



Bangladesh Women's U-19 team beat Pakistan by three wickets in the second of the five-match T20 series at the Cox's Bazar Academy Ground on Friday to level the series 1-1, after suffering a 13-run defeat in the opener. The third match will be played at the same venue on Sunday.

PHOTO: BCB

NCL set for exciting finish

SPORTS REPORTER

The 27th National Cricket League (NCL) is set for an exciting finish, with six of the eight teams still in contention for the title as the final round begins today.

Table-toppers and defending champions Sylhet will take on Barishal at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium. Barishal currently have 18 points, and a win would allow them to match Sylhet's tally of 26. However, under NCL rules, teams can earn bonus points for winning by an innings or by 10 wickets, scenarios that may come into play in this fixture.

Sylhet remain in a strong position for the title following their 10-wicket victory over Rajshahi in the previous round.

Veteran batter Shamsur Rahman, representing Barishal this season, is set to retire from first-class cricket after this match, and the 37-year-old hopes to end his career "on a good note".

Mymensingh, the newest team in the NCL, trail Sylhet by just two points and are also well-placed to challenge for the title in their debut season. They will face Rajshahi at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Rangpur, who have faced setbacks this season -- drawing three and losing one of their six matches -- will take on Khulna in Bogura. Khulna, who have drawn their last three games, also remain in contention.

With bonus points also available for consecutive wins, Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Chattogram all stand to gain extra points if they secure victories in the final round.

Dhaka, who are not in the title race, could hamper Chattogram Division's title aspirations as they face off at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

A course correction forgotten?

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

The 2021 ICC T20 World Cup was a disaster for Bangladesh.

The campaign began with a defeat to Scotland in the preliminary round and ended with five losses and zero wins in the main phase.

The Tigers had come into the tournament with a false sense of confidence, having just registered two landmark series wins at home against second-string Australia and New Zealand sides on heavily doctored wickets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

Those matches left the players unprepared for what was waiting for them in the UAE and they looked like fish out of water on proper T20 wickets.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), to its credit, learned its lesson and **corrected course** before the next T20 World Cup. The board arranged a tri-series against Pakistan and New Zealand in New Zealand on November 2022, right before the event kicked off in Australia that same month.

The board couldn't arrange a high-profile preparatory series in the build-up to the 2024 edition, but it sent the side to the USA -- one of the host countries -- for a series against the Associate side.

Although the Tigers lost 2-1, they exceeded expectations in the main tournament, registering three wins -- most ever for them in a single edition -- and making it to the second round. The Tigers even had a great chance of making it to the semifinal for the first time, which they squandered.

Bangladesh are now

approaching the 2026 edition, set to take place in India and Sri Lanka starting from February 7. But rather than building towards the event as a team, the players will be busy vying against each other in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), beginning on December 26.

The Tigers have already completed their last T20I

in a no-result.

They have blown hot and cold away from home, winning series over Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, while also losing 2-1 to the UAE and getting clean-swept by Pakistan. At the Asia Cup at the UAE in September, they progressed to the Super Fours but could not make it to the final.



assignment before the World Cup, a home series against Ireland which they won 2-1. Before the Irish, the Tigers played three T20Is against West Indies in Chattogram in October and lost all of those.

Unlike the previous two editions, Bangladesh will neither face top sides nor play matches in the host country in the build-up.

Bangladesh have played a lot of T20Is in 2025 -- 30 in total which is also the highest ever for them in one year -- but the results have been a mixed bag. They have won 15 matches -- most ever in a year for them, lost 14 and one game ended

At home, before the humiliation against the Caribbeans and the triumph over the Irish, they won series against Pakistan and the Netherlands.

As the T20 World Cup is set to begin just two weeks after the BPL final, it leaves no room for the board to arrange a preparatory series for the Tigers. But there was enough scope to do that before the BPL. Such laissez-faire attitude from the BCB before a T20 World Cup seems like courting disaster, much like they had done in 2021. Whether it leads to a similarly disastrous campaign is left to be seen.

Kings put five past Brothers

SPORTS REPORTER

Leaders Bashundhara Kings extended their winning run in the Bangladesh Football League with a resounding 5-1 victory over a spirited Brothers Union at the Shaheed Birshreshtha Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Dorielton Gomes bagged a brace while Emmanuel Sunday, Faisal Ahmed Fahim and Sohel Rana Jr scored one apiece.

The fourth successive win strengthened the five-time champions' grip on the top of the 10-team table, taking them to 13 points from five matches.

It also preserved their unbeaten record against Brothers Union in professional league encounters -- eight wins and two draws in 10 meetings.

Nasrin make dreadful start in SAFF tourney

SPORTS REPORTER

Nasrin Sports Academy made a dreadful start to their SAFF Women's Club Championship campaign, suffering a 4-0 defeat to Nepal's APF Football Club in the second match of the opening day in Kathmandu yesterday.

Fielding several players from the national U-17 and U-20 women's teams, Nasrin initially showed promise and matched APF in the early exchanges. However, the more experienced Nepalese side, powered by a brace each from Rashmi Ghising and Mina Deuba, ultimately proved too strong.

Nasrin even appeared to have the upper hand for a brief spell before a defensive lapse allowed APF to take the lead in the 38th minute, with Rashmi scoring from close range after a goalmouth melee. Mina doubled the advantage in the 70th minute, breaking an offside trap to slot home.

Rashmi extended the lead to 3-0 in the 80th minute, and Mina completed the rout by netting her second goal in stoppage time.

Nasrin will face Pakistan's Karachi FC in their second match. Karachi were held to a goalless draw by Bhutan's Transport United in the tournament opener at the same venue.

LABUSCHAGNE FIRST TO 1K RUNS IN PINK-BALL TESTS

A relentless Australia seized a 44-run lead over England on Day 2 of the second Ashes Test in Brisbane on Friday, with Marnus Labuschagne (65) becoming the first-ever batter to reach the 1000-run milestone in pink-ball Tests. Labuschagne has now scored 1,023 runs across 16 innings at an average of 63.93. Alongside Labuschagne, Australia stand-in skipper Steve Smith (61) and opener Jake Weatherald (72) also smashed fifties to help the hosts end the day on 378 for six -- the most by a team in a day's play in pink-ball Tests, bettering 348 by England against West Indies on Day 1 in 2017 -- after England made 334 all out in first innings.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Can hybrid wickets solve Mirpur conundrum?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The conversation around the Mirpur wickets has been a long-standing issue in Bangladesh cricket.

A generation of players have had to curate their game to the low and slow tracks usually on offer, impeding growth across formats. Players such as Litton Das and Nazmul Hossain Shanto had been vocal in their demands for decent playing surfaces, but in Bangladesh cricket, talks of sporting wickets being equated to the production of quality cricketers have hardly ever been discussed seriously.

Over the last six months, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul has also heard the pleas of several national team stars who talked about not just match wickets but bad practice wickets.

Mirpur, however, has been a precarious challenge. With 218 matches since the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium's inception in 2006, the venue is sixth in the list of the most international matches in a single stadium. Four out of the five venues in the top five are over a hundred years old, giving an impression of the high frequency of matches and why tired wickets became a Mirpur issue.

Soil inconsistencies have often prevented proper preparation of

wickets, according to BCB sources.

This is where the conversation around hybrid wickets has come in. The wickets are easier to maintain and more durable, known for having quicker recovery time and, as per sources, easier to install as well. The benefits are that natural grass is still in play. The process involves



intertwining fibres with natural grass. Most importantly, it produces consistent bounce.

The BCB boss also confirmed that the discussion around hybrid wickets has come up. "The cost has come up as one of the issues," Bulbul told The Daily Star.

"Since labour cost is lesser here, we have to decide whether we will

bring hybrid wickets at that cost," he added, noting a hybrid pitch costs around 30,000 AUD. The BCB boss felt that instead of buying at high costs, sending curators abroad to learn the technology would help the board implement such wickets here if and when purchase of required materials take place. In Tony Hemming, BCB has someone well adept at building these wickets.

The board plans to dismantle the greenhouse facilities at Mirpur, as those wickets were unused. With more pitches needed, hybrids are an option. The ICC has approved them for T20Is and ODIs, while the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) trialled hybrids for a year in the County Championship.

But all is not rosy when discussion comes to adaptability. Last year, a Gloucestershire vs Northamptonshire county match was abandoned owing to safety concerns for batters on a hybrid wicket. BCB officials say hybrids could be trialled on a "test case basis" to see if reliability outweighs costs, as "what the wickets will be like in our conditions is still unknown".

For now, the main question is whether hybrid wickets can solve the Mirpur conundrum. With batters complaining about practice turfs, it may be the answer, depending on adaptability to Bangladesh's conditions.

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