

# BASKET WITHOUT BASE

NCL T20 reveals flaws again

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu recently laid bare a harsh reality, admitting that he doesn't have enough quality players available and has to work with "what's in his basket".

The reason, as he rightly pointed out, lies in the lack of proper domestic competition. One cannot expect that basket to be filled adequately when only a handful of tournaments are organised just to complete the calendar.

Last year, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) introduced the T20 version of the National Cricket League (NCL) for the first time, aiming to expose domestic players to competitive T20 cricket and help Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) franchises identify local talent.

As the tournament wrapped up its second edition on October 12 –



with Rangpur Division clinching back-to-back titles – it's an opportune moment to assess whether the competition has lived up to its purpose.

### Minor positives

The second edition, which began on September 14, was initially scheduled in Rajshahi and Bogura but halted after four matches—three washed out—due to rain. Play resumed in Sylhet after 10 days, yet weather continued to disrupt, with six of 32 games yielding no result. Still, scoring rates improved slightly, with averages rising from 155 to 157 and run rates from 7.75 to 7.86. Financially, player fees increased from Tk 25,000 to Tk 40,000, along with higher allowances and logistical costs. But that's where the positives end.

### Harsh negatives

The 2025 edition suffered from overused Sylhet pitches and untimely rain. During the final stages, the wickets deteriorated sharply – only one of the last eight matches saw teams post more than 150 runs.

"Sylhet is under too much pressure for domestic and international matches," Chattogram Division wicketkeeper-batter Irfan Sukkur told The Daily Star. "Early on, scores were good, but in the last 8–10 matches there were hardly any innings above 150. The wicket was an issue."

While both editions produced two centuries each, the number of half-centuries fell from 41 to 29. Boundaries also dropped noticeably – 596 fours and 309 sixes this year compared to 723 fours and 418 sixes last year.

As the competition wore on, spin bowling dominated more heavily. Four of the top five wicket-takers were spinners, whereas last year's list featured three pacers and two spinners.

"During the playoffs, I saw spinners bowl the first seven or eight overs. In international matches, you might see two at most. There was no reflection of that in the NCL," said chief selector Lipu.

"Batsmen didn't get the chance to face seamers. Captains may have focused on winning, but ultimately, what did we achieve from the tournament?" he questioned.

The packed schedule exhausted players and pitches alike, with Barishal coach Mohammad Ashraful saying the event should run at least a month to allow recovery and adjustment.

### Far from destination

It would be unfair to expect the tournament meet all expectations in just two seasons. What matters most is assessing whether it's on the right track. Without better infrastructure, improved conditions, and smarter scheduling, the NCL T20 will keep missing its mark.

"We put in a good effort, but it couldn't fulfil our expectations. Better infrastructure and drainage would have helped. Players also need to improve their fitness and preparation," said BCB tournament committee manager AEM Kawser.

# Why always ‘uncomfortable’ Mirpur?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Before the start of the three-match ODI series against the West Indies, Bangladesh had managed just one win in eight outings this year. Their recent struggles in the 50-over format, including a humiliating 3-0 defeat to Afghanistan, had drawn widespread criticism for a side that appeared to have lost both confidence and competitiveness in the their once-preferred format.

However, the Mehidy Hasan Miraz-led team finally broke their four-match losing streak with a 74-run victory over the Caribbean side in the series opener on Saturday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. Yet, instead of celebration, the familiar debate over the "Mirpur formula" resurfaced – one that heavily favors spin-friendly conditions.

In an era where defending 207 runs is often seen as improbable, Bangladesh's spinners turned that modest total into a mountain, bowling out West Indies for just 133. While the win brought temporary relief, questions re-emerged about why the Tigers continue to rely on a surface many of their own players have often criticized.

Despite available venues in Sylhet and Chattogram – both offering more balanced conditions – the decision to host the series in Mirpur raised eyebrows. Bangladesh last played an ODI series at the venue back in September 2023 against New Zealand.

"Our women practiced here recently, and we saw that the wicket behaved well. But on the black soil wicket, I thought – and [pitch curator] Tony [Hemming] also had the same idea – that the wicket would be better than this," BCB cricket operation

chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

"My assumption is that due to recent rain, preparing the pitch was challenging. Covering and uncovering the wicket repeatedly may have affected how much water was applied. So, it's not easy to prepare a perfect pitch under those conditions," he added.

He added that players were also uncomfortable: "The wickets we practise on don't match what we get here... the wicket definitely had turn... but we are not comfortable."

A BCB official, meanwhile, said Mirpur hosts to ensure "even distribution among venues." On whether the team requested a specific wicket, he said "that would be known to the board or directors."

Currently ranked 10th in the ICC ODI standings and outside the direct qualification zone for the 2027 World Cup, Bangladesh face a crucial year ahead. They are scheduled to host Pakistan, New Zealand, Australia, and India for a total of 12 ODIs next year, along with eight away matches in Zimbabwe and Ireland.

That raises another question: will Bangladesh continue to rely on their spin-heavy home advantage against the world's best sides and to do that, will they prefer continuing playing in Mirpur?

"Australia and New Zealand have excellent spinners and play spin very well. So there's no chance of taking that advantage against them – in fact, we might be the ones struggling," Fahim cautioned.

While next year's venue plan isn't finalised, sources indicate Bangladesh may again lean on their Mirpur formula to bolster qualification hopes.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Tigresses aim to ‘finish strong’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to beat Sri Lanka to keep their ICC Women's World Cup semifinal hopes alive as they face the co-hosts in their penultimate league-stage fixture in Navi Mumbai today.

After opening the tournament with a win over Pakistan, the Tigresses endured close defeats against England and South Africa, leaving them sixth on the table.

Bangladesh have never beaten Sri Lanka in this format but will take confidence from their narrow one-wicket win in a warm-up game in Colombo last month.

Leg-spinner Fahima Khatun, who took two wickets and scored an unbeaten 26 in that match, said the team are "confident" and hopes the batters can "repeat that performance." Reflecting on the campaign, she added the team

played "competitive cricket against every team," and aim to "maintain the same intensity and finish strong".

Bangladesh will also be boosted by the expected return of pacer Marufa Akter, though left-arm spinner Nahida Akter remains doubtful after an ankle injury.

### Tricky heist to semis

For Bangladesh, the task is complicated: they must beat Sri Lanka and India, and hope England defeat New Zealand and the latter beat India, brining the net run rate into play.

# New events make a splash at national swimming

**The Max Group 34th National Swimming, Diving and Water Polo Championships kick off today at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur, featuring four international-standard events and women's diving for the first time. Despite progress in the pool, timekeeping remains manual as the Tk 4-crore electronic timer continues to malfunction since 2019.**



- » Four new international events introduced: men's 800m freestyle, women's 1500m freestyle, mixed 4x100m freestyle relay, and mixed 4x100m medley relay
- » Women's diving events included for the first time
- » A total of 42 swimming events and six diving events to be held over four days
- » Prize money: Tk 5,000 for new records, Tk 2,000–1,000–500 for medal winners
- » Tk 42 lakh total expenditure; Max Group contributes Tk 25 lakh
- » Egyptian coach Saeed Magdy guiding swimmers ahead of the South Asian Games.

# Abahani fall to Brothers AFTER 11 YEARS

**Defending champions Mohammedan and runners-up Abahani endured another frustrating round in the Bangladesh Football League. Abahani suffered a 2-1 defeat to Brothers Union in Cumilla, while Mohammedan squandered an early lead to draw 1-1 with Bangladesh Police in Gazipur yesterday. Both traditional powerhouses remain winless after two rounds, with Abahani having drawn goalless against Rahmatganj and Mohammedan losing 2-0 to Fortis in the opening round.**



- » Goals from Nepalese forward Anjan Bista and Brazilian Marcus Rudwere earned Brothers Union their first win over Abahani since 2014. Malian forward Souleymane Diabate reduced the margin in stoppage time but couldn't rescue the Dhanmondi-based side.
- » It was Brothers' overall third triumph over Abahani in the professional football league since its introduction in 2007. The Gopibagh outfit now sit fourth in the table with three points from two matches.
- » In Gazipur, Rahim Uddin's 19th-minute volley put Mohammedan ahead, but SM Bablu equalised for Police in the 49th minute. Police have now drawn seven of their 11 league meetings with Mohammedan.
- » After two games, both Abahani and Mohammedan sit eighth and ninth respectively in the 10-team table with a single point each. Police and Rahmatganj share the top spot with four points apiece, the latter edging Fakirerpool Young Men's Club 1-0 in Manikganj.

## Career stats so far

	Appearance	Goals	Assists	Minutes per goal contribution	Hattricks incl. penalties
Messi	1130	889	399	72	13 (21.7%)
Ronaldo	1292	949	259	87	29 (43.9%)

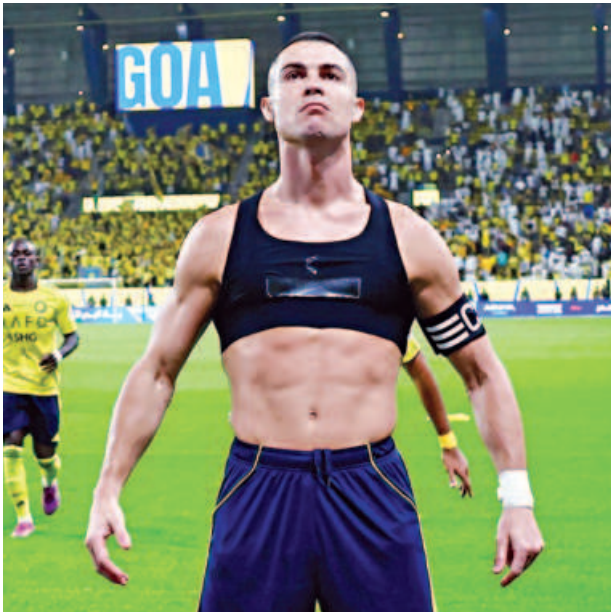
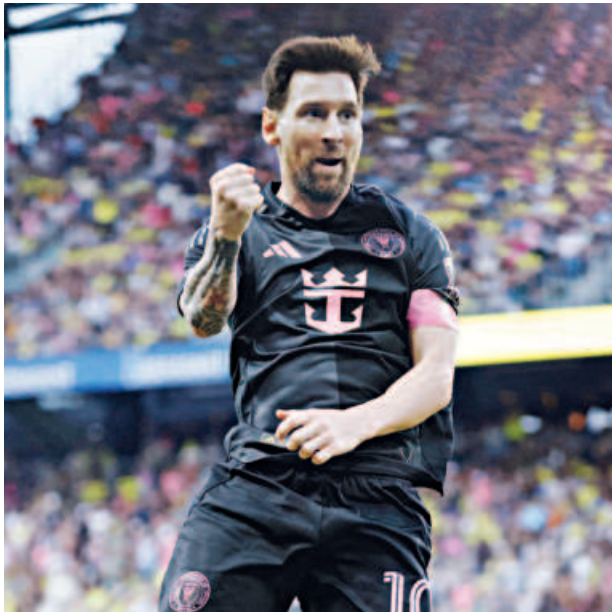


PHOTO: FACEBOOK/AFP

On a night when two footballing titans reminded the world of their enduring brilliance, Cristiano Ronaldo fired his 949th career goal -- a thunderous strike moments after missing a penalty in a Saudi Pro League fixture -- to lead Al Nassr's 5-1 rout of Al Fateh in Riyadh, while across the Atlantic, Lionel Messi delivered a vintage hattrick and an assist as Inter Miami stormed into the MLS playoffs with a 5-2 win over Nashville in Tennessee on Saturday. Messi sealed the Golden Boot with 29 goals, notched his 50th club hattrick, and closed the overall gap to six behind Ronaldo's record 66.