

Surprise in store in Mirpur?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Mirpur wicket has often looked green in the past, hinting at assistance for fast bowlers, but more often than not it has behaved like a typical slow and low surface, offering little surprise. However, a BCB official yesterday claimed that the track could indeed offer a bit of a surprise in terms of quality this time around.

"It may be a bit of a surprise this time. Things are changing now," a BCB official, with knowledge about the surface, told The Daily Star yesterday as Bangladesh host Pakistan for a three-match ODI series, starting today.

The wicket appeared to have a thin covering of grass and looked hard, which could ensure good carry for the bowlers. Traditionally, however, Mirpur pitches have tended to be slow and uneven.

Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi seemed encouraged by the conditions as a fast bowler.

"So far it feels like there's a little bit there for fast bowlers. Haven't seen what it's like right now but we will check again and have a discussion with the team management and go from there," he added during the press conference at Mirpur yesterday afternoon.

In Bangladesh's last home ODI series in October last year, West Indies used spinners to bowl all fifty overs in one match. Shaheen, however, suggested that things could be different this time.

Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz said that the team needed true wickets as part of their preparation for the upcoming World Cup.

Whether such expectations will finally be met at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium remains to be seen, as the balance between securing direct World Cup qualification and building confidence among the batters continues to be a key consideration.

Questions over captain Miraz ahead of key series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh enter the three-match ODI series against Pakistan, starting today in Mirpur, with several objectives in mind.

While the Tigers will be eager to produce a noteworthy performance, especially after being excluded from the recent T20 World Cup, the outcome of the series will also influence Bangladesh's bid to qualify directly for the 2027 ODI World Cup. A series win will see the 10th-ranked Bangladesh climb to ninth – the bare minimum spot needed to be ensured for a direct World Cup qualification.

Despite such stakes, the focus on the eve of the first match centred largely on Mehidy Hasan Miraz's captaincy and his own performances.

Questions surrounding Miraz's leadership first surfaced in June 2025, when the all-rounder replaced Najmul Hossain Shanto as Bangladesh's ODI skipper. The decision by the cricket operations department came under scrutiny, and Bangladesh's results under Miraz did little to quiet those concerns.

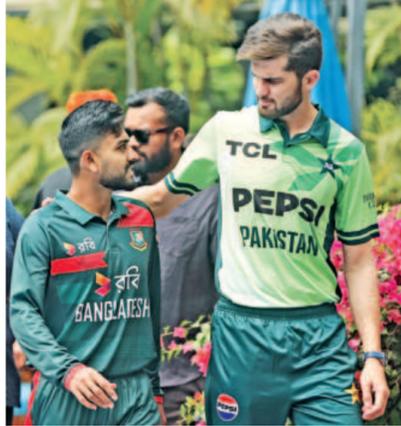
Since taking charge, Bangladesh lost their first two series – away to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Miraz later led the team to a series win over the West Indies, but questions over his captaincy remained ahead of such an important ODI assignment.

Miraz, who has won just three of his 13 matches as ODI captain, declined to view the Pakistan series as a 'litmus test' for his leadership.

"Whoever is given the captaincy role needs time to build the team well," he said during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

Miraz mentioned that the team's objectives remain the priority.

"My goal is to take the team



◀ Bangladesh have a poor head-to-head ODI record against Pakistan, winning only five of the 39 matches between the two sides, while Pakistan have won the remaining 34.

▶ This will be the first ODI series between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 11 years. The last one was in 2015, when the Tigers whitewashed Pakistan 3-0 in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

to a good position. This series is important for Bangladesh, not just me, because qualifying for the World Cup is the primary goal, regardless of who is the captain," he added.

However, the numbers present a concerning picture. In four of his 13 matches as captain, Miraz batted at number four and averaged over 50. Despite those returns, Bangladesh lost each of those games, prompting questions about his approach in a format where higher strike rates are increasingly important.

He has one fifty as captain while batting at number five, but when Miraz produced steady innings, the pressure often shifted to the rest to accelerate the scoring.

Overall, Miraz averages 32.58 as captain. His recent preference to bat at number seven also suggests he has yet to settle into a fixed role in the lineup, despite producing some respectable numbers.

Miraz himself admitted that

batting higher up the order did not translate into team victories, saying his presence at number seven "would be most helpful for the team's balance."

There were also questions over his decision-making during last year's series against Afghanistan, particularly regarding the handling of death overs.

Miraz, however, said he intends to rely on established methods to tackle the upcoming challenge.

Although Miraz – whose captaincy tenure currently runs until June this year – said there have been no discussions with management about an extension, the Pakistan series represents an important test for Bangladesh, who have lost four of their last five ODI series.

And, questions over the captaincy do not create the right atmosphere ahead of important challenges, especially with direct World Cup qualification on the line.

ABAHANI salvage draw to stay in hunt

SPORTS REPORTER

Last season's Federation Cup runners-up Abahani kept their semifinal hopes alive after coming from behind to draw 1-1 with Rahmatganj MFS, courtesy of a disputed penalty in Cumilla yesterday.

The result left Abahani second in the five-team group with four points from three matches, three behind leaders Brothers Union, who beat PWD SC 3-0 at Bashundhara Kings Arena.

The Cumilla clash was a rematch of last Friday's Bangladesh Premier League meeting, when Abahani thrashed Rahmatganj 4-1 at the same venue, but the Sky Blues struggled to break down the Old Dhaka side's defence despite dominating possession at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium.

Rahmatganj took the lead against the run of play in the ninth minute when Earnest Boateng fired a low shot from outside the box past Abahani goalkeeper Mitul Marma.



PHOTO: BFF

Abahani equalised through a penalty in the 42nd minute after Syed Shah Quazem Kirmance was tackled inside the box. The decision sparked protests from Rahmatganj players, halting play for seven minutes before Sheikh Morsalin converted.

"It was not penalty because my player did not charge the Abahani player rather he stood tall," claimed Rahmatganj coach Kamal Ahmed Babu.

After the break, neither side managed to score again despite creating chances.

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** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'From exile to immortality: The Paulo Rossi story'

Probe sought over BCB polls

SPORTS REPORTER

Several councillors from district and divisional sports associations and universities submitted a complaint to sports state minister Aminul Haque yesterday, seeking an independent investigation into alleged irregularities, manipulation, and abuse of power in the 2025 elections of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

In the letter, they also demanded the dissolution of the current BCB board of directors and called for fresh elections in accordance with the board's constitution.

Former BCB director and University of Chittagong councillor Sirajuddin Mohammad Alamgir said they were seeking a proper inquiry and appropriate action if irregularities were found.

"We are demanding a proper investigation. Previously, the environment was not conducive, but now there is a fair environment and an elected government. If irregularities are found, appropriate action should be taken," Alamgir told The Daily Star after submitting the letter to the minister's personal secretary at the National Sports Council.

"The State Minister for Sports has the authority to act under the National Sports Council Ordinance," he added. Alamgir said they were also awaiting a court hearing on the matter.

Earlier, on Sunday, representatives of 50 Dhaka clubs, including former national team captain Tamim Iqbal, submitted a separate complaint to the NSC seeking an independent investigation into the last BCB elections.



Bernabeu set for another Real-City battle

AGENCIES

Wednesday's Champions League action features several high-profile clashes. PSG meet Chelsea for the first time since last year's Club World Cup final, Arsenal take on Bayer Leverkusen, and Bodo/Glimt host Sporting.

However, the spotlight falls on Real Madrid vs Manchester City at the Bernabeu in the first leg of their last-16 tie. It marks the fifth straight season the teams have met in the knockout rounds.

Rarely do record 15-time winners Real Madrid enter a Champions League clash as underdogs, but that appears to be the case when City visit the Santiago Bernabeu.

With key attackers Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo Goes set to miss the game through injury, and Alvaro Arbeloa's team in inconsistent form, the Premier League side are firm favourites in the



last-16 tie.

Manchester City beat Madrid in the league phase in the Spanish capital and have strengthened since then.

Premier League leaders Arsenal, who have never been crowned European champions, remain on track for four trophies this season as they chase their first major silverware since 2020.

Mikel Arteta's men won all eight matches in the league phase to cruise into the last 16, where success against Leverkusen will set up a tie against Bodo/Glimt or Sporting.



PSG are wobbling as the reigning European champions put their title on the line against Chelsea in the first meeting of the teams since the London side won 3-0 in last July's Club World Cup final.

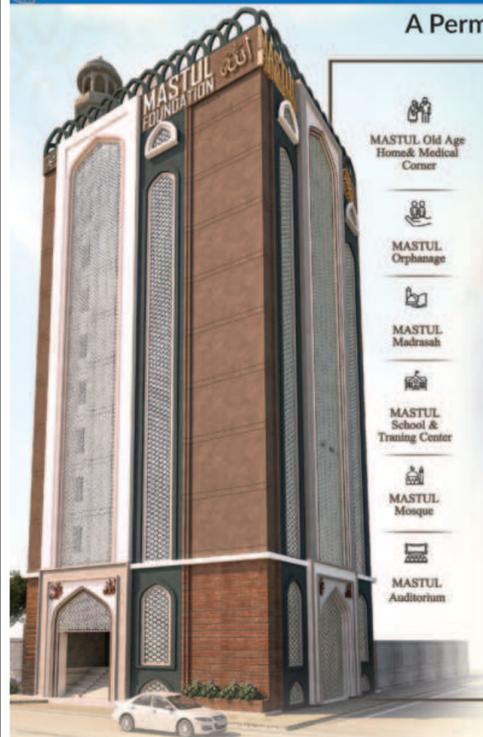
Bodo/Glimt's fairytale run continues as they welcome Portuguese champions Sporting to the Aspyra Stadium, which lies inside the Arctic Circle.

Kjetil Knutsen's team finished the league phase with wins against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid before beating Inter Milan home and away in the play-offs.

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