



The 12th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League got underway in the presence of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Friday in Sylhet with a short opening ceremony featuring Quran recitation, the singing of the national anthem, a minute's silence in memory of the late Sharif Osman Hadi -- a youth activist and July uprising leader -- along with the release of smoke flares and balloons. The BCB had announced a sell-out of tickets for the opening-day fixtures, and the 18,000-capacity Sylhet International Cricket Stadium was packed in every corner and treated to a high-scoring thriller in the opener that featured the first century of the tournament from Rajshahi skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto against Sylhet Titans.

PHOTO: BCB

Madness at the MCG

England fast bowler Josh Tongue etched his name into the history books on a crazy opening day of the fourth Ashes Test against hosts Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday, as bowlers made full use of a lush green surface and early overcast conditions, with a total of 13 innings ending in single digits. Australia were 4 for 0 in their second innings at the close, with Scott Boland on four, 46 runs ahead, and Travis Head yet to face a ball.

A remarkable 20 wickets fell in a frantic day, with Australia bowled out for 152 before striking back to dismiss England for 110, leaving the match on a knife-edge.

It was the fifth time that 20 or more wickets fell on Day 1 of a Test in Australia. The record is 25 wickets, set in a match between the same sides at the MCG in 1901-02.

A total of 94,199 fans attended the iconic MCG -- the biggest cricket crowd ever at the venue, surpassing the 93,013 who watched the 2015 World Cup final.

Tongue, who returned figures of 5 for 45 in the first innings, became the first England bowler since Dean Headley and Darren Gough in 1998 to take five wickets in an innings in a Test at the MCG.

England batter Joe Root's 41-run knock was the highest among the two sides.

Australia have already retained the Ashes after eight-wicket victories in Perth and Brisbane and an 82-run win in Adelaide.



Royals avoid further embarrassment

SPORTS REPORTER

Chattogram Royals narrowly avoided further embarrassment on Friday by meeting the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) requirement of fielding at least two foreign players in their opening match against Noakhali Express in Sylhet.

The Royals included Pakistani top-order batter Mirza Tahir Baig and Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batter Masood Gurbaz in their playing XI, complying with BPL 12 bylaws that mandate teams to field a minimum of two and a maximum of four overseas players in a match.

There had been doubts over Chattogram's ability to bring in any foreign players after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) took over ownership of the franchise just a day before the tournament. The takeover followed the withdrawal of Triangle Services Limited, which cited financial constraints in relinquishing the franchise rights.

Sources said efforts are underway to recruit more overseas players for upcoming matches.

By naming two foreign players, Chattogram avoided a repeat of last season's controversy when Durbar Rajshahi were forced to play without any overseas players against Rangpur Riders due to payment disputes. On that occasion, the BPL Technical Committee allowed Rajshahi to field an all-local XI under clause 1.2.8, which permits exceptions for "valid reasons".

Shanto sizzles to 'put pressure on selectors'

ABDULLAH AL MEHIDI

Rajshahi Warriors captain Najmul Hossain Shanto celebrated with a pumped fist and the customary air kiss off the bat after marking a match-winning century in Sylhet yesterday. More than a milestone, it was a determined effort to seize an opportunity in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) he had called crucial for his national ambitions ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Shanto showed composure before accelerating with sharp shot selection to guide his team to an emphatic eight-wicket win over Sylhet Titans. The wicket at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium offered value for runs as Sylhet posted 190 for five after being asked to bat, but the chase seemed to slip when Rajshahi reached 43 for one in the Powerplay.

However, Shanto, scoring at a run-a-ball, shifted gears with a six off Mehidy Hasan Miraz. A dropped caught-and-bowled chance off the next ball allowed him to find his rhythm with a drive through mid-on, and the boundaries followed as he capitalised on the evening dew.

"When we finished the first innings, we knew the dew would come and the wicket would be better," Shanto said at the post-match presentation.



With a T20I strike-rate of 109.06, Shanto had previously lost both the captaincy and his place in the Tigers' T20I side. This innings, however, showcased a more assured hitting arc, blending composure with sustained acceleration. After reaching 30 off 25 balls, he brought up his fifty in 36 deliveries and completed his ton in 58, striking 10 fours and five sixes -- including a 101-metre maximum.

Bangladesh batting coach

Mohammad Ashraful believes Shanto is overcoming his T20 difficulties.

"He had two tons already in this format [in T20s]. The last two years didn't go well, especially last year when he didn't get many games," Ashraful told The Daily Star.

"Strike-rate was being talked about and he struggled, but he is the kind of player who, when he scores, scores big. In this format, when a player has such ability, there's not much argument against him," Ashraful noted, adding that his approach could force the selectors into renewed discussion ahead of the T20 World Cup in February next year.

"Seeing him bat, it feels like he will remain in the conversation if he continues this way. He has started this BPL outstandingly and, if it continues, there will definitely be pressure on selectors."

A strike-rate of 168.3 from the opener boosted Shanto's confidence. He lifted the tempo precisely when scoreboard pressure threatened to engulf his side during the unbeaten 101 off 60 balls. Earlier, Shanto had told this newspaper that he was more focused on impact than volume of runs -- an impact he certainly delivered, along with momentum for Rajshahi in their campaign opener.

Ayush brace takes Police to third

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Nepalese forward scored his first goals in the Bangladesh Football League as Bangladesh Police registered a 3-0 win over Arambagh at the Shaheed Miraj Tapan Stadium in Manikganj on Friday.

Police, who stunned league leaders Bashundhara Kings in the previous round, opened the scoring in the 26th minute when 21-year-old Ayush finished a neat move initiated by Shafiq Kagimu.

Veteran Bangladeshi winger Amirul Islam doubled Police's lead three minutes before half-time after being set up by Ismail Hossen.

The Ayush-Kagimu partnership was at work again as Police wrapped up the victory seven minutes after restart, with Ayush getting his second goal of the match as well as of the campaign.

The comprehensive victory put Police in third position with 13 points from eight matches, one ahead of Rahmatganj who have a game in hand.

Arambagh, meanwhile, remained second from bottom on goal difference with five points, with Young Men's Fakirerpool Club languishing at the bottom with same number of points.

A LOOK BACK AT 2025

A year of turmoil in Bangladesh cricket

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The year 2025 will be remembered less for what Bangladesh cricket achieved on the field and more for the turbulence that engulfed it off it.

Across formats, the men's, women's, and age-level teams struggled to meet expectations, but their underwhelming performances were largely overshadowed by sustained administrative chaos within the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

BPL 11 SCANDAL AND UNPAID DUES
The year began with multiple reports of alleged fixing in the 11th Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), with players, officials, and franchises named in the media after being red-flagged by the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU).

The BCB acted swiftly to form an inquiry committee, and its nine-month investigation yielded a 900-page report, which was not made public.

The board later appointed former ICC Anti-Corruption chief Alex Marshall to revamp its ACU. He was handed the inquiry committee's report, and based on his recommendations, those under suspicion were barred from the next BPL season.

Meanwhile, the board struggled to

contain the damage caused by unpaid dues involving franchises Durbar Rajshahi and Chattogram Kings -- an embarrassment that tarnished the league's reputation both locally and globally.

Eventually, the BCB awarded fresh contracts to six franchises, including four new ones, to relaunch BPL 12.

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENTS BLOCKED, A PRESIDENT TOPPLED
Ahead of the 2025 BCB elections, the Faruque Ahmed-led board attempted to amend the board's constitution to curtail the influence of Dhaka clubs, which hold 76 councillor votes and elect 12 out of 25 BCB directors.

Once details of the proposed changes leaked, protests erupted, and clubs announced boycotts, forcing delays to domestic leagues. The amendment process was ultimately scrapped.

The biggest shock came in May, when eight directors passed a no-confidence motion against Faruque, prompting the National Sports Council (NSC) to revoke his directorship, which by default ended his presidency. Former Bangladesh captain Aminul Islam Bulbul was installed as president.

Though initially claiming he had no long-

term ambitions, Bulbul later contested the elections and secured a full four-year term following a highly controversial October 6 vote.

ELECTION DRAMA
The election process itself was fraught with allegations of manipulated councillorship nominations, court cases, and repeated suspensions and reinstatements of voting rights for 15 clubs under Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) scrutiny.

Former Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud's open involvement further fueled criticism. A rival panel led by former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal boycotted the vote, turnout was low, several directors were elected unopposed, and Bulbul was re-elected president -- with Faruque making a dramatic return as his deputy.

BCB V DHAKA CLUBS
Relations between the BCB and Dhaka clubs hit an all-time low after the polls, as the majority of clubs boycotted or threatened to boycott domestic competitions, citing irregularities in the election.

The standoff put the livelihoods of hundreds of cricketers at risk and remains unresolved, with eight clubs skipping the ongoing Dhaka First Division Cricket League and more expected to boycott the

Second Division and other tournaments.

JAHANARA'S BOMBHELL ALLEGATIONS

In November, former women's captain Jahanara Alam dropped a bombshell on the BCB when she publicly accused former women's team selector and team manager Manjurul Islam of sexual harassment.

Initially denied by the board, the allegations eventually led to the formation of an investigation committee. Despite multiple deadline extensions, the probe remains inconclusive, even as more women cricketers and athletes have come forward with similar claims regarding others.

HRIDOY'S SUSPENSION

In April, Mohammedan Sporting Club player Towhid Hridoy was handed a suspension for misconduct toward umpire Sharafudoula Ibne Shahid Saikat during the Dhaka Premier League.

The episode divided players and officials, with cricketers rallying behind Hridoy and the umpire threatening resignation. The matter escalated after Hridoy committed another offence, resulting in a lengthy suspension that ruled him out of the league-deciding match -- eventually won by Abahani Limited.

SHANTO STRIPPED, RESIGNED AND RENAMED AS CAPTAIN

Najmul Hossain Shanto was stripped of the ODI captaincy just hours before departure for a Sri Lanka tour in June, exposing a serious communication breakdown within the cricket operations department.

The fallout led Shanto to resign from the Test captaincy after the series, though he later returned to the role for the 2025-27 World Test Championship cycle following discussions with the board.

LITTON, LIPU BUMP HEADS OVER SHAMIM

Tensions surfaced between the national selectors and T20I captain Litton Das over squad selection.

All-rounder Shamim Hossain was dropped from the squad for the first two of three Ireland T20Is in November-December. Skipper Litton told the media that he had wanted Shamim in the squad and had conveyed it to the selectors, forcing chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu to publicly clarify his stance.

Shamim was added to the squad for the third T20I and was picked in the XI. Overall, relentless off-field controversies eroded stability in Bangladesh cricket in 2025 -- a year defined more by turmoil than triumph.