



What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 1  
Big Bash League  
Melbourne Stars vs  
Adelaide Strikers  
Live from 2:15 pm

STAR SPORTS 2  
SA20  
Pretoria Capitals vs  
MI Cape Town  
Live from 9:30 pm

## 'Cricket now a religion in Nepal'

Cricket in Nepal is growing rapidly, with leg spinner **Sandeep Lamichhane** at the forefront. A regular for the national team and familiar in global franchise leagues, Lamichhane first caught attention in Bangladesh during the 2016 U-19 World Cup and later featured in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) with Sylhet Sixers in 2019. Now back in Bangladesh with Rajshahi Warriors for BPL's 12th edition, the 25-year-old spoke to *The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan* about Nepalese cricket, leg-spin nuances, and expectations ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup. The excerpts follow:

**DS:** Why the long gap before returning to Bangladesh?

**SL:** I think the Bangladesh Cricket Board or the BPL invited me after a long time. I was also busy with various franchise leagues and international games for Nepal, so sometimes the schedules just don't match. I am happy that the proposal finally came from a BPL franchise and that I am here now.

**DS:** Changes in the BPL since 2019?

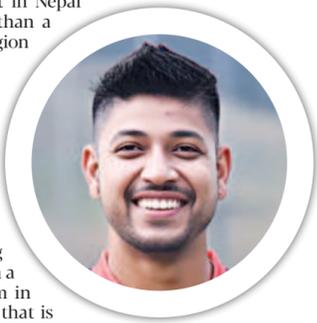
**SL:** I don't see a massive difference because the passion and respect for cricket here remain the same.

**DS:** How do Nepali fans view the BPL?

**SL:** It is a blessing to have fans who live their dreams through us. Cricket in Nepal has become more than a sport; it is like a religion now.

**DS:** How is the Nepal Premier League impacting cricket in Nepal?

**SL:** Having our own league is a huge thing for us. It has evolved quickly... Playing under floodlights in a jam-packed stadium in Nepal was a dream that is now coming true.



**DS:** How important is adding new variations as a leg-spinner in the modern game?

**SL:** Cricket has changed over the years and often favours batters now with smaller boundaries and good wickets. While analysts show your videos to the opposition, we also use analysts to find the weaknesses of the batters.

**DS:** How do you cope after conceding big runs?

**SL:** Leg-spinners need to be brave. You shouldn't doubt your skills or think about negative aspects; instead, focus on getting a wicket to turn the game in your favour.

**DS:** Thoughts on Nepal's near-misses in the last T20 World Cup?

**SL:** It was absolutely disappointing... whether you lose by one run or a hundred, a loss is a loss. However, we made a statement that Nepal cricket is here and has potential.

**DS:** There is talk that some venues might shift in the upcoming T20 World Cup, such as Bangladesh's games moving to Sri Lanka. Are you okay with that, as you are in the same group?

**SL:** It's a big challenge, but it is not in our control. We will play wherever the venue is set -- Mumbai, Delhi, Dubai, or Sri Lanka. I would actually be happy to play a Nepal versus Bangladesh game in Nepal if we could host it. We have to respect and understand whatever the schedule the ICC has made.

**DS:** Advice for Bangladesh leg-spinner Rishad Hossain in the Big Bash League?

**SL:** He is playing for Hobart [Hurricanes], which is the same team I played for [two seasons], so it's a nice connection... My advice would be to keep enjoying the game and the Australian weather.



Rajshahi Warriors pacer **Ripon Mondol** claimed a hat-trick to set up a seven-wicket victory over Dhaka Capitals, bringing the Sylhet leg of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) to a close yesterday. The 22-year-old right-arm quick became the 11th player to register a hat-trick in BPL history and the third bowler to achieve the feat this season, after Mehedi Hasan Rana and Mritunjay Chowdhury. [Inset] Meanwhile, Sylhet Titans batter Parvez Hossain Emon struck his third half-century to guide his side to a comfortable six-wicket win over Rangpur Riders, after which the teams took laps around the ground, applauding the Sylhet fans. The league resumes with the Dhaka leg from January 15, with Sylhet, Chattogram Royals, and Rajshahi already ensuring playoff spots.

PHOTO: WALTON



## Barca lift first trophy of the season

A frenetic tie that ebbed and flowed, records being shattered, a first trophy of the season for one side and renewed doubts over the future of the losing team's coach -- Sunday's Spanish Super Cup Clasico in Jeddah, edged 3-2 by Barcelona against Real Madrid, had everything.

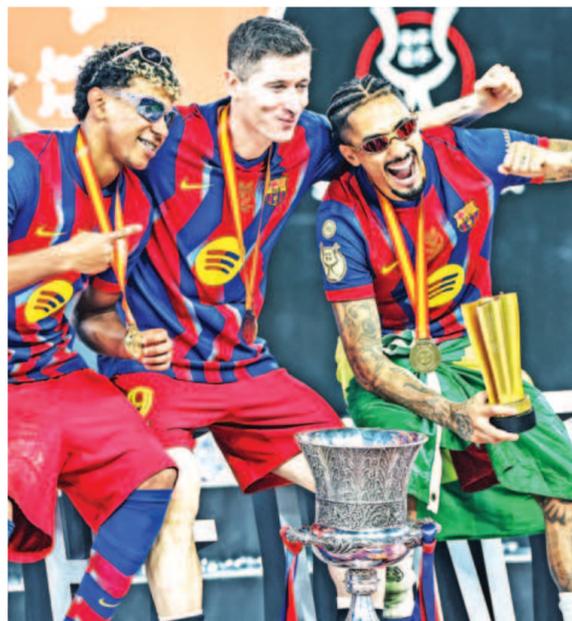


PHOTO: AFP

Raphinha was the hero as Barcelona secured the first trophy of the season, scoring twice, while Robert Lewandowski also found the net. Raphinha has now scored seven times in last six games against Real.

Barcelona took the lead through Raphinha, but a frantic end to the first half produced three goals in stoppage time. Real winger Vinicius Junior levelled with a brilliant individual effort, Lewandowski restored Barca's lead, before Gonzalo Garcia struck to make it 2-2 for Los Blancos. Raphinha then netted the winner in the second half.

The victory saw Barcelona lift the Spanish Super Cup for a record-extending 16th time and retain the trophy for the first time in eight years.

It was also the fourth trophy for Hansi Flick as Barcelona coach, following last season's LaLiga, Copa del Rey and Spanish Super Cup triumphs.

The defeat ended Real Madrid's four-match winning run and reignited doubts over the future of coach Xabi Alonso, which had first surfaced during the club's turbulent spell late in 2025.

The last four winners of the Spanish Super Cup have gone on to claim LaLiga.

## Following father's footsteps, expat paddler Zaiyan eyes national spot

ANISUR RAHMAN

The ongoing 40th National Table Tennis Championships have attracted players across age groups, from seven to 70, including children of organisers, umpires, corporate officials, students and seasonal players. But among the hundreds competing, one story stands out: 17-year-old expatriate paddler Zaiyan Mahdeen, who travelled from the United Arab Emirates to fulfil a dream his father once lived -- playing at Bangladesh's national championships.

The son of former national-level paddler Shamim Waheed, Zaiyan grew up around his father's billiards and table tennis academy in Abu Dhabi. He is representing Bangladesh Biman in this edition of the tournament, having earlier competed for Bangladesh at the WTT Youth Championship in Egypt with special approval from Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation general secretary Captain Masood Ahmed.

"I always wanted to play in the national championships, where my father once competed," Zaiyan told *The Daily Star* yesterday. "Bangladesh Biman gave me this opportunity, and I'm really enjoying the experience. Playing here means facing new players with different styles."

Currently a Grade 12 student, Zaiyan competed



in the U-19 singles and doubles events, winning a few matches before being knocked out in the round of 32 by national age-group players. He also featured in the men's singles.

"I play for a club in Abu Dhabi and travel regularly across the UAE for tournaments," he said. "I've had both wins and losses, and I've won a few events there."

Zaiyan now dreams of earning a place in the Bangladesh senior team. "Every player wants to reach a certain level. I train one to two hours every day, and I hope I can represent Bangladesh in the future," he said.

His parents, Shamim Waheed and Natasha Waheed, are accompanying him at the championships. Shamim, who represented Jashore district several times in the early 1990s, said his passion for the sport never faded, even after moving to the UAE in 2009.

"When I first enrolled my son in an academy, they couldn't even teach him the basics," Shamim said. "So, I decided to start one myself."

In 2019, he launched Legends Billiards and Table Tennis Hall, combining table tennis, billiards, snooker and a cafe. A certified ITTF Level 1 coach, he now trains 26 students from different countries.

"I brought Zaiyan to Bangladesh so he could feel what it means to play the national championships," Shamim said. "If he wants to chase this dream, we will support him fully."

## Enjoying captaincy, not thinking about quitting: Joty

The Bangladesh team are set to depart today for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers in Nepal, starting on January 18. Captain **Nigar Sultana Joty** spoke about the team's preparation, plans to address Powerplay struggles, her wicketkeeping duties, and her future as skipper in an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi*. The excerpts are as follows:

**DS:** How have domestic competitions shaped the team's preparation for the World Cup Qualifiers?

**NSJ:** We played the National Cricket League (NCL) and Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) in T20 formats, and players were selected based on their performances in these tournaments. After our camp for the qualifiers, we also played two practice matches. The preparation camp was short, but everyone's intent looked different, especially as they played on good wickets in the BCL. The intensity of their shot-making shows that everyone is in good rhythm.

**DS:** Is there scope for experimentation in a tournament where the team could play seven matches?

**NSJ:** Before a World Cup, we should use this platform for whatever experience, experiments, or team combinations we need to try. Some players are very good at



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

power-hitting and have performed impressively. They are being given opportunities so that they can start from their comfort zones. In global qualifiers, apart from two or three teams, the rest are average, so there will be good chances to experiment and observe players.

**DS:** How do you view the squad?

**NSJ:** An uncapped opener, Juairiya Ferdous, has been picked. She did very well in the NCL, although she could not do as well in the BCL. Still, she has a lot of potential that the selectors and players noticed during tournaments and practice matches.

Her ability to use power and her intent are different from everyone else. [Dilara Akter] Dola has also been added. We have often seen that we lack runs or power in the top order, which makes us suffer, so the team has been organised to strengthen the batting.

**DS:** Are you going to share wicketkeeping duties with Juairiya, and do you see her opening the innings?

**NSJ:** If she plays, you will likely see her opening. As for wicketkeeping, it depends on the management. When I play domestic cricket, I

try to keep wickets very rarely so that other domestic keepers can get noticed. I have no problem with that [sharing wicketkeeping duties], and I enjoy fielding a lot. Whatever is asked of me in the interest of the team, I will do it.

**DS:** Is it easier to captain as a wicketkeeper or as a fielder?

**NSJ:** Both feel the same to me. Whether you are changing a bowler or a fielder, your position does not really affect it. However, there is an advantage in keeping: communication with the bowlers is much better. You can understand the line and length or what the batter is doing far more clearly from behind the stumps.

**DS:** Do you have any thoughts on your captaincy stint beyond the T20 World Cup?

**NSJ:** It will depend entirely on the board. If they feel the team is not improving under me, then that will be their decision. But I am enjoying the captaincy and am not thinking about quitting at the moment.



Michael Olise struck twice and set a new Bundesliga assist record as Bayern Munich ran riot in an 8-1 demolition of Wolfsburg on Sunday to move 11 points clear at the top of the table. The Bavarians were ruthless on their return from the winter break, benefiting from two Wolfsburg own goals while Harry Kane, Luis Diaz, Leon Goretzka and Raphael Guerreiro also found the net. Olise also provided two assists, taking his tally to 25 in 50 league appearances, the most by any player in their first half-century of Bundesliga games.

PHOTO: REUTERS