



It's a very blessed feeling for me because I know it's my debut match and I performed really well for my country. And especially when I was going for a bat, so I was a little bit nervous at that time but I performed very well for my team... ..I'm a very calm guy, so I just do my normal celebration.

Pakistan debutant Awaiz Azan after century



Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed set the tone for the day with a fiery spell in the morning session, removing centurion Azan Awaiz and Shan Masood and cornering Pakistan in their first innings of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Inset) However, it was Mehidy Hasan Miraz's 14th five-wicket haul which helped bundle out the visitors and eventually helped the hosts to a 34-run lead at the end of the third day's play. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



SCORES IN BRIEF

1st Test, Day 3
Bangladesh 1st innings 413 all out, and 2nd innings: 7 for no loss
Pakistan 1st innings 386 all out (Awaiz 103, Fazal 60, Salman 58, Rizwan 59; Miraz 5-102, Taskin 2-70, Tajjul 2-46)

Fortis, Police set for AFC club licences

SPORTS REPORTER

Fortis FC and Bangladesh Police FC are ahead in the race to represent Bangladesh in the upcoming AFC Challenge League for the first time, regardless of their final standings in the ongoing Bangladesh Football League.

Usually, the BFL champions receive an indirect slot in the AFC Challenge League, subject to obtaining the AFC club licence. However, Bashundhara Kings and Abahani – currently locked in the title race with only two rounds remaining – are facing complications after FIFA imposed registration bans on the two clubs.

A source within the Bangladesh Football Federation said the federation's First Instance Body (FIB), responsible for assessing club licensing criteria, recommended Fortis FC and Police FC for AFC club licences during Saturday's meeting. Six other clubs, including Abahani and Kings, reportedly failed to meet all requirements.

Abahani and Kings, however, will have until May 25 to appeal before the AFC makes its final decision on May 31.

"We have sought time until June to fulfil all club licensing conditions, especially clearing unpaid wages of foreign players to lift the FIFA registration ban," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu told The Daily Star.

No official from Bashundhara Kings was available for comment regarding the matter.

Fortis FC manager Rashedul Islam said the club remained optimistic about securing the licence.

"We have fulfilled all the requirements for club licensing. If we can finish among the top two, we are interested in playing the AFC Challenge League," he said.

Eight clubs expressed interest in obtaining AFC club licences before the December 28 deadline. The licensing process officially began on January 1, with March 31 set as the deadline for document submission.

Taj Nehar the only surprise in Women's WC squad

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board on Sunday announced a 15-member squad for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup, with the team targeting at least three wins in the tournament scheduled to be held in England and Wales from June 12.

Bangladesh made one change from the squad that featured in the recent three-match WT20I series against Sri Lanka at home, recalling top-order batter Taj Nehar in place of Sharmin Sultana.

Taj Nehar's inclusion came as a surprise, given she has managed only 44 runs in eight WT20Is and last played for the national side in January 2025.

The same team will also compete in a tri-series involving Scotland and the Netherlands in Edinburgh before travelling to Loughborough for the World Cup warm-up matches. Bangladesh are scheduled to leave for Edinburgh on May 25.

Placed in Group A alongside Australia, India, Pakistan, the Netherlands and South Africa, Bangladesh will begin their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on June 14 at Edgbaston.



SQUAD: Joty (C), Nahida (VC), Supta, Sobhana, Shorna, Ritu, Rabeya, Fahima, Trisna, Marufa, Maghla, Sultana, Dilara, Juariya, Taj Nehar.

Tigers bounce back with Taskin, Miraz in sync

ABDULLAH AL MEHIDI

Pakistan batter Imam-ul-Haq remarked after Day 2 of the first Test against Bangladesh that "the beauty of Tests is how there always remains a chance to bounce back."

At the end of Day 3 yesterday, Mehidy Hasan Miraz echoed that sentiment after helping Bangladesh wrest back control with his 14th Test fiver, combining brilliantly with pacer Taskin Ahmed.

Pakistan had raced to 179 for one in reply to Bangladesh's first-innings 413 after dominating Day 2. But by stumps on Day 3, Bangladesh had bundled the visitors out for 386 and moved to seven without loss in their second innings, holding a 34-run lead.

Miraz may have claimed the lion's share of wickets, but it was Taskin's incisive morning spell that shifted the momentum, even after Pakistan had continued their dominance in the opening session.

Azan Awaiz and Abdullah Fazal resumed confidently, extending Pakistan's solid third-wicket stand. Nahid Rana's opening burst showed that pace alone would not be enough to force a breakthrough. Taskin was introduced in the seventh over of the day and showed intent right away, as Fazal edged his

first delivery between wicketkeeper and slip.

Yet that was only the beginning of what proved to be his most impactful spell of the Test.

"I would love to bowl at 145 kph or more, but it is not my time to do that anymore. I do not need it. 138-140 is good enough for me," Taskin had told this reporter ahead of the series.

As it turned out, he needed even less.

After struggling with injuries in recent months, the Pakistan Tests were Taskin's own call, and on Day 3 he made that decision count. Having sprayed the ball around on the green Mirpur surface a day earlier, he adapted smartly, sacrificing express pace for control.

Most of his deliveries hovered in the 127-130 kph range. Instead of speed, he relied on disciplined lengths, extracting bounce and seam movement from the grassy track.

Azan, already on a hundred on his debut and looking set for a much bigger score, fell victim to Taskin's subtle setup. The first ball of Taskin's second over was back of a length and angled across, which Azan defended. The next came tighter into the body, drawing a

slight inside edge to mid-on. A third delivery, again on a tighter line, pushed him further back.

Then came the trap. Taskin went slightly wider, tempting Azan into a loose drive, and Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto completed the catch at first slip.

During that opening spell, Taskin and Miraz conceded just 27 runs in 13 overs. Taskin soon removed Pakistan skipper Shan Masood, while Miraz struck twice. Taskin could have had Salman Agha too, but a no-ball spared the batter. Even so, Pakistan collapsed from 210 for one to 230 for five during that decisive partnership.

Miraz then capitalised on the pressure created by Taskin, claiming five for 102 on a surface offering little turn and proving his own adaptability.

"It made things much easier for me when he [Taskin] picked up those two wickets. Our partnership was vital. If one end wasn't kept tight and runs were flowing freely, the batsmen would just look to rotate the strike comfortably. Because Taskin kept his end incredibly tight, the batsmen tried to attack me to score runs, and that is exactly how they ended up getting out."

A month to go, World Cup unease lingers

AFP, Los Angeles

Just a month left before the 2026 FIFA World Cup begins, but as anticipation builds for football's grandest stage, anxiety is proving an equally dominant emotion.

Despite FIFA president Gianni Infantino insisting it is "very difficult to find something negative" about the upcoming tournament, the buildup to the 23rd edition of the World Cup has been clouded by soaring ticket prices, geopolitical tensions and uncertainty surrounding Iran's participation.

A record 48 teams and millions of fans are set to descend on the United States, Canada and Mexico for the first-ever World Cup co-hosted by three nations. The expanded, six-week spectacle will kick off at Mexico City's iconic Estadio Azteca on June 11 before culminating in the July 19 final at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium.

Yet even before a ball has been kicked, the tournament risks being overshadowed by growing concerns over accessibility and security.

Infantino insists the pre-tournament unease is overblown, dismissing the tide of downbeat headlines as "negative press."

Many fans, however, may disagree.

'Extortionate' ticket prices

The sharp rise in ticket prices has sparked perhaps the biggest backlash of the tournament's buildup, with many supporters fearing they are being priced



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

out of football's biggest celebration.

Fan group Football Supporters Europe (FSE) has condemned FIFA's pricing structure as "extortionate" and a "monumental betrayal," with tickets for some marquee matches soaring far beyond the reach of ordinary fans.

The most expensive ticket for the 2022 World Cup final in Qatar cost around \$1,600 at face value. For the 2026 final, FIFA's top-priced ticket now stands at a staggering \$32,970.

Infantino has defended the pricing, pointing to the commercial realities of hosting the tournament in the United States.

"We have to look at the market – we are in the market in which entertainment is the most developed in the world. So we have to apply market rates," he said.

FIFA says demand remains unprecedented, reporting more than 500 million ticket requests – ten times the combined total for the 2018 and 2022 tournaments.

Yet despite claims of overwhelming demand, seats for several matches, including the United States' opening game against Paraguay in Los Angeles on June 12, remain available on resale platforms.

Even US President Donald Trump

appeared stunned by the prices.

"I did not know that number," Trump told the New York Post after learning tickets for the USA-Paraguay clash were selling for around \$1,000. "I would certainly like to be there, but I wouldn't pay it either, to be honest with you."

War and uncertainty

Beyond ticket concerns, geopolitical tensions have added another layer of unease.

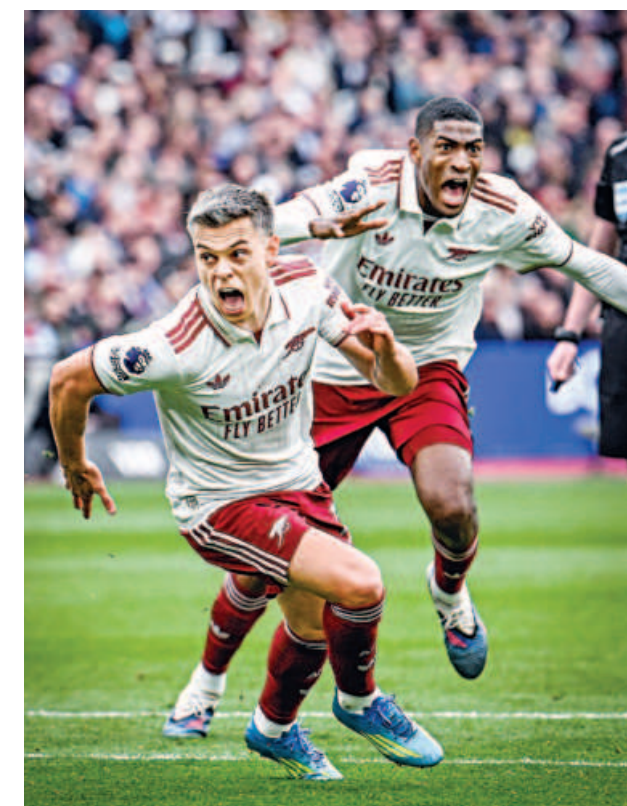
The ongoing conflict involving Iran has cast doubt over what should be one of football's most unifying occasions, with questions raised over security and logistics ahead of the tournament.

Iran, however, remains set to participate, with Infantino insisting the team will play all three of its group-stage matches in the United States as scheduled.

FIFA will hope those anxieties fade once the action begins and football takes center stage.

With defending champions Argentina led by Lionel Messi among the favorites alongside Spain, France and England, and debutants such as Curacao and Cape Verde ready for history, the promise of another unforgettable World Cup remains intact.

But as the final countdown begins, excitement is sharing the stage with apprehension – and FIFA's biggest challenge may be ensuring the world can focus solely on football.



Arsenal edged closer to a first Premier League title in 22 years with a dramatic 1-0 win away to West Ham yesterday. Leandro Trossard's 83rd-minute strike restored Arsenal's five-point lead over second-placed Manchester City, who remain on 74 points with a game in hand. Arsenal needed a huge slice of luck in stoppage time as West Ham had a late equaliser ruled out by VAR for a foul on goalkeeper David Raya before Callum Wilson scored. PHOTO: FACEBOOK