Star SPORT
DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 18, 2026, MAGH 4, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
BPL
Noakhali vs Rangpur
Live from 1:00 pm
Dhaka vs Chattogram
Live from 6:00 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1 AND HD2
ICC U19 WC
New Zealand vs USA
Live from 1:30 pm
Premier League
Aston Villa vs Everton
Live from 10:30 pm

STAR SPORTS 1
India vs New Zealand
3rd ODI
Live from 2:00 pm

Rana does 'what matters most'

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a string of underwhelming outings early in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20, Rangpur Riders fast bowler Nahid Rana finally found his rhythm, producing a match-winning performance against Dhaka Capitals in Mirpur yesterday.

The spell not only brought personal relief for the young pace sensation but also sealed Rangpur's place in the playoffs.

"Obviously, losing three matches in a row can affect the team mentally," Rana said after the match. "But we still had confidence and took that onto the field."

The six-foot-five right-armer ripped through Dhaka's middle order at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, returning figures of three for 11 from four overs as Rangpur clinched an 11-run victory.

Among his scalps, Saif Hassan's dismissal stood out. First ball, Nahid produced a dream delivery, bringing it back in sharply to outplay the batter completely and uproot the stumps, leaving Saif stranded on 12.

He then removed Sabbir Rahman (eight) and Mohammad Mithun (25) to reduce Dhaka to 99 for six while chasing 182, a collapse that virtually sealed the contest. Rana bowled 14 dot balls, conceded no boundaries, and, crucially, maintained his pace throughout while mixing in effective variations.

"I don't really think too much about pace, because it's something that is partly God-gifted," he said, adding that speed without skills is a recipe for disaster.

"At the international level, pace does matter. But as cricket keeps evolving, if you don't develop your skills along with pace, you won't survive for long. So I'm trying to improve my skills even more."

The 23-year-old had hinted at a return to form in Rangpur's previous Sylhet-phase match with figures of two for 18 in three overs. Before that, he had taken just two wickets in his first four matches, struggling for consistency despite being economical at times.

"Whether I play for Bangladesh or any franchise, contributing to match-winning performances is what matters most to me."

RANGPUR REACH PLAYOFFS

Speedster Nahid Rana celebrates one of his three wickets with Litton Das and Tawhid Hridoy during Rangpur Riders' 11-run win against Dhaka Capitals in yesterday's first BPL fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. Dawid Malan (78 off 49 balls) and Tawhid Hridoy (62 off 46 balls) struck commanding half-centuries and added 126 runs for the second-wicket stand before Rana's sensational bowling spell, as Rangpur, under new skipper Litton, ended a three-match losing streak and earned the fourth and final playoff spot. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The captains of the ten participating teams, including Bangladesh's Nigar Sultana Joty, pose with the trophy of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier, which starts in Nepal today. The teams are competing for the final four spots at this year's 20-over showcase event in England and Wales. The Tigresses will play their opening match against the USA. PHOTO: BCB

SHORT CORNER

Cambodia, East Timor earmarked for friendly before Singapore tie

Bangladesh will play either Cambodia or East Timor in a FIFA international friendly ahead of their final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers match against Singapore in March. Already out of contention for the Asian Cup, Bangladesh will play their sixth and final qualifier away to Singapore on March 31. Following a meeting of the National Teams Committee on Saturday, it was decided that the national team camp will begin on March 20, with the squad set to depart for Singapore on March 28.

Shamsunnahar continues goal glut in women's league

Shamsunnahar Jr continued her impressive run in the Bangladesh Women's Football League, once again playing a decisive role for Farashganj. On Saturday, Farashganj secured a narrow 1-0 victory over Bangladesh Army Sports Club, with Shamsunnahar scoring the winning goal. Shamsunnahar Jr has now scored an astonishing 19 goals in five matches in the ongoing league.

Bangladesh held by Bhutan in women's futsal

Bangladesh fought back from 3-1 down to hold Bhutan to a thrilling 3-3 draw in their second match of the inaugural SAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Bangkok on Saturday. Bangladesh won the opening match against India and they will play their third match against Sri Lanka on January 21.

***Read The Daily Star website for full stories.*

PHOTO: ICC

Bangladesh pacer Al Fahad claimed a five-wicket haul to bundle out India for 238 in 48.4 overs in their opening ICC Under-19 World Cup match in Bulawayo yesterday. The right-arm seamer provided Bangladesh a flying start alongside fellow pacer Iqbal Hossain Emon, dismantling India's top order inside the Powerplay. Fahad struck twice in back-to-back deliveries in the third over to remove India captain Ayush Mhatre and Vedant Trivedi, before returning at the death to pick up three more wickets, including that of top-scorer Abhigyan Kundu (80). Rain intervened during the first innings, reducing the match to 49 overs per side, and later caused a second interruption in Bangladesh's chase when they were 90 for two in 17.2 overs, with Azizul Hakim Tamim playing a captain's knock. After resumption, the game was reduced to 29 overs per side, with Bangladesh needing 165 to win. Earlier, the captains of the two teams did not shake hands at the toss -- a move the Bangladesh Cricket Board later described as unintentional and a lapse in concentration by stand-in captain Zawad Abrar, filling in for regular skipper Azizul who was unable to attend due to illness.

AFCON

Morocco, Senegal face off in heavyweight final

AGENCIES

Morocco and Senegal meet in a heavyweight Africa Cup of Nations final showdown on Sunday, with the host country hoping a partisan crowd can help them claim a first continental title in half a century. Walid Regragui's Morocco were favourites coming into the competition, having become the first African side ever to reach the World Cup semifinals in 2022 and established themselves as the continent's leading team in the FIFA rankings.

They are unbeaten in two years, since going out of the last AFCON in Ivory Coast in the last 16 to South Africa, and are captained by the current African footballer of the year, the rampaging Paris Saint-Germain full-back Achraf Hakimi. However, all of that has placed enormous pressure on Morocco to deliver since the start of this tournament, the first held in the country since 1988 and the first AFCON to start in one year and end in another.

This pressure comes as Regragui, who has faced regular criticism from an expectant public, is mindful of the country's underwhelming AFCON record, with their only title coming in Ethiopia in 1976.

The hosts face a formidable opponent in Senegal, Africa's second-best side in the rankings and into their third final in four editions of the tournament. After losing to Algeria in 2019, the Lions of Teranga won the title in Yaounde in 2022, beating Egypt on penalties. Knocked out by Ivory Coast in 2024, they bounced back to reach the final here with a Sadio Mane strike that defeated Egypt in the semi-finals.

It is an experienced, ageing Senegal side — Mane, goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, captain Kalidou Koulibaly, and midfielder Idrissa Gana Gueye are all aged 33–36. Centre-back Koulibaly will miss the final through suspension, a significant blow for a clash between two of Africa's stingiest defences, who have conceded just three goals each in the tournament.

Raul Asencio celebrates with Kylian Mbappe after netting Real Madrid's second goal during their 2-0 win over Levante in a LaLiga fixture at Santiago Bernabeu yesterday. The win offered a vital boost for new coach Alvaro Arbeloa, who took charge following a turbulent week that saw Madrid lose a cup final to Barcelona, exit the Copa del Rey to a second-division side, and part ways with Xabi Alonso. PHOTO: AFP

American Madison Keys, currently ranked seventh in the WTA, claimed a thrilling Grand Slam victory last year, defeating Aryna Sabalenka 6–3, 2–6, 7–5.

On the men's side, world number two Jannik Sinner lifted the trophy after a straight-sets win over Alexander Zverev.

This year's prize pool is a record $111.5 million -- a 16 per cent increase on 2025 -- with the men's and women's singles champions each earning $4.15 million and runners-up taking home $2.15 million.

At 38, Novak Djokovic said he still gets a "drug-like" adrenaline rush from tennis and has no plans to retire anytime soon.

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams said she is "up for the challenge" as she prepares to become the oldest woman to compete at the Australian Open at age 45.

All eyes on Alcaraz, Sabalenka as Australian Open begins

AGENCIES

The Australian Open, first Grand Slam tournament of the year, begins in Melbourne on Sunday, with Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka leading the spotlight.

Alcaraz starts his bid for a career Grand Slam, with the Australian Open the only title missing from his collection. The top seed, who faces home player Adam Walton, said: "This is my main goal for this year... I'm just hungry for the title." He has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne.

Should the 22-year-old complete the career Slam, he would join an exclusive club as just the sixth man to win all four major titles after Andre Agassi, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Rod Laver. He would also become the youngest, surpassing Nadal, who was 24 at the time.

But he faces a major roadblock in Italy's Jannik Sinner, the two-time defending champion. Sinner, who beat Alexander Zverev in last year's final, opens against France's Hugo Gaston and could meet Djokovic in the semifinals.

Djokovic, chasing a record 25th major, begins against Pedro Martinez, while Zverev faces Canadian Gabriel Diallo.

On the women's side, top-ranked Sabalenka opens against wildcard Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah. After losing last year's final, she said: "I'm not really focusing on that result... but of course I would like to do just a little bit better." The two-time champion is coming off a Brisbane title win.

Iga Swiatek, Sabalenka's main rival, is also chasing a career Grand Slam in Melbourne, having never gone beyond the semifinals.

Bryan Mbeumo roars after opening the scoring as Manchester City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma looks dejected during Manchester United's 2-0 Premier League derby win at Old Trafford yesterday, giving club legend Michael Carrick a perfect start in charge. PHOTO: AFP