



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Marie Helena Costa Mendes of the International School Dhaka competes in the balance beam individual girls' event (age category 12-14) during the Interschool Gymnastics at the National Sports Council Gymnasium in Paltan yesterday. Organised by the Bangladesh Gymnastics Federation, the second edition of the two-day competition began on Thursday, featuring 209 participants from 64 institutions across several districts. While the initiative is a commendable step in promoting youth participation in gymnastics, the subpar venue conditions highlighted areas that still need attention. With poor ventilation and inadequate lighting, the hot and humid environment posed an additional challenge for the young athletes -- issues the federation may need to address if it hopes to attract more participants in the future.

EKUSH TAPADER, from Dubai

During Wednesday's Asia Cup Super Four fixture between Bangladesh and India, a particular chant from the stands instantly raised eyebrows.

That expression from the Bangladesh fans at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium had nothing to do with cricket; nor did it carry any sign of nationalism, or typical banter. In the last World Cup, a group of Indian supporters was also seen involved in similar activity during their match against Pakistan.

The Asia Cup was originally launched to foster harmony among teams in the region. In recent years, however, it has been organised mainly in line with the global calendar, with schedules ensuring multiple India-Pakistan matches. On paper, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) says it aims to help teams prepare for world events; in practice, the tournament has lost much of that spirit, creating a setting where genuine cricket fans often end up anxious rather than entertained.

This edition has felt particularly tense. It began with Indian players declining to shake hands with Pakistanis after a group stage match and escalated to gestures such as Sahibzada Farhan's "rifle-pointing" celebration and Haris



Rauf's "fighter jets-crashing" signal during Sunday's Super Fours clash. Both were widely circulated on social media, prompting the India cricket board (BCCI) to lodge an official complaint with the ICC.

The Pakistan Cricket Board, in turn, raised concerns over India captain Suryakumar Yadav's post-match remarks, which it argued carried political undertones. These incidents have reinforced the view that the ACC's indifference has let tensions escalate; handshakes are skipped, press conferences avoided,

yet little action is taken. Ironically, youth-level footballers from India and Pakistan have exchanged courtesies of late.

Covering the tournament, many Indian and Pakistani journalists have gathered in the UAE. In past events, they were seen engaging in long, lively conversations. This time, however, everyone seems more reserved, as if showing friendliness might call their loyalty into question. Even when Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar appeared in the press box a few times this year, it felt as though

an invisible curtain had descended. Although India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh once shared the same land before 1947, they remain caught up in social divides and narrow political sentiment. Despite sharing much of the same language and culture, someone who migrated from Chandigarh to Lahore after Partition may now, in his twilight years, feel distant from the soil of his birth. The same applies to those who moved from Bardhaman to Dhaka or from Khulna to West Bengal.

As Srinivas Thota Narayon, a taxi driver from South India, put it: "I've lost all interest in cricket now. The English Premier League is much better." Pakistani fan Adil Shehzad, a Virat Kohli admirer, now keeps such opinions to himself. Most cricket lovers admire Wasim Akram's swing or Sachin Tendulkar's straight drive, yet the political climate dictates silence.

Unfortunately, Srinivas and Shehzad are the minority. Social media content creators and "influencers" fuel the tension further. India-Pakistan or Bangladesh-India matches almost automatically become sensational spectacles.

In the end, when politics overshadows the game, even if the ACC's funds are filled with millions, cricket itself is the ultimate loser.

## Rangpur girls win JFA tourney

Rangpur district emerged champions of the JFA U-14 Women's Youth Development tournament -- launched in 2015 as a talent-hunting initiative with financial support from the Japan Football Association (JFA) -- defeating Thakurgaon in a tiebreaker following a 1-1 draw in the final at Rajshahi Stadium yesterday. After Thakurgaon's

Runa Akhtar cancelled out 15-minute opener, Rangpur prevailed 3-2 in the penalty shootout. Divided into six zones, a total of 42 districts competed from mid-August, with six zonal champions, the best runners-up, and hosts Rajshahi advancing to the eight-team final round which began on September 16.



## BPL to BFL: Rebranded league starts today

After 13 years, the country's professional football league is getting a new name as the 17th edition, which gets underway today, has been renamed to the Bangladesh Football League (BFL). The league was called the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) from 2012 onwards. The change was made to avoid clash with the franchise T20 cricket tournament which is also called BPL. Alongside the name change, this season will also see a few new features, which the organisers are hoping would liven up the biggest and most important domestic football tournament in men's football in the country.



- The BFL will be held in five venues this season with Shaheed Miraj-Tapan Stadium in Manikganj being the new addition.
- Ten clubs including two promoted outfits Arambagh KS and PWD SC will compete this season.
- For the first time, footballers from the SAARC region will play as local players. Teams can register four foreign players and field a maximum of three in a match.
- Each club must field an Under-20 player in the starting XI.
- The league will see two breaks -- September 29 to October 15 and October 23 to November 23 -- due to international engagements of the national team and Bashundhara Kings.
- Holders Mohammedan SC are the reigning champions.
- On the opening day, Rahmatganj MFS will host Abahani Ltd in Munshiganj while Fakirerpool Young Mens Club will take on Arambagh KS in Manikganj.

Tigresses' first WC warm-up tie gets rained out

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's preparation for the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup suffered a blow as their first warm-up match against South Africa ended in a no result due to rain at the Colombo Cricket Club Ground on Thursday.

Sent to bowl, the Tigresses had reduced South Africa to 49-3 in nine overs before incessant rain ended the match abruptly.

Pacer Marufa Akter bowled South African skipper Laura Wolvaardt on the very first ball, and then removed Annerie Dercksen in her second over. Left-arm spinner Nahida Akter joined her in the act by dismissing Marizanne Kapp on 21.

South Africa's in-form opener Tazmin Brits was unbeaten on 19 alongside Anneke Bosch (0) when rain halted the proceedings.

The warm-up match was crucial for the Tigresses to gauge themselves as they have not played an international match since April this year.

Bangladesh's second and last warm-up match will be against Sri Lanka at the same venue on Saturday. Nigar Sultana and Co will begin their World Cup campaign against Pakistan in Colombo on October 2.

## More drama awaits as final voters' list due today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in Mirpur was abuzz on Thursday, as former skipper Tamim Iqbal and former board president Faruque Ahmed appeared before the Election Commission (EC) for their hearings regarding the 38 objections to the draft voters' list received the day before, ahead of the upcoming Board of Directors' election of the BCB.

The EC informed in the evening that the final voters' list would be published at 4:30pm today after it scrutinises the papers of 15 clubs, who were among the objectors for not being included in the voters' list due to various irregularities, which are currently under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The objection against Tamim was not taken into account, as the "person who submitted it was not present at the hearing," with the left-handed opener claiming to be "embarrassed over explaining the issue" to the media.

Tamim expressed scepticism over whether he would be "allowed to

participate in the elections," while refraining from commenting on whether he would quit the polls.

Meanwhile, former BCB boss Faruque's nomination papers were accepted despite a late submission -- an issue that many clubs objected to, claiming clarification behind their inclusion in the voters' list still being left pending. Faruque presented an explanatory letter during the hearing yesterday.

The EC found itself embroiled in controversy. The BCB had previously said that a decision on the 15 clubs had been made in the last board meeting, and since the ACC had not alleged anything, the clubs would be allowed to provide councillors in the upcoming elections.

Reportedly, the BCB sent a letter to the EC concerning the 15 clubs. When asked who in the BCB signed the letter, the EC tried to sidestep the issue. "We had to view a huge number of papers," one EC member said.

As the back-and-forth exchanges of words and allegations prevail, the drama surrounding BCB elections appears to continue.



## BANGLADESH STORM INTO FINAL

Captain Nazmul Huda Faisal and Opus Rahman found the net as Bangladesh marched into the final of the SAFF U-17 Championship with a 2-0 victory over Pakistan in the first semifinal at the Racecourse International Stadium in Colombo yesterday. The two-time winners, who scored 10 and are yet to concede, will face India in the September 27 final.

PHOTO: BFF