



PHOTO: BCB

NASUM'S RECORD FIFER CRUSHES NOAKHALI

Nasum Ahmed delivered a record-breaking spell to power Sylhet Titans to a six-wicket win over Noakhali Express in the Bangladesh Premier League in Sylhet yesterday. The left-arm spinner registered the best figures by a spinner in BPL history, returning five for seven -- also a career-best -- as Sylhet skilted Noakhali for 61 in 14.2 overs. The previous record was held by Shakib Al Hasan, who claimed five for 16 for Dhaka Dynamites against Rangpur Riders in 2017. Chasing a modest target, Sylhet reached the target in 8.4 overs.

NOAKHALI'S campaign unravels on and off the field

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

Newcomers Noakhali Express continued their miserable run in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 as they suffered their fourth consecutive defeat on Monday, going down by six wickets to Sylhet Titans in Sylhet.



While the on-field performances of Noakhali -- the only winless side in the tournament -- have been alarming, their off-field troubles have been far more concerning and wide-ranging.

Noakhali's losing streak is not unfamiliar territory for head coach Khaled Mahmud Sujon. In 2024, he coached Durdanto Dhaka, who lost 11 straight matches to finish bottom while last season, his Dhaka Capitals managed just three to end sixth out of seven teams.

During the tournament, a member of the team's coaching staff has reportedly faced questioning by the BCB's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) after doubts emerged about the authenticity of his professional credentials.

The troubles with the coaching panel had started a day before the season began, when head coach Sujon and assistant coach Talha Jubair boycotted a practice session over inadequate training arrangements and equipment, before rejoining later the day, calling it a 'misunderstanding'.

The captaincy situation of the team has also been murky from the start. Before the tournament, the team's Managing Director Bazlur Rahman Ratan publicly stated that he did not want national team wicketkeeper Jaker Ali to lead the side.

Eventually, the team named Shykat Ali -- a 32-year-old uncapped local cricketer -- as captain, only to replace him two matches later with Pakistani batter Haider Ali.

Noakhali is also struggling at bringing in players from overseas. They had signed West Indies batter Johnson Charles, Sri Lankan batter Kusal Mendis and Afghanistan's Sediqullah Atal as direct recruits.

However, Mendis was ruled out due to injury, while the participation of Charles and Sediqullah remains uncertain, with a concerned team official admitting that both are unlikely to feature and the franchise is unsure about who to bring in their places. They have already roped in local players Munim Shahrir and Abu Jayed Rahi mid-tournament, trying to salvage a season that looks destined for humiliation.

BCB awaits ICC reply as speculation grows

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) plea to the International Cricket Council (ICC) to relocate its ICC Men's T20 World Cup matches from India has sparked widespread speculation among officials, players, stakeholders and fans, with all pondering what will happen next.

On Sunday, the BCB formally wrote to the ICC, informing them it won't send the national team to India for the tournament amid "growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India" and "considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government".

As of Monday, the ICC is yet to respond and sources indicate that cricket's global governing body is likely to issue an official statement within a day or two.

The ICC now faces a choice, with a few possible courses of action.

The ICC could accept Bangladesh's request, in which case the Tigers could possibly play their matches in Sri Lanka -- joint hosts of the tournament alongside India.

Some online reports have claimed that the ICC is heading down this path. However, a BCB director isn't convinced.

"How can the ICC agree so quickly?"

We sent the letter on Sunday [a holiday]. So, reports of an agreement are just rumours," he said, requesting anonymity.

The Daily Star attempted to contact ICC officials regarding their position but did not receive any response.

A number of scenarios could unfold from here on. If the ICC rejects the BCB's request and the board remains

the 2003 World Cup, England and New Zealand skipped their matches in Zimbabwe and Kenya respectively for similar reasons, resulting in walkovers.

The ICC could also replace Bangladesh with another team. Australia had opted out of the 2016 Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh just 22 days before it began and ICC named Ireland as their replacement.

tomorrow [today]," said the BCB director, expecting a reply in this regard.

However, former BCB general secretary Syed Ashraful Haque, who previously served as CEO of the Asian Cricket Council, sees the situation differently.

"In this case, I believe the Indian government will say that they will provide 'head-of-state' level security for Bangladesh. Then the ball will come again to our court. Then we will decide whether we will travel or not," Ashraful told The Daily Star over the phone from Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Based on my experience, with only one month remaining before the tournament, relocating venues is an extremely uphill task. Shifting matches involve massive logistical challenges.

"Moreover, if Bangladesh does not play -- or if the ICC refuses relocation and Bangladesh opt out -- the board is unlikely to receive its share of World Cup revenue. This could also lead to direct conflict with the BCCI. We can't get emotional everytime. It's not about just losing money. It's about the goodwill as well. International cricket is big business."

All eyes are now on the ICC's decision, which can either resolve the uncertainty or trigger further discord.



firm in its position, Bangladesh will not feature in the global event.

The tournament then could end up becoming a 19-team event, with Bangladesh's Group C opponents -- the West Indies, England, Italy and Nepal -- getting walkovers.

In the 1996 World Cup, Sri Lanka received walkovers from Australia and the West Indies, who didn't travel to Sri Lanka over security concerns. During

Zimbabwe had also pulled out from the 2009 T20 World Cup a year prior and were replaced by Scotland.

The BCB could still revert its stance and participate as per the original schedule, but it's unlikely to happen unless the government changes its directive.

"As the government has taken a stance, we are bound to follow it. We will probably hear from the ICC



PHOTO: REUTERS

Day two of the fifth and final Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground belonged to an imperious Joe Root, although a rapid-fire unbeaten 91 from Australia opener Travis Head helped the hosts to a strong finish against England on Monday. Root's 242-ball 162 powered England to 384 all out in the first innings, with Australia ending the day on 166 for two, still trailing by 218 runs.

ROOT equals Ponting at SCG

** Resuming the day on 72, Root reached an almost chanceless century off 146 balls to reaffirm his status as an all-time great. It was his 41st hundred in the format, drawing him level with Australia great Ricky Ponting in third place on the all-time list of Test centuries.

** Only India's Sachin Tendulkar (51) and South Africa's Jacques Kallis (45) have scored more Test centuries than Root, who remains top of the list among current players. Next on that list among active players is Australia's Steve Smith, who has 36 centuries in 123 Tests.

** Root starred in a 169-run fourth-wicket stand with Harry Brook, who could add only six runs to his overnight score of 78. So far, it is the highest partnership of the five-match series, surpassing the 162 put on by Head and Alex Carey in Adelaide.

** Australia lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after their victory in the previous Test in Melbourne.

United sack Amorim after turbulent tenure

REUTERS, London

Ruben Amorim's turbulent 14-month tenure as Manchester United manager ended abruptly on Monday when he was sacked a day after voicing a passionate defence of his role and vowed not to quit in the wake of a disappointing 1-1 draw with Leeds United.

The Portuguese coach, 40, took over from Erik ten Hag in November 2024, ending his first season with the club 15th in the Premier League -- their worst placing since they were relegated in 1974 -- and losing to Tottenham Hotspur in the Europa League final. This season they are sixth after 20 games, having won three of their last 11 matches, and the Leeds result triggered a fiery outburst in a press conference from Amorim.

He bristled at questions about his job security, delivering a defiant message that he came to United as a manager with full authority and not merely a coach taking orders. "I'm not going to quit. I will do my job until another guy is coming here to replace me," he said.

Amorim's replacement will be assistant Darren Fletcher, as United again set about trying to find a big-name operator who can bring back the glory days of the Alex Ferguson era.

Since Ferguson retired in 2013, United have turned to David Moyes, Louis van Gaal, Jose Mourinho, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Ralf Rangnick, and Ten Hag with limited success and it is now 13 years since they won the last of their 20 league titles.

'Expectations are natural'

Bangladesh U-19 team left for Zimbabwe early Monday to take part in the 16th ICC U-19 World Cup, scheduled from January 15 to February 6 in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Having played extensive youth international cricket at home and abroad over the past two years, the side head into the tournament as one of the contenders. Captain Azizul Hakim Tamim spoke to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan about preparation, expectations and challenges ahead of departure. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): With the World Cup approaching, how would you assess the team's overall preparation?

Azizul Hakim Tamim (AHT): We are well prepared in every aspect. We have played over 30 matches and are fit both physically and mentally... Now it is about execution on the field.

DS: What do you see as this team's biggest strength?

AHT: It is not just one thing. At this level, we chased 284 in the Asia Cup. Our bowling has always been good, and now our batting is also very strong.

DS: After winning the 2024 Asia Cup and following it up with several successful series, but missing the final in the last Asia Cup, do you believe the selected 15 players are the best available?

AHT: We won every series we played, Alhamdulillah, except for the last Asia Cup where we lost only one match against Pakistan. Everyone is fit now.

DS: You had a great start in the National Cricket League for the Mymensingh Division. Several players in this squad have exposure to senior domestic cricket, which is rare at this level.

AHT: Domestic cricket gives us valuable

experience. Playing alongside national and foreign players helps a lot... and that experience will be very useful in the World Cup.

DS: Conditions in Zimbabwe are often compared to Bangladesh. How familiar are you with them?



AHT: We have played in similar conditions before, so we have a good idea about the wickets, weather and grounds.

DS: Since Bangladesh won the U-19 World Cup in 2020, expectations have been high. Do you see that as pressure?

AHT: Winning the 2020 World Cup is part of Bangladesh cricket's history. Expectations from the people are natural,

and it is good that they expect from us. We will try our best to live up to that.

DS: You are grouped with India and New Zealand, with India first up. How important is the opening match?

AHT: Every match is important because the World Cup quickly becomes like a knockout stage.

DS: Does the rivalry with India add extra motivation?

AHT: It is not just about India. Against big teams, there will be sledging. We have to play not just with our heads, but with body language.

DS: This squad has many all-rounders. How much of an advantage does that give you as captain?

AHT: It is a big advantage... When everyone contributes, it creates a strong impact.

DS: You have previously said the team's biggest strength is collective unity rather than individuals. Could that be key to success in this World Cup?

AHT: Yes, definitely. We have played together since U-15 and U-17, which has created a strong bond. The combination among the players is very good, and the senior players are very supportive.



MANAGERLESS CHELSEA DENT CITY'S TITLE HOPES

Chelsea interim manager Calum McFarlane celebrates as Enzo Fernandez scores a dramatic stoppage-time equaliser in a 1-1 draw, while Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola cuts a dejected figure after City failed to cut the gap on league leaders Arsenal to four points. The Blues handed their London rivals a timely boost in the Premier League title race just three days after the club sacked head coach Enzo Maresca. Fernandez's goal, scored at a freezing Etihad Stadium, ensured Arsenal finished a congested festive schedule with a six-point lead at the top. The Gunners sit on 48 points from 20 matches, with City and Aston Villa both on 42. Photo: Reuters