

### T SPORTS

New Zealand vs West Indies

2nd Test, Day 1

Live from 4:00 pm

ILT20

Gulf Giants vs Sharjah

Warrior

Live from 8:30 pm

SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5

Champions League

Live from 11:45 pm:

Qarabag vs Ajax

Live from 2:00 am

(Thursday):

Real Madrid vs Man City

Athletic Bilbao vs PSG

Club Brugge vs Arsenal

### 'A signal to quit': Shamsur's moment of clarity

After a first-class career spanning nearly two decades, domestic stalwart **Shamsur Rahman Shuvo** has retired from red-ball cricket following the recently concluded 27th National Cricket League (NCL). Interestingly, he had not planned to step away this season, but a particular dismissal during the tournament offered unexpected clarity. Finishing with 9,602 first-class runs, Shamsur reflected on his journey, satisfaction, disappointments, his views on Bangladesh's domestic system, and his future plans in an interview with **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan**. The excerpts are as follows:

**DS:** Being so close to the 10,000-run milestone, what made you retire before reaching it?

**Shamsur Rahman Shuvo (SRS):** A cricketer doesn't retire so close to a milestone without any reason. I did not have a good time with the bat this year, and also did not get the support -- and by that I mean mental freshness. That's why I decided it is the best time to remove myself, providing juniors an opportunity to play in my place which would make me feel good.

**DS:** Having played for Dhaka Division for so long, do you regret retiring as a Barishal player instead of with your own division?

**SRS:** I played for Dhaka for 17 years -- meaning Dhaka Metro and Dhaka Division. When such an established team is not available (for me), and as a player, when I get an opportunity in another division, it certainly feels bad that I couldn't retire from my own division.

**DS:** Did you decide beforehand to retire after this season?

**SRS:** No, I didn't decide beforehand. I made the decision this year, on the ground.

**DS:** What triggered the decision?

**SRS:** First, it occurred to me that I have left behind my good time. The second was when I was bowled by a Rishad [Hossain] delivery in Bogura. I found the manner of the dismissal very surprising. I defended on the back foot and was bowled after the ball dropped straight onto the ground -- I stood my ground for a while, thinking that it is perhaps a signal that this was the best time for me to quit.

**DS:** What changes have you seen in domestic cricket in the last 20 years?

**SRS:** I won't say there has been much change. We create a lot of hype before every season, but nothing new happens. Increase in match fees, DA, staying at good hotels and traveling by flight are the improvements -- but not so much when it comes to the ground or other on-field things, which should have been the case for a country playing Test cricket for 25 years.

**DS:** What is the reason behind that stagnation?

**SRS:** We should change our mindset. Where do we actually want to see our country's cricket, and where do we want to take it? When you don't think that way, nothing will improve.

**DS:** What is the most satisfying part of your career? Any regrets?

**SRS:** My greatest achievement was to play Test cricket, and to play in all three formats for Bangladesh. And, I have no regrets.

**DS:** What are your future plans?

**SRS:** I won't play for long. Maximum, if I play this year and then retire from competitive cricket. My plan is to stay connected with cricket as I have played since childhood. I would like to serve Bangladesh if the BCB gives me an opportunity in some capacity.



## Akbar hails Rangpur spirit in 'competitive' NCL

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

As dusk settled over Rajshahi Division Cricket Ground yesterday, the match between Sylhet and Barishal ended in an expected draw, handing Rangpur the title with 31 points, having secured a seven-wicket win over Khulna a day earlier.

It marked Rangpur's first NCL longer-format title since the 2022-23 season and completed a domestic double after their success in the NCL T20 in October.

Winning any trophy is always special, but this time it was even sweeter for captain Akbar Ali due to the competitiveness of the tournament, which had often been questioned, and the quality of the wickets, which added further satisfaction.

This season, the tournament entered the final round with six teams still in contention. That intense competition set the perfect stage for celebration for Akbar and his teammates in Bogura, where every session felt meaningful and every wicket carried added value.

"[The competitiveness] It's a big thing. All of us were watching the match on our phones, and everyone was supporting Barishal today. We even played football today, and the plan was to leave here celebrating the title," said Akbar, who returned from the Rising Asia Cup to lead Rangpur to the four-day tournament triumph.

The celebrations highlighted the strong camaraderie within the Rangpur unit. Akbar emphasised the team's competitive edge -- their selflessness.

"When teams are formed, no one probably keeps us on the favourites' list, but the way everyone fights for this team is our biggest strength. Everyone plays selfless cricket here," he told The Daily Star.

This season's NCL also introduced several new elements, with Kookaburra balls used in the first two rounds to prepare national team players ahead of the Ireland Tests, and Dukes balls coming into play from the third round. There were more high-quality wickets on offer, and Akbar, the ICC Under-19 World Cup-winning skipper, was especially pleased with how

statistics, with Khulna's Soumya Sarkar fighting tooth and nail to become the top scorer, despite struggling with the transition from ODIs to first-class cricket at the start of the tournament, proving that resilience and quality thrive under pressure.

Rangpur's Iqbal Hosen and Sylhet's Amite Hasan also delivered notable performances. From a

### NCL 2025-26: Season highlights

**Champions:** Rangpur Division (third title)

**Runners-up:** Sylhet Division

**Player of the tournament:** Mukul Islam Mugdho (Rangpur Division). Wickets - 29 at an average of 13.03 and a strike-rate of 23.93.

**Top run-scorer:** Soumya Sarkar (Khulna Division) -- 633 runs in 14 innings at an average of 45.21, including one century and four half-centuries.

**Highest individual score:** Amite Hasan (Sylhet Division) -- 213 against Rajshahi Division. This was the only double-century of the league.

**Most hundreds:** Marshall Ayub (Dhaka Division) -- 3 centuries

**Top wicket-taker:** Tanvir Islam (Barishal Division) -- 34 wickets at an average of 22.61, including two five-wicket hauls.

**Hattrick:** Afif Hossain (Khulna Division) vs Barishal Division

### Career landmarks

\*Marshall Ayub became only the fourth Bangladeshi batter to reach 10,000 first-class runs, joining Tushar Imran, Naeem Islam and Mominul Haque.

\*Shuvagata Hom became just the second Bangladeshi player, after Shakib Al Hasan, to complete the double of 6,000 runs and 300 wickets in first-class cricket.

the Bogura pitches rewarded the disciplined bowlers willing to attack.

"When there is grass on these wickets, like in Bogura, it's challenging for the batters. That was great for us since we needed wins -- there was no other option. A result-oriented wicket was very good for us," he said.

The tournament's competitiveness also shone in the

selectors' perspective, the NCL showcased real competitiveness.

"This time, I felt the competitiveness of the tournament really increased. The players appeared serious, and the wickets were excellent at Sylhet, Bogura, and Rajshahi. The transition from Kookaburra to Dukes was also good, as it raised the challenge," selector Hasibul Hossain Shanto said.



## Real vs City: Pressure, problems, and high stakes

Real Madrid vs Manchester City has become a Champions League staple -- a fixture known for producing moments of brilliance and for storylines that dominate discussion long before kickoff. This meeting is no different. Real Madrid enter the contest missing key players through injury and suspension, uncertain over the availability of their most prolific forward, and facing growing pressure on coach Xabi Alonso -- circumstances Pep Guardiola's Manchester City will look to exploit.

» This will be the 15th meeting between the two sides in the Champions League. Since their first encounter in 2012-13, it has become the most-played fixture in the competition.

» Pep Guardiola faces Real coach Xabi Alonso -- whom he coached at Bayern Munich -- for the first time as a manager.

» Real have won just two of their last seven games in all competitions, with Spanish media suggesting Alonso could be sacked if they lose to Guardiola's side.

» Adding to Alonso's challenges, Real could be without up to eight key players, including Champions League and LaLiga top scorer Kylian Mbappe, who missed Tuesday's training with an injury.

» City arrive on a three-match winning run, while Real suffered a 2-0 defeat to Celta Vigo at the weekend, leaving them four points adrift of LaLiga leaders Barcelona.

» City will look to Erling Haaland,

who has scored 20 goals in all competitions this season. Only Mbappe (25) and Harry Kane (28) have scored more in 2025-26 among players in Europe's top five leagues.

» City sit ninth in the 36-team Champions League standings, two points behind fifth-placed Real. Both teams have one loss, but Real have four wins to City's three and can strengthen their top-eight position with a victory.

» Despite City's momentum, they have lost their last two matches against Real, falling at home and away in last season's play-off round.



## Rockey eyes 'goal machine' tag

Penalty-corner specialist **Amirul Islam** deservedly stole the spotlight with a staggering 18 goals as Bangladesh clinched the Challenger Trophy in their maiden FIH Men's Junior Hockey World Cup campaign. Yet it was **Rakibul Hasan Rockey** who orchestrated the attacking play with his breathtaking stickwork and dribbling, scoring five goals and creating numerous others for his teammates. In an interview with **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman**, the Kishoreganj-born midfielder discussed the team's campaign, the state of hockey in Bangladesh, and his own ambitions. The excerpts are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** Despite limited preparation, Bangladesh surprised many by finishing 17th on debut -- the best among the bottom eight. How did the turnaround happen?

**Rakibul Hasan Rockey (RHR):** We had hoped to reach at least the quarterfinals, but our group was extremely tough with Australia, France and South Korea. Even so, we're proud of what we achieved. It reflects months of hard work... From the very start, we were determined to give everything. The staff backed us, and our confidence grew after beating Switzerland 5-3 in a warm-up match. Once we learnt that a Challenger Trophy would be awarded after the group stage, we made it our mission to bring home Bangladesh's first global hockey trophy.

**DS:** What changed after coach Seigfried Aikman arrived?

**RHR:** He rebuilt our defensive organisation and kept the message simple -- make the defence solid, and chances will come. We also benefitted from earlier work under coaches Ashiquzzaman in the qualifiers and Moududur Rahman Shuvo in the Junior Asia Cup.

**DS:** Any regrets about scoring only five goals, given your previous tallies?

**RHR:** Not at all. After the Austria match, coach Aikman hugged me and kissed me on my forehead, saying I had done exactly what the team needed. That meant far more than individual numbers. Playing for the team mattered above everything.

**DS:** You were heavily involved in both attack and defence. How did you manage that workload?

**RHR:** As a senior player in the U-21 setup and a member of the national team, I took responsibility at both ends. My target was to win penalty corners knowing Amirul was in peak form to finish them. We've played together for years, and none of us played for our names.

**DS:** Can the senior team rely on you for open play goals? And how do you react to comparisons with Jimmy?

**RHR:** [Rasel Mahmud] Jimmy bhai is still our best forward and is far ahead of me in terms of experience, fame and performance. He has been playing for 21 years. But I do want to make a name for myself and attract crowds one day. I want people to know me as a goal machine.

**DS:** What are your long-term goals?

**RHR:** My hidden dream is to play in the Olympics and help Bangladesh reach the Games.

**DS:** What do you feel you need to improve?

**RHR:** I need to work on my physique because I gain weight easily. My stickwork and quick decision-making are strengths, but I need to improve my temperament and finishing.

**DS:** You'll now return home with no domestic matches ahead. How does that feel?

**RHR:** When there is no domestic action, we quickly lose fitness, and it really pains us. I expect the federation to restart all domestic competitions -- league, franchise events, school hockey and more -- because this is our bread and butter. And unless I see young players pushing to take my place, there's no real urgency to grow. That's why domestic tournaments are essential.



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