

"They say Australia isn't the place for weak men. We're definitely not weak, but we need to find something."

England captain Ben Stokes

"Great day. First two days were pretty even, game turned when we were able to extend to get the new ball under lights, that was crucial for us."

Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith



PHOTO: AFP

Zakir ton keeps Sylhet alive in NCL

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet recovered from a shaky start against Barishal thanks to Zakir Hasan's unbeaten century on Day Two of the final NCL round at the Rajshahi Divisional Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Barishal were dismissed for 312 after Sohag Gazi's brisk 68, before Sylhet slumped to 47 for four. Zakir then rebuilt with a 113-run stand with Ashraful Hasan, reaching his ton off 151 balls and ending the day on 130 not out as Sylhet closed at 214 for 5, trailing by 98.

Second placed Mymensingh fared poorly, collapsing from 73 for 2 to 137 all out at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, with Rajshahi's Sunzamul Islam taking five for 18. Rajshahi reached 210 for 6, extending their lead to 292.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura, Rangpur kept their title hopes alive after being bowled out for 174 in reply to Khulna's 308. They hit back strongly, reducing Khulna to 41 for 5 at stumps.

At Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka dented Chattogram's chances by declaring on 541 for 6 before leaving them reeling at 94 for 6, still 447 behind.

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh T20I side right now is strewn with openers and figuring out how they can be incorporated in different roles is a question the management is trying to answer before the ICC T20 World Cup comes around in February next year.

In the recently-concluded three-match Ireland series, the Tigers rotated their openers. Parvez Hossain Emon and Tanzid Hasan Tamim opened the innings in the first two matches while in the final T20I, Saif Hassan replaced Parvez at the top.

Skipper Litton Das is also an opener in the white ball scheme, having opened in 69 out of his 118 T20I innings. But he has opened in only two of the 25 T20Is he has played in 2025 and has settled into the No.3 slot.

With not many alternatives available in a shallow pipeline of players, the management has to find a way to utilise the openers in other roles in the top order and hopefully churn the best out of them.

The national team batters, including Emon, Tanzid and Saif, are undergoing a skill camp at the Academy Ground in Mirpur under the watchful supervision of head coach Phil Simmons, senior assistant coach Mohammad Salauddin and specialised batting coach Mohammad Ashraful.

"Personally, I think it's better for



batters' to have a settled place. However, right now, we have four [openers] in the top order. All four players have been very successful last year," said Ashraful.

"They are scoring a big fifty every second or third match in T20Is... Saif, Parvez, and Tanzid possess the ability to hit sixes standing in their position, not all batters can do that," he added.

Saif has batted at No. 3 and 4 in franchise T20 tournaments like the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and the Global Super League (GSL).

Even though he made his mark for the national side while opening in this year's Asia Cup, he is the likeliest candidate to come down to No.4 in the T20 World Cup set to take place in India and Sri Lanka.

"If we look at Saif's domestic career, he has about 10 centuries in List-A cricket and eight centuries in first-class cricket. When Saif scores, he scores big and he is used to batting as an opener or at No. 3 or 4," Ashraful said.

The former Bangladesh captain also shared that to solve the problem of batting collapses, the coaches are working with the openers in the camp to hone their shot selection and improve execution of low-risk scoring shots.

"Specifically, this training is about ensuring we play more grounded shots. We have the ability to play aerial shots, but we are trying to work on playing more cricketing shots along the ground," he said on the work done with openers.

BAF's nationwide drive puts 25,000 schoolkids on track

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) is set to launch a nationwide initiative called Athletics Compass under the World Athletics 'Grant for Growth' project.

The programme aims to involve school-going children in sports to promote better health and support social development.

Around 25,000 children, aged four to 14, from 64 schools are expected to take part in separate events in Jashore, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Rangamati, Mymensingh and Dhaka. Students from both primary and secondary schools will learn basic athletic skills, including running, jumping, throwing and safeguarding.

In addition, 96 physical education teachers will receive foundational athletics training so they can continue guiding students in sports activities throughout the year.

World Athletics has provided a grant of USD 30,000 (Tk 36.5 lakh) after BAF submitted a proposal to strengthen athletics at the grassroots. The federation has also allocated Tk 15



lakh to support the project.

"Our aim is not simply to produce national-level athletes, but to encourage families to embrace a sporting culture that promotes good health, reduces disease and supports social development," said BAF general

secretary Shah Alam at a press briefing. He cited a World Health Organisation survey indicating that 81 percent of children lack opportunities to engage in an hour of daily physical activity.

"We believe every child is born to move, to play and to explore," added the former athlete.

Project manager and BAF joint secretary Kitab Ali said the initiative prioritises children's health rather than elite talent identification.

"If even five out of 25,000 students eventually enter mainstream athletics, we will consider that a success," he said.

Kitab, a former national coach, also noted that the project is expected to run until 2027, depending on funding from World Athletics and the federation.

The programme will start in Jashore on December 10, followed by events in Sunamganj from December 20-24, Jamalganj upazila from December 27-31, Rangamati from January 5-9, Jhenaighati from January 21-25 and Dhaka from January 26-30.

Ashes hopes fading away for England

England are now staring down the barrel in the Ashes, having suffered another comprehensive eight-wicket defeat against Australia on Day 4 of the Day-Night second Test in Brisbane on Sunday. History suggests Ben Stokes' men must now overcome overwhelming odds to regain the urn, as they trail the five-match series 2-0.

- England became the first team to lose a Day-Night Test after scoring 300+ when batting first.
- Only once in the previous 22 attempts have England lost the Gabba Test and went on to win the Ashes -- a 3-1 win in 1954/55.
- This is the 15th instance of England being 0-2 down after the first two Tests of an Ashes series in Australia. They went on to lose all previous 14 such occasions.
- Australia's Steve Smith is yet to lose a Test as a stand-in skipper, having led the side to eight wins and three draws in 11 matches.
- Playing on his home ground, 35-year-old pacer Michael Neser registered his maiden five-wicket haul in Tests (5/42) to help the hosts bundle out England for just 241 in the second innings, needing just 65 to win.

Norris crowned F1 world champion

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris claimed his maiden Formula One world drivers' title in Abu Dhabi on Sunday, ending Max Verstappen's four-year reign.

The Briton finished third in the season closer behind race winner Verstappen and the other title challenger, McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri, to claim the crown by two points.

Norris, in tears on the team radio, said: "Thanks so much. I love you mum, I love you dad."

"That was exciting, a little too exciting, awesome," said McLaren team principal Zak Brown.

Norris becomes Britain's first world champion since Lewis Hamilton in 2020 with this 13th drivers' crown for McLaren.

The 26-year-old's success comes over half a century after Emerson Fittipaldi claimed the British marque's first drivers' title in 1974.

A galaxy of F1 greats followed -- James Hunt (1976), Niki Lauda (1984), Alain Prost (1985, 1986, 1989), Ayrton Senna (1988, 1990, 1991), Mika Hakkinen (1998, 1999) and Hamilton in 2008.

McLaren, headed by team principal Andrea Stella and CEO Brown, secured back-to-back constructors' titles in Singapore last month.

Sunday's season closer was the first time the title was decided by a contest involving more than two drivers since a four-way scrap at the final race in Abu Dhabi in 2010.

Salah signals Liverpool exit

AGENCIES

Mohamed Salah has cast serious doubt over his Liverpool future after unleashing a blistering attack on the club and manager Arne Slot, saying he has been "thrown under the bus" during the team's turbulent run. The 33-year-old has been benched for three consecutive matches, including Saturday's 3-3 draw at Leeds, where he was not used at all.

Salah told reporters he felt scapegoated for Liverpool's poor form. "I have done so much for this club down the years and especially last season. Now I'm sitting on the bench and I don't know why. It seems like the club has thrown me under the bus," he said, adding: "I think it is very clear that someone wanted me to get all of the blame."

He also suggested his relationship with Slot had broken down. "I said many times before that I had a good relationship with the manager and all of a sudden, we don't have any relationship. I don't know why, but it seems to me someone doesn't want me in the club," Salah said. He noted he had been given "a lot of promises in the summer" that he feels have not been kept.

With the Africa Cup of Nations approaching, Salah hinted that Liverpool's upcoming home match against Brighton could be his farewell. "I will be at Anfield to say goodbye to the fans... I don't know what is going to happen now," he said, having already invited his parents to attend.

Slot defended his benching decisions, saying the team "needed something different" tactically.



'THE MOMENT MESSI, MIAMI HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR'

Lionel Messi inspired Inter Miami to their first-ever MLS Cup title on Saturday, playing a starring role in a 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Whitecaps in Florida. Argentina superstar Messi provided assists for two goals and helped create another to spark wild celebrations before a rapturous home crowd at the Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale. "This is the moment that I've been waiting for, and that we as a team have been waiting for," Messi, who has now won record 47 major trophies, said afterwards.

PHOTO: REUTERS