

# BPL 12 begins today with chaos in tow

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The Bangladesh Premier League T20 (BPL) returns for its 12th edition today, promising cricketing excitement but once again shadowed by controversy. From organisational hiccups to franchise turmoil, chaos seems inseparable from the league's narrative, setting the tone even before the first ball is bowled.

As the tournament gets underway at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, with Sylhet Titans facing Rajshahi Warriors in the opener, controversies continue to surface despite repeated assurances of a smoothly run event.

The newly elected Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), led by Aminul Islam Bulbul, took charge just two and a half months ago and faced a range of organisational challenges, such as broadcasting, security and logistical issues among others. While much groundwork was done, several gaps remained.

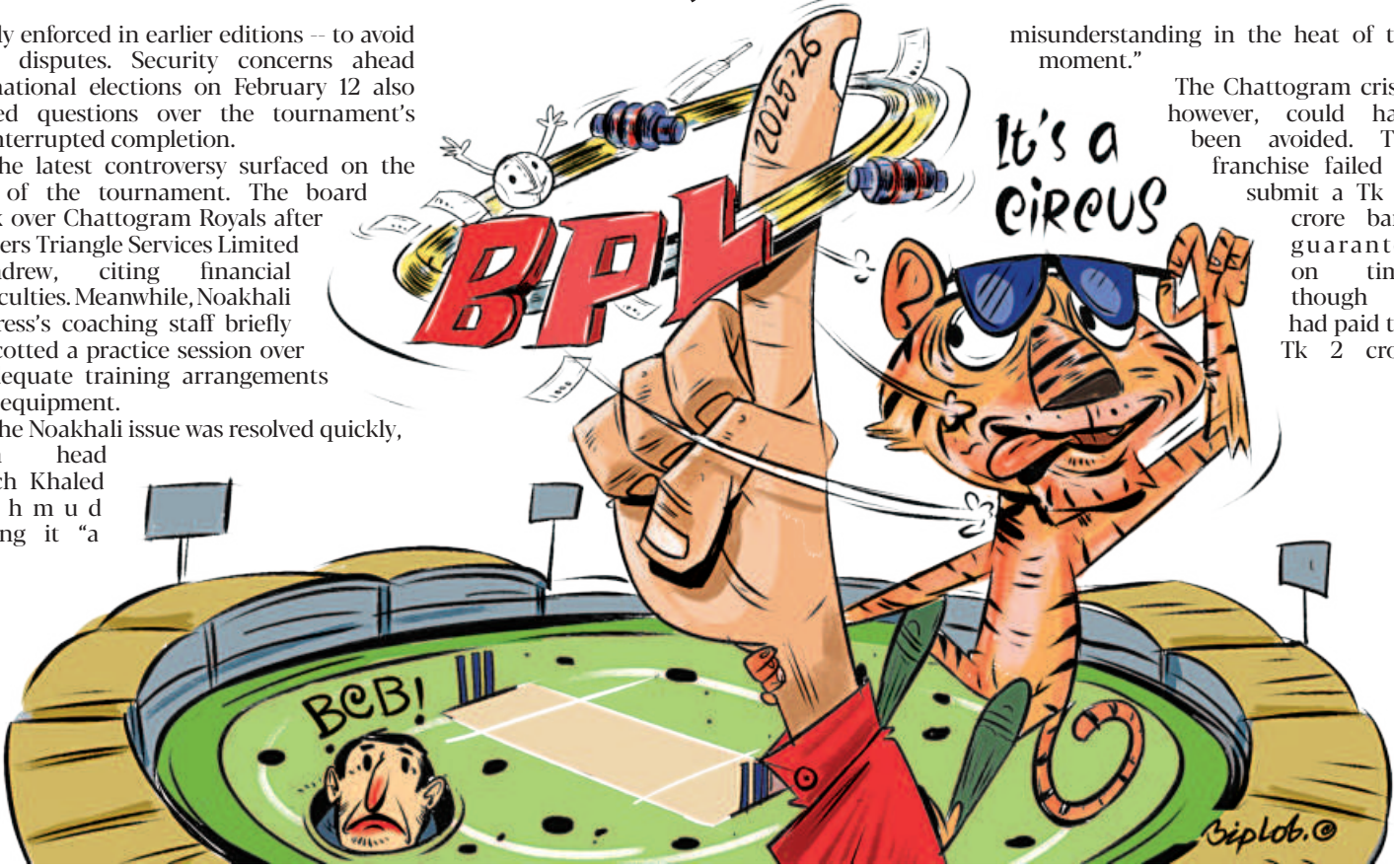
Six franchises were awarded for the next five seasons, and the players' auction returned for the first time in 12 years. Controversy struck even before the auction, with several players dropped over alleged involvement in fixing during the previous edition.

This season, the board adopted a tougher stance on franchise payments, insisting on participation fees and bank guarantees --

rarely enforced in earlier editions -- to avoid past disputes. Security concerns ahead of national elections on February 12 also raised questions over the tournament's uninterrupted completion.

The latest controversy surfaced on the eve of the tournament. The board took over Chattogram Royals after owners Triangle Services Limited withdrew, citing financial difficulties. Meanwhile, Noakhali Express's coaching staff briefly boycotted a practice session over inadequate training arrangements and equipment.

The Noakhali issue was resolved quickly, with head coach Khaled M a h m u d calling it "a



misunderstanding in the heat of the moment."

The Chattogram crisis, however, could have been avoided. The franchise failed to submit a Tk 10 crore bank guarantee on time, though it had paid the Tk 2 crore

participation fee. On December 9, BCB announced that Chattogram had settled its dues, but operational problems persisted. The team had no foreign players in Bangladesh and changed coaching staff multiple times.

"In the letter, they (Chattogram) said they failed to secure sponsors due to negative media coverage," said BPL governing body member secretary Iftekhhar Rahman Mithu.

Following the takeover, BCB appointed former captain Habibul Bashar as team director, with Mizanur Rahman Babul and Nafees Iqbal named head coach and team manager. Uncertainty remains over player payments, coaching continuity and overseas player availability. Mithu expressed hope that two foreign cricketers -- one from Pakistan and one from the UAE -- could arrive before Chattogram's opening match.

Amid the off-field turmoil, players have focused on cricket. Sylhet Titans captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz said the team was concentrating "on our team because discussing these matters too much can disrupt the environment."

As BPL 12 unfolds, the league once again stands at the crossroads of promise and uncertainty. Whether it can deliver thrilling cricket while navigating its familiar controversies will determine if this edition is remembered for the action on the field or the chaos that walks alongside it.

## Christmas moments

Despite a packed holiday schedule, footballers still found heart-warming moments on and off the pitch. Liverpool shared a cheerful Christmas Eve photo on Wednesday, showing the squad in buoyant spirits during training, dressed in red practice kits and Santa hats while linking arms on the pitch. Manchester City striker Erling Haaland joined the celebrations by dressing up as Santa Claus and posing with a sack full of presents. Barcelona forward Robert Lewandowski struck a cosy note, posing with his family in matching red checkered pyjamas, while City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma smiled alongside his partner and child in front of a Christmas tree. Spain and Chelsea defender Marc Cucurella also shared a festive family photo in matching blue pyjamas, and Brazil winger Raphinha beamed with his family in a Christmas-themed snap. Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer did it differently as he was seen in shorts on a beach next to a Christmas tree. While such moments offered festive warmth, football's relentless calendar rolls on, with the Premier League and Serie A set to stage Boxing Day fixtures even as much of the rest of Europe pauses for a winter break. Photos: Instagram



## Zidane watches on as son makes AFCON debut

AGENCIES

The floodlights of Rabat shimmered with more than just footballing drama as Algeria opened their Africa Cup of Nations campaign with a commanding 3-0 victory over Sudan on Wednesday.



Among the spectators in the Moroccan capital was a familiar face to the global game: Zinedine Zidane. The France and Real Madrid legend watched proudly from the stands as his son, Luca Zidane, stood between the posts for Algeria, turning a routine group-stage win into a moment steeped in legacy.

"When I think of Algeria, I remember my grandfather. Since childhood, we've had this Algerian culture in the family," Luca Zidane told BeIN Sports France after the match. "Every time I receive an international call-up, he calls me and says that I made a great decision and that he is proud of me."

### A LOOK BACK AT 2025

## Hope flickers despite hurdles

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Hope and despair -- Bangladesh women's cricket team saw both sides of the coin in 2025, as the possibilities shown this year and the turbulence faced both on and off the field left them standing on the precipice of either progress or regression going into the new year.

As the year is revisited, a few performances continue to light beacons of hope.

The narrative was shaped by the biggest event in Bangladesh women's cricket in 2025, the ODI World Cup held in September-November. The lead-up to the event, however, carried heartbreak and frustration -- heartbreak in failing to secure direct qualification, and frustration in how, even after eventually booking a place in the mega event, the team were let down by the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) lack of foresight in arranging a proper preparation phase.

The Tigresses toured the West Indies in January with direct qualification in line, but a 2-1 series loss forced them into the six-team World Cup Qualifiers in Pakistan in April.

Qualification itself came by the narrowest of margins and a near miracle, as Bangladesh grabbed the second spot at the expense of West Indies, who finished just 0.013 behind in net run-rate after both teams secured three wins.

There was respite amid the struggle. A ton against Thailand saw skipper Nigar Sultana Joty become the first woman centurion from Bangladesh in an ICC ODI

event. Joty and Sharmin Akter Supta finished as the second and third highest run-getters of the qualifiers. The Women's Dhaka Premier League in March also offered encouraging signs, with several batters showing greater tenacity and attacking intent.

However, following the league, World Cup preparation plans hit



a snag. The Tigresses went into the showcase without playing a single international bilateral series since the West Indies tour.

Instead of competitive international fixtures, camps and tournaments with the national U-15 boys' team were all that BCB could arrange. The lack of competitive preparation showed during the World Cup, particularly in crunch moments.

Bangladesh collectively failed to grab close matches by the scruff

of the neck, something that might have been different with proper international exposure before the World Cup. They ended with just one win, the same return as in the 2022 edition.

This time, however, performances suggested the players were able to rise above their lack of preparation.



The explosiveness of the new generation -- Marufa Akter, Rabeya Khan, Rubya Haider and Sobhana Mostary -- stood out as the main takeaways.

It was a dream start for Marufa, who, with her inswingers, immediately became one of the stars of the World Cup.

Batting concerns had followed the Tigresses, yet the tournament also saw Mostary, the top scorer for Bangladesh in the previous T20 World Cup, and Supta staking

claims in the top order.

The 23-year-old Mostary led with composure, and while Supta remained the standout in terms of aggregate runs, Mostary created impact. Among the youngsters, Shorna Akter's explosive knock against South Africa and Rabeya's ability to change games with her leg spin gave Bangladesh's campaign vitality, even as they fell just short in the final hurdles against England, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

As the year edged towards its close, off-field controversies also came to light. Former skipper Jahanara Alam made allegations of sexual abuse against coaches and team management officials near the end of the year, developments that threatened to derail stability.

Looking ahead, preparations for the 2026 Women's T20 World Cup in England in June-July began late this year. But it remains in danger of becoming another patched-up effort, with the BCB yet to confirm any international matches before the tournament and questions continuing to be raised about the standard of domestic cricket.

Still, as 2025 draws to a close, the year will be remembered not only for missed opportunities and administrative failures but also for the emergence of a promising core. If nurtured with proper planning, competitive exposure, and stability, the performances of this year may yet become the foundation on which Bangladesh women's cricket builds a brighter future.

### A LOOK BACK AT 2025

## 'Sincaraz' rivalry defines the season

Women share the spotlight



AGENCIES

Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner turned 2025 into a season-long duel, a tug-of-war that defined men's tennis and gave the sport a compelling new centre of gravity.

For the second straight year, the Grand Slams were carved up between them, each chapter sharpening a rivalry that now feels era-defining.

Sinner struck first. His commanding Australian Open victory over Alexander Zverev not only secured a title defence but also made him the first Italian man to win three majors, eclipsing Nicola Pietrangeli's long-standing mark. Then came an interruption -- a three-month ban in February stemming from a 2024 anti-doping violation -- followed by an unforgettable return.

Paris delivered the rivalry's masterpiece. In the longest Roland Garros final on record, Alcaraz saved three match points to outlast Sinner in five hours and 29 minutes, sealing one of the great comebacks and confirming his status as the "Prince of Clay" in the post-Nadal era. Wimbledon flipped the script again, Sinner exacting revenge on Centre Court

to lift his first trophy at the All England Club.

Their collision course led inevitably to New York, where Alcaraz dazzled under the lights, thumping Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals before dismantling Sinner in the final to extend his Grand Slam lead to six titles to four.

While the men's game revolved around "Sincaraz", the women delivered variety



and drama. Madison Keys stunned Melbourne by claiming her first major at 29, Coco Gauff conquered Paris, and Iga Swiatek handed Amanda Anisimova a brutal Wimbledon final lesson. Aryna Sabalenka salvaged the season with a dominant U.S. Open title before Elena Rybakina closed the year in style at the WTA Finals.

Off court, rising prize money and governance disputes simmered, even as Novak Djokovic provided poignant milestones late in his career with 100th title in Geneva and 101st in Athens.