

GOALS GALORE as WFL kicks off

Bangladesh Army players celebrate one of two goals from Tanima Biswas during a 2-0 win against Bangladesh Police in the opening match of the Women's Football League at the Birsreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. It was a surprising result, given debutants Police had formed a strong squad with a few national team players. The second match of the day, played under floodlights, saw BKSP thrash defending champions Nasrin Sports Academy 8-0. There are three matches today in the 11-team league, which is offering a prize money of Tk 20.5 lakh.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Chill in the air and on the scorecards

SPORTS REPORTER

The country has been experiencing a spell of cold weather over the past few days, and it appears to be leaving its mark on the Sylhet phase of the ongoing 12th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Although last year's BPL was marred by player payment and integrity concerns, it still produced plenty of high-scoring matches. This time, however, with just three matchdays completed, run-scoring appears to have somewhat dipped. Low totals were seen on the second matchday and again in yesterday afternoon's game between Rangpur Riders and Chattogram Royals.

"About the lack of runs, there was no sun coming out today if you look at the weather conditions. So it's difficult to score big runs," Chattogram mentor Habibul Bashar pointed to the weather as a major factor.

"Deliveries were not keeping low; rather, it was seaming and swinging due to the conditions. The wicket is fine and with some sun, expect it to fare better in the coming days, although unfortunately, tomorrow [today] will possibly be a foggy day as well," he added.

There were still glimpses of the surface's trueness. When Chattogram opener Mohammad Naim hit Rangpur pacer Nahid Rana straight down the ground for six, it underlined that the pitch was not misbehaving. But Mustafizur

In foggy conditions at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, excitement was scarce during a low-scoring contest yesterday, but Mustafizur Rahman and Litton Das gave Rangpur Riders something to smile about with impactful performances in their opening BPL game this season.

PHOTO: RANGPUR RIDERS

Rahman soon dismissed Naim with a cutter after a 20 ball 39, and the rest of the Chattogram batting struggled against the testing lengths of Faheem Ashraf, who extracted seam and swing to claim a five-wicket haul.

Chattogram were bundled out for 102, and Rangpur cruised to a seven-wicket win following a solid opening stand between Litton Das and Dawid Malan.

The contrast with the opening day of the tournament was striking. Before temperatures dipped, Sylhet International Cricket Stadium witnessed two high-

scoring games, the opener between Rajshahi Warriors and Sylhet Titans being the standout.

Parvez Hossain Emon adapted well to his new number-four role with a brisk fifty, guiding Sylhet to 190 for five. Rajshahi captain Najmul Hossain Shanto then became the tournament's first centurion and, with support from Mushfiqur Rahim's fifty, led his side to a convincing win.

The evening match on the same day also saw Chattogram post 174 for six before Noakhali collapsed to 109 in the

chase.

On the very next day, however, Rajshahi could manage only 132 for eight against Dhaka Capitals on that same surface. Although Shanto and Mushfiqur both got starts, it was evident that the afternoon conditions were tougher. While dew had helped batters generate pace in the previous evening match, the ball held up more in the surface earlier in the day.

A BCB official, speaking on condition of anonymity, felt that the tight scheduling of games was also contributing to the low-scoring trend.

December 28 was a rest day, but across the three matchdays, Noakhali Express and Rajshahi played every day, while Chattogram and Sylhet featured twice each.

"In other franchise leagues, you don't get to play two matches in a row even at home, and here you are playing on the same wicket," the official said. "You have only 18 to 20 hours between matches, and players have to recover quickly, whether from a loss or a poor performance. That is difficult."

While it is still early in the tournament, the combination of cold conditions and closely scheduled fixtures is clearly adding to the challenge. It now remains to be seen whether improved weather -- the one variable that can realistically change -- will help bring big scores back to the BPL.



PHOTO: RANGPUR RIDERS

A LOOK BACK AT 2025

A year when hockey carried the flag

ANISUR RAHMAN

In a country where cricket and football command almost every headline, 2025 became the rare year when hockey forced its way into the national conversation. At a time when lesser-known disciplines usually struggle for space, Bangladesh hockey managed to capture attention through performance, organisation and belief -- offering a powerful reminder of the untapped potential that still exists beyond the big two.

The year began under the shadow of turbulence that continued since the July uprising last year, which disrupted almost every sports federation. By the latter half of 2025, however, around 42 national federations were gradually replaced by ad-hoc committees, reviving activities across the board. Preparations were aligned with three major events -- the Youth Asian Games in Bahrain, the Islamic Solidarity Games in Turkey and the South Asian Games in Pakistan next year.

More than 500 athletes from 23 disciplines were enrolled into structured training programmes, many under foreign coaches, and medals followed at the Youth Asian Games and Islamic Solidarity Games. Yet no achievement resonated like what hockey delivered.

WHEN HOCKEY ROSE HIGH

Bangladesh had already broken new ground in 2024 by qualifying for the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup for the first time. What followed in 2025 was a performance by the under-21 team that reignited belief in a sport long starved of structure.

Under Dutch coach Siegfried Aikman, the juniors produced a spirited World Cup debut in India, finishing 17th among 24 teams and winning the newly introduced Challenger Trophy -- the best finish among the bottom eight. They fought bravely against former champions Australia and two-time runners-up France and ended the tournament ahead of Austria, Korea, China, Egypt and Canada.

Drag flicker Amirul Islam was the face of that success, ending the tournament as the top scorer with 17 goals, outshining players from established hockey nations. Teammates such as Rakibul Hasan, Din Islam, Mahmud Hassan, Obaidul Joy, Hozifa Hossain, and Mehrab Hossain embodied the unity that surprised even seasoned observers.

The impact went beyond the pitch. Two Bangladeshi umpires -- Salim Lucky and Shahbaz Ali -- also made history by officiating at a World Cup for the first time. Between them, they were involved in 28 matches, handling roles as field, video and reserve umpires. Lucky spoke of learning

modern officiating techniques, earning encouraging feedback from the FIH and the pride of hearing "Salim Lucky from Bangladesh" announced before matches.

Yet the euphoria carried a warning. Aikman urged authorities to act swiftly, saying the momentum would vanish without



sponsors and government backing within weeks. Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) general secretary Lt Col (Rtd) Riazul Hasan admitted finances remain the sport's biggest obstacle, acknowledging that retaining a foreign coach, keeping the squad together and restarting domestic leagues will be difficult without meaningful support.

For a nation whose last major hockey wave dates back to the 1985 Asia Cup, the Junior World Cup campaign did not just bring a trophy -- it brought attention, belief,

ARROWS HITTING NEW TARGETS

Archery followed hockey in delivering both performance and organisational breakthroughs. Despite the departure of established names such as Ruman Sana,



Abdul Hakim Rubel and Diya Siddique to the United States, a new generation stepped up.

Abdur Rahman Alif won gold in the men's recurve individual at Asia Cup Stage 2, while Bonna Akter and Himu Bachhar earned silver in the compound mixed team event. Kulsum Akter Mone added bronze in the women's compound individual category at the Asian Archery Championships.

The biggest moment, however, came off the field when former federation general

secretary Kazi Rajib Uddin Ahmed Chapol was elected president of World Archery Asia in Dhaka. By defeating Thomas Han 29-9, Chapol became the first Bangladeshi to lead the continental body, a four-year mandate that places the country at the heart of the sport's regional development.

GLIMPSES OF PROMISE ELSEWHERE

Elsewhere, women's kabaddi claimed historic bronze medals at the Asian Championship and the World Cup in Dhaka, while youth teams got medals at the Asian Youth Games. Tennis produced a landmark when Zarif Abrar became the first Bangladeshi to win an ITF World Tennis Tour Juniors J-30 singles title. Chess, gymnastics, badminton and table tennis also added international medals and milestones, while Bangladesh hosted events in archery, kabaddi, volleyball and chess.

The medal tally may not have been overwhelming, but 2025 made one thing clear: when athletes from so-called secondary sports are given training, exposure, and even limited resources, they respond.

As 2026 approaches, the responsibility now lies with the authorities to ensure that this long-awaited momentum in Bangladesh's lesser-known disciplines does not fade back into obscurity.