

Nasir shows he still has the power

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Former national cricketer Nasir Hossain showed that he is far from finished as he smashed a career-best unbeaten 90 off 50 balls to help Dhaka Capitals end their three-match losing streak in BPL 12 with a seven-wicket win over Noakhali Express in Sylhet yesterday.

Nasir, who served a two-year ICC ban for breaching the Emirates Cricket Board's Anti-Corruption Code during the 2020-21 Abu Dhabi T10 League, returned to competitive cricket in April last year. This season also marks his return to the BPL after two years.

The 34-year-old, who played 19 Tests, 65 ODIs and 31 T20Is for Bangladesh between 2011 and 2018 and was often in the spotlight for controversies, had already shown form in the recent National Cricket League (NCL) T20. He scored 176 runs in eight innings and took six wickets, including a match-winning 46 off 31 balls in the final. This helped Rangpur Division clinch back-to-back titles.

That performance earned him a BPL contract worth Tk 18 lakh, but he struggled initially, managing only 41 runs in his first three matches while battling lower down the order.

Yesterday, Dhaka promoted him to number

three while chasing 134, and Nasir grabbed the chance brilliantly. His fluent knock, decorated with 14 fours and two sixes, took Dhaka to victory in just 14.1 overs and revived their playoff hopes.

The promotion followed Dhaka resting national batter Saif Hassan, who had scored only 26 runs in four innings. Nasir ensured the team did not regret the decision.

After the match, Nasir admitted national players usually get batting priority but said he had no complaints.

"We have players from the current World Cup squad. Their priority is always higher, and they're given positions they prefer," he said. "It's not unfair. They're in the national team because they are better. Even then, local players still get opportunities."

"If strict priority existed, maybe Saif would bowl instead of me. From my perspective, everything is fine, and the balance is good."

Nasir also expressed his preference for batting in the powerplay. "With only two fielders outside the circle, scoring becomes easier if you take risks. After that, it gets tougher, so I enjoy batting then," he said, adding that he hopes to continue playing for another five to six years if fitness allows.



Jacob Bethell fulfilled his rich potential in front of his family with a chanceless maiden Test century on Wednesday, as England built a fragile 119-run second-innings lead with two wickets remaining to give themselves a glimmer of hope in the final Ashes Test against hosts Australia. At the end of day four at the Sydney Cricket Ground, England had reached 302-8 with Bethell imperious on 142 not out and number 10 Matthew Potts yet to score. "I haven't really had time to kind of reflect on it... But to do that and have the family there was very special," Bethell said. England are desperate for another morale-boosting win after victory in the previous Test at Melbourne. Australia lead 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Sylhet hub set up, but long road awaits BCB

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) launched its first regional office in Sylhet on January 3, marking a significant step towards decentralisation and grassroots cricket development, although several key operational elements are still being put in place.

BCB director from Sylhet division, Rahat Shams, acknowledged that the office will initially operate on a limited scale.

"Space has been allocated within the Sylhet [International Cricket] Stadium offices," Shams said, explaining that the setup would remain modest in its early phase. According to him, the structure will include a room for the Head of Cricket, a small lounge for counsellors, and a meeting room for divisional and district coaches, with existing facilities expected to cover most immediate requirements.

Staffing will also be gradual. Shams informed the office plans to recruit four to five staff members under BCB payroll to manage accounts, administration, logistics, and game development.

Recruitment will begin with the

appointment of the Head of Cricket for Sylhet, with a newspaper advertisement expected within the next five to seven days.

"The criteria include strong cricketing knowledge -- preferably an ex-player," he said, adding that leadership, governance, management, and communication skills would also be essential for

- BCB's first regional office in Sylhet to operate initially from Sylhet International Cricket Stadium; permanent site identified
- Regional Cricket Center to coordinate year-round grassroots programmes at district and upazila levels
- Matching fund model approved, including Tk 15 lakh for First Division League and Tk 7.5 lakh for school cricket
- School Cricket Tournament to begin mid-January with 15 participating schools
- Sunamganj and Moulvibazar still lack BCB-appointed district coaches due to certification challenges

the paid role.

Beyond infrastructure and staffing, the initiative aims to bring structural alignment to year-round cricket activities at the grassroots.

"This initiative is called the Regional Cricket Center," Shams said. The objective, he explained, is to ensure that talented players from rural areas and upazilas remain

within the development pathway rather than dropping out due to a lack of organised opportunities.

To address seasonal challenges, Shams said plans are in place to ensure year-round training despite prolonged monsoon periods. Facilities such as indoor sheds or synthetic turfs will be arranged in coordination with local organisers

maintain a separate account and signatories.

He added that the BCB has already approved Tk 15 lakh as a matching fund after Sylhet raised the same amount through foreign remittances for the Sylhet First Division Cricket League 2025-26, which began on January 3 at the Sylhet District Stadium.

An additional Tk 7.5 lakh has been raised for a School Cricket Tournament, which the BCB will also match, with the competition scheduled to begin around mid-January.

Despite the progress, challenges remain in manpower and coaching depth. Shams acknowledged that Sunamganj and Moulvibazar still lack BCB-appointed district coaches, largely due to difficulties in finding suitable Level-1 certified candidates.

Although a Level-1 coaching course was held in Sylhet in late October, he stressed that standards would not be compromised. "You can't make a top coach overnight," Shams said, underlining why certification and selection processes will remain strict, with only deserving candidates progressing.

'Individual hard work behind Afghans' T20 success'

Afghanistan's dashing opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz shares a special bond with Bangladesh, having made his international and franchise debuts here in 2019. Since then, the 24-year-old has made a name for himself, with his aggressive batting and sharp wicketkeeping skills increasing his demand in franchise cricket around the globe, as he emerged as one of Afghanistan's key players. Now representing Dhaka Capitals in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Gurbaz spoke to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan about his experience in Bangladesh, the presence of his brother Masood Gurbaz in the same tournament with Chattogram Royals, and Afghanistan's ambitions at the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Tell us about your experience in the BPL.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (RG): The BPL was my first franchise league, and from here I went on to play in other leagues. I had a very good experience. The people are nice, the fans are amazing, and they support us everywhere -- both inside and outside Bangladesh. I really love playing here in Bangladesh.

DS: How do you prepare yourself while playing in Bangladesh, where the surface can be tricky?

RG: For me, cricket is cricket. It doesn't matter whether it's the [Indian Premier League] IPL, the BPL or anywhere else. I just respect the game and play it with love. I'm happy here, making many friends and receiving a lot of love, which is what every player wants. I try my best to give something back, and I think that's the best way to live.

DS: Afghanistan players now represent franchise leagues worldwide. What is the recipe behind your success?

RG: I would say individual hard work. Everyone works really hard, which is why you see Afghan players succeeding in leagues all over the world. There is a lot of natural talent in Afghanistan. We may not have as many facilities as some other countries, but with what we have, I think we are one of the strongest teams. I'm also very happy with our cricket board at the moment -- they are working hard to improve facilities, and we really appreciate that.

DS: Afghanistan is set to relaunch its own franchise league after 2018. What are your thoughts on that?

RG: The [Afghanistan Premier League] APL will be a great opportunity for Afghan players. It will help young players earn money and support themselves. Most importantly, it will help us identify new talent.



DS: What is the key to being a successful opener?

RG: Again, it's individual hard work. I love the game, I love practice, and I love working hard. There's one simple belief: if not today, maybe tomorrow; if not tomorrow, one day you will get the result. What you see now is the result of six, seven, or even ten years of hard work. I'm grateful for whatever I have achieved -- for my country, my family, and everything else. I've achieved my dreams, and that's very special.

DS: Are you looking forward to a face-off with your brother, Masood Gurbaz, in this BPL?

RG: He's a talented young player and still has time to improve his skills. This is a very good opportunity for him to show his talent to the world. He follows what I do in cricket, but I always tell him not to copy me -- just learn from the discipline and the work ethic.

DS: Like you, he also made his BPL debut early in his career. Does that make it extra special?

RG: That's exactly why I'm happy for him. I hope the BPL brings him good luck as well. He deserves to play in other leagues because he has the ability. My dream is also to play alongside him in the same team one day, and that our names would come side-by-side 'Gurbaz, Gurbaz'.

DS: What's your take on Afghanistan being placed in a tough T20 World Cup group alongside South Africa and New Zealand?

RG: We've already played against them and beaten them before. For us, it's simple -- we don't care who the opponent is, whether it's Canada, South Africa or New Zealand. We respect all teams, but on the day, whoever plays better cricket will win. We are not a small team anymore.

Real out for Atletico revenge

STAR SPORTS DESK

Real Madrid will walk into Thursday night's Spanish Super Cup semifinal clash with Atletico Madrid in Jeddah with one emotion driving them -- revenge.

The memory is still raw. Back in September, Xabi Alonso's side were humiliated 5-2 at Atletico's home in LaLiga, a defeat that ended Real's unbeaten run and triggered a dramatic downturn. The season unravelled after that night: Xabi found himself on the brink of being sacked, with Los Blancos currently four points behind leaders Barcelona after 19 league matches.

Now, under the Saudi lights of the King Abdullah Stadium, Real finally have a chance to strike back.

Atletico, chasing their fourth Spanish Super Cup, arrive in Jeddah unbeaten in five competitive matches, but their confidence was dented on Sunday after a 1-1 draw against Real Sociedad. The draw at the Reale Arena left Diego Simeone's side fourth in LaLiga, a daunting 11 points adrift of Barcelona.

With their title hopes seemingly gone at the halfway stage of the season, the Super Cup has taken on added significance for Atletico, along with the Copa del Rey and Champions League, as they look to end a five-year wait for silverware.

Real, though, are arriving with renewed belief. Xabi has eased the pressure with four straight wins, capped by an emphatic 5-1 home thrashing of Real Betis on Sunday despite the absence of the injured Kylian Mbappe.

Mbappe will again miss the semifinal as he continues to recover from a knee injury, but for Real Madrid, this derby is no longer about who is missing -- it is about making amends.

Leaders Arsenal welcome champions Liverpool

STAR SPORTS DESK

Premier League leaders Arsenal welcome reigning champions Liverpool to the Emirates Stadium on Thursday evening in a heavyweight clash.

The Gunners are firm favourites, having won a remarkable 14 of their 15 home matches this season, including their last 12 in a row. Victory would see Mikel Arteta's side move a massive 17 points clear of fourth-placed Liverpool. Liverpool, however, are on a longer unbeaten run than Arsenal, who have won their last seven games.

After suffering nine defeats in 12 matches across all competitions earlier in the campaign, Arne Slot's men are now



unbeaten in their last nine games. Liverpool beat Arsenal 1-0 at Anfield in August, but a mounting injury crisis threatens their hopes of completing a double. Hugo Ekitike is a major doubt with a hamstring issue, Alexander Isak is sidelined, and Mohamed Salah remains away on Africa Cup of Nations duty with Egypt.

CORPORATE BOOKING

Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will be reserved on 8th January (Thursday), 2026 for Corporate Booking.

From 9th January (Friday), 2026 Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will remain open for all.

Contact: 01969-910100

