the hosting rights for the event, has agreed to stage the eight-team tournament in September. But rather than holding it in India, it wants to shift

it to the UAE.

Another major outcome of the AGM was the ACC announcing the inclusion of cricket in the upcoming Asian Games 2026 in Japan. The continental cricket body declared that the top 10 ranked men's teams and the top eight ranked women's teams from Asia will compete at the event.

The organisation also welcomed three new members – Mongolia, Uzbekistan, and the Philippines. This was the first time the ACC AGM was held in Dhaka.



## PANT DEFYING ODDS... AGAIN

Despite a severe foot injury, India's wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant hobbled his way out to bat on Day 2 of their fourth Test against England in Manchester on Thursday -- less than 24 hours since he had to retire hurt on 37 when he was struck with a painful blow on the foot attempting an audacious reverse-sweep off a Chris Woakes yorker. After England fast bowler Jofra Archer removed Ravindra Jadeja for 12 early under grey Manchester skies, and Shardul Thakur followed him back to the pavilion, Pant received a standing ovation as he limped down the steps and onto the field. Survivor of a serious car crash in 2022, Pant made a habit of defying odds and standing tall – as he did once again yesterday, adding 17 more to his score and helping India to 358 in their first innings total. Pant, however, will not be taking up the gloves anymore in the game, as confirmed by BCCI.

PHOTO: AFP

## BTTF to send full-strength squad to Nepal

#### SPORTS REPORTER

After resolving a dispute with players over selection criteria, the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) has submitted late entries to ensure the country's top paddlers participate in the South Asian Regional Championship 2025.

A squad of eight players – four men and four women – is set to depart for Kathmandu, Nepal, on July 28. The regional event, featuring only team competitions, will be held from July 30-31. Bangladesh will compete alongside India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, with only the champions earning a spot at the World Championships in London in April next year.

While preparations began in late May with 16 men and 16 women in camp, training was disrupted due to disagreements over selection methods. Players opposed trials in favour of the usual ranking-based approach – how the BTTF usually selects teams for ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation) events – which relies on results from the Federation Cup, National League, and two ranking tournaments.

However, in cases like the SA Games, Commonwealth Games,

Islamic Solidarity Games, and Asian Games, selection trials are the norm. This time, though, with the Federation Cup last held in 2021 and the league in 2023, the board insisted on trials to assess current form.

"We had initially planned not to send the team for disciplinary



reasons," said BTTF general secretary Captain Maksud Ahmed Sonet told The Daily Star.

"But the players now understand why trials were necessary. Plus, we've seen improvement in camp, and this tournament is a good chance to evaluate them."

Men's team coach Syed Mahmuduzzaman Shahed is targeting second place in both categories, acknowledging India's dominance but hopeful of success

against the rest. "India are stronger than us, no doubt," he told The Daily Star while conducting training at the Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Dhaka.

"But we've beaten teams like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan before, and I believe we have a 50-50 chance against them."

Women's player Sonam Sultana Soma admitted the early training lacked intensity due to the dispute, but said the team is now fully focused.

"We didn't agree with the trial system, but preparations are serious now. We'll give our best even if the outcome is uncertain," she said, adding that the experience will help in next year's SA Games.

Mohutasin Ahmed Ridoy, who has been juggling camp and exams, said: "I'm trying to recover quickly and contribute. Against teams other than India, the margins have always been narrow. We're capable of beating them."

Ramhim Lian Bawm also pointed out time constraints due to academic commitments but is giving full effort in camp. "I'm not sure who else is competing yet, but other than India, I'd say our chances are 60-40."

## 'Belal Bhai': The T20 batter born before his time

#### SPORTS REPORTER

"He was an ideal example of the kind of T20 batter we look for today."

With those words, former Bangladesh captain and current chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu paid tribute to one of the country's earliest cricketing gems – Mir Belayet Hossain, affectionately known as Belal Bhai – who passed away on Wednesday evening in Mymensingh at the age of 70.

To today's generation, his name might barely register, but for those who witnessed the golden era of club cricket in the 1970s and '80s, Belal Bhai was a revelation – a charismatic, hard-hitting batter whose presence lit up the field, and whose joyful personality made him unforgettable off it.

"I joined Abahani in 1981. Belal bhai had already been with the club before me," recalled former Abahani skipper Lipu. "His extraordinary stroke-play, fitness, and power-hitting still flash before my eyes. People today can't even imagine how outstanding a batter he was – how powerfully he could hit."

Former national selector and cricketer, Dr Asaduzzaman Misha, added a poignant reflection.

"He was well ahead of his time. I remember watching him whack a flat six at the outer stadium – it's still vivid in my mind. He had a rare quality as a wicketkeeper-batter. And just imagine – he developed all that without proper coaching or facilities. It's very unfortunate that he never received a national award," he said.

Belayet represented Bangladesh from 1977 to 1984 and was part of the country's historic 1979 ICC Trophy squad. While that era lacked modern exposure and infrastructure, his cricketing reputation was forged in the heart of domestic cricket. He featured for Abahani, Kalabagan, Rupali Bank, Agrani Bank, and Dhanmondi Club, as well as for Mymensingh District in the National Cricket Championship.

Those who played alongside him or watched from the stands recall a player far ahead of his time – an explosive stroke-maker in an era yet to embrace aggressive batting.

"Physically, he was a bit bulky, but incredibly agile. He could run a lot and was very fit," said Lipu.

"Belal bhai was exceptionally stylish, aggressive, and cheerful. His sense of humour will keep his memory alive. He could see everything through the lens of joy," Lipu added.

Misha also spoke fondly of Belayet's jolly character.

"He will not only be remembered for his cricketing ability or performance but also for his jolly character. There was never a dull moment if Belal bhai was around. His style of speaking was amazing. I still remember how we spent an entire night listening to his stories during a national championship match in Faridpur. And once in Tangail, he suddenly disappeared at night – we later found out he had gone to watch a jatra," Misha recalled.

Even after hanging up his gloves, Belayet remained deeply involved in the game. He served as a match referee in 79 first-class, 81 List A, and one T20 match, and also worked as a regional development manager for the Bangladesh Cricket Board, continuing to nurture the game he loved.

Lipu summed it up best: "If there had been as many matches back then as there are today, people would have known Belal Bhai differently."

