

### HIGHLIGHTS

Najmul Hossain Shanto became the first Bangladeshi captain to score a Test century against Pakistan, reaching 101 off 130 balls on the opening day of the first of two Tests in Mirpur yesterday.

Shanto and Mominul Haque's 170-run stand is the highest ever third-wicket stand by Bangladesh in a Test against Pakistan.

Since his Test debut in 2017, Shanto has scored nine centuries, the joint-highest alongside Mushfiqur Rahim and Mominul Haque among Bangladesh batters during the same period.

Shanto is also third overall among cricketers with 2,000-plus Test runs in terms of converting fifties into hundreds. With a conversion rate of 64.29%, the left-hander is behind only Australia's Don Bradman (69.05) and West Indies' George Headley (66.67).

Bangladesh ended the day at 301 for four in 85 overs, marking their highest total in a single day against Pakistan in any Test. This surpassed their previous best of 289 runs on Day 3 of the first Test in Rawalpindi in 2024, a series that Bangladesh went on to win 2-0.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

After Pakistan pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali struck with two quick wickets, reducing Bangladesh to 31 for two in 10.1 overs, the hosts bounced back through a 170-run third-wicket stand between skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mominul Haque on Day 1 of the first Test in Mirpur yesterday. Shanto notched his ninth Test century, while Mominul fell just nine runs short of his own milestone. Together, the duo helped Bangladesh reach a strong position, setting several records along the way.

## Shanto dominates with controlled aggression

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Aggression is one thing, but controlled aggression is a different kind of menace. Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's century against Pakistan on Friday in Mirpur on Day 1 of the first of two Tests, part of the World Test Championship, was a perfect example of the latter.

Shanto's measured aggression not only unsettled Pakistan in Dhaka's sweltering heat but also showcased his masterful construction of an innings on a pitch offering something for the pacers. Not only did Shanto pick up his first-ever Test ton against Pakistan and his ninth in Tests, he did it exhibiting a conversation-rate unheard of in modern cricket.

When Shanto walked in, Bangladesh were under pressure after the early dismissals of their openers. His first boundary immediately signaled his intent: standing a few metres outside the crease, he drove Mohammad Abbas beautifully through the on-side, the kind that provided a glimpse of the purple patch he is on. When Shanto is in this kind of touch, it often turns into a commanding day at the crease.

He had his favourite Test batting partner, Mominul Haque, by his side, with whom he has recorded two of the three highest third-wicket stands for Bangladesh in the format. "I think Shanto's innings

**SCORES IN BRIEF**

**BANGLADESH VS PAKISTAN**  
1st Test, Day 1  
Bangladesh 1st innings: 301 for 4 in 85 overs (Shanto 101, Mominul 91, Mushfiqur 48 not out, Litton 8 not out; Abbas 1-51, Shaheen 1-67, Hasan 1-54)

is one of the best I've seen from him. I enjoyed the way he dominated from the beginning." Mominul reflected on the captain's influence in difficult conditions.

Shanto also became the first Bangladesh captain to score a Test century against Pakistan. The hallmark of his innings was controlled aggression -- a hunger for runs that seems to be growing. In his last eight innings, he has scored four centuries. Overall, in 14 innings where he passed fifty, he has converted nine into hundreds, an astonishing conversion rate of 64.2 percent.

"Shanto has a hunger for runs, and he wants to give his best for the side. Someone has to build these records, which others will break in the future," Mominul added.

Shanto had previously shared with this newspaper, "Whenever I bat, my focus is always on scoring runs. If you bat with positive intent, you create more scoring opportunities." He displayed exactly that

approach with fluency, patience, and authority.

Pakistan pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi, Mohammad Abbas, and Hasan Ali tested him thoroughly. Shaheen moved the ball early, Abbas challenged him from awkward lengths, and Hasan provided skiddy deliveries. Shanto responded to each with intelligent shot selection: driving straight off Shaheen, adjusting his stance to counter Abbas' swing and movement, and comfortably pulling Hasan when required. His 130-ball 101 was a masterclass in reading conditions and adapting on the fly.

The cover drive off Abbas that brought up his ninth century was a treat, like many of his strokes. His celebration reflected just how much it meant. Yet, on the very next delivery, he was dismissed leg before to Abbas -- much to Pakistan's relief, as he had looked on course for a bigger score. Perhaps the slightly prolonged celebration disrupted his focus -- a small area he could work on in the future.

"To maintain this rhythm, it's important to keep the same mentality. You can't be too confident or too deflated," Mominul noted.

For Shanto, as evidenced by his numbers, the hunger is only building. With each innings, he is not just scoring runs; he is staking his claim as a leader and a batter capable of shaping Bangladesh's future in the format.

"I don't think it was a frustrating day. We put in the hard work; at some points we didn't bowl well, but at other points, we bowled really well and were a bit unlucky. There was play-and-miss action going on all day. I think it is a very good cricketing pitch, and since the new ball is in our hands, we will come back tomorrow to take early wickets and finish their innings as soon as possible.... There is grass on top, but it [the wicket] is very dry underneath. We have played enough cricket to know we need to put in really hard work, and the weather is also very hot."

Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Abbas after Day 1



**33 DAYS TO GO**



### Europe's footballing might

Among the 55 current member nations of UEFA, Europe's top football governing body, 33 have played in the World Cup. For the upcoming 2026 edition, 16 teams from UEFA will participate. Notably, 11 of those have the experience of playing in a World Cup semifinal.

**\*\*Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Brehme's penalty: The moment Maradona's Argentina fell silent'**

## Bylaws fiasco stretches BFL clash to nearly three hours

SPORTS REPORTER

The high-stakes Bangladesh Football League clash between holders Bashundhara Kings and Bangladesh Police on Friday was overshadowed by a lengthy interruption caused by confusion over the eligibility of foreign players.

What should have been a routine 90-minute contest at the Bashundhara Kings Arena eventually stretched close to three hours before ending in a 1-1 draw.

The controversy began after Police replaced Brazilian forward Paulo Henrique -- who had been sent off after receiving a second yellow card -- with fellow Brazilian Danilo Azevedo.

Kings captain Topu Barman immediately objected, claiming the substitution violated league regulations regarding foreign players.

According to the bylaws, teams are allowed to field a maximum of three foreign players in a match, while foreign players may also replace other foreign players during play.

Police FC argued their decision was valid, citing a similar incident during their match against PWD on May 1, when PWD were permitted to introduce Ghanaian forward Kofi Junior after Brazilian

Jonathan Santos had been sent off.

The dispute led to a suspension of around 75 minutes before Police eventually withdrew Danilo and continued the match with only two foreign players for the remaining 27 minutes.

The lengthy stoppage appeared to disrupt the rhythm of both teams, who failed to find a winner after Henrique had cancelled out Dorielton Gomes' 35th-minute opener in the 53rd minute.

The whole scenario once again exposed the poor officiating in the top-tier domestic football as there was no red flag raised since the previous incident on May 1.

The draw at the Kings Arena, meanwhile, allowed title rivals Abahani to close the gap at the top of the table to just one point after a 2-0 win over PWD SC at Shaheed Barkat Stadium.

Souleymane Diabate and Shah Quazem Kirmanee scored for Abahani, who moved to 34 points from 16 matches, one behind leaders Bashundhara Kings.

Meanwhile, Fortis FC strengthened their third position with a commanding 7-1 victory over Fakirerpool Young Men's Club. Pa Omar Babou struck four times, while Onyekachi Okafor added a brace and Ananta Tamang scored the other goal as Fortis climbed to 31 points from 16 matches.



PHOTO: STAR

Hamza Choudhury signs an autograph for a young kid during a Notun Kuri Sports talent hunt programme for budding cricketers in Dhaka at the Government Physical Education College ground in Mohammadpur yesterday. The event was also attended by State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque and Bangladesh Football Federation president Tabith Awal. Meanwhile, Hamza, the Leicester City and Bangladesh football team star, will leave the country today following a five-day trip.

## BFF to finalise head coach by Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER

The wait for Bangladesh's next national football team head coach is expected to end within the next few days, with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) set to make a final decision on Sunday.

The BFF National Teams Committee, headed by president Tabith Awal, has already interviewed five of the 11 shortlisted candidates and plans to complete the remaining interviews by Saturday before finalising the appointment.

"Interviews of the selected 11 coaches are being conducted online. The NTC has already interviewed five coaches and will interview the remaining six today and tomorrow. We are likely to take the final decision at the executive committee meeting, which is the final stage of the recruitment process," Tabith told reporters at the Physical Education College in Mohammadpur following Notun Kuri Sports talent hunt programme on Friday.

"Our target is to finalise the coach by Sunday and sign a contract with him by May 15," he added.

Tabith said the BFF had followed a transparent recruitment process, having initially received around 230 applications before reducing the list to 100, then 23, and finally 11 candidates for the last round of interviews.

Amid concerns that financial limitations could prevent the BFF from appointing a high-profile coach, Tabith insisted the federation remained ambitious.

"Budget is not just about how much is being paid, rather it is about what we are investing and what we are receiving in return. Finance is important, but it will likely be the last criteria in hiring a high-profile coach," he said.

Responding to a question on local coaches, Tabith said: "We are very open to evaluating local coaches for these positions. We want to confirm the assistant coach, goalkeeping coach and fitness coach once we select the head coach of the national team."