Star
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# SPORT

**What to WATCH**

**T SPORTS**
Lanka Premier League
Qualifier 2
Colombo vs Galle
Live from 8:00 pm

**TEN CRICKET**
The Hundred (Men's)
Birmingham vs Leeds
Live from 11:30 pm

## TIGERS could find familiar conditions in Australia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's upcoming Test series against Australia may hold a few surprises. While Australia is synonymous with pace, bounce and carry, the conditions in Darwin and Mackay remain unfamiliar even to Australia's own Test players.

"I last played there in 2007 but, from what I've heard from players who have been there recently, Darwin is very warm and dry. There's more bounce than we're used to in Bangladesh, but there's movement as well," former Bangladesh Test opener Imrul Kayes, now batting consultant of the BCB High Performance unit for the Top End T20 tournament in the Northern Territory, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I wouldn't describe it as spin-friendly, yet it won't be like Sydney or Melbourne, where there's very little for the spinners. It's probably the closest to Bangladesh conditions, albeit with a bit more bounce."

**"(Conditions in Darwin) is probably the closest to Bangladesh conditions, albeit with a bit more bounce."**
**Imrul Kayes,** former Bangladesh batter

Bangladesh's top order struggled on the opening day of the three-day tour match against Cricket Australia XI before Mehidy Hasan Miraz's unbeaten 109 lifted the Tigers to 263 at DXC Arena, next to the venue for the first Test. However, Cricket Australia XI off-spinner Corey Rocchiccioli caused the most damage, claiming six for 83.

The first Test will be played on a drop-in pitch at TIO Stadium, with reports suggesting the wicket was transported there around five weeks ago.

Jake Pavlich, head of grounds and facilities at Northern Territory Cricket, told ESPNcricinfo that lessons from last year's Australia A versus Sri Lanka A match in Darwin, where pace and spin shared the wickets, would shape preparations.

"We had good reports early on in the A game, so we'll be trying for a little more movement later on [in the game]," he said.

More grass could aid Australia's quicks early, but the dry conditions may also bring Nathan Lyon, Taijul Islam and Mehidy Hasan Miraz into the contest as the match wears on.

"There's a lot of unknowns going in," Australia paceman Josh Hazlewood said on the Unplayable podcast.

As both camps try to decode the surfaces, adaptability could prove as valuable as skill over the two-Test series.



**"The pitch was a bit challenging early on. I just tried to play according to the merit of the ball. They bowled in very good areas, so it was a little difficult for me, especially since it was my first time batting in these conditions. I tried to adapt to the conditions and build partnerships."**
-- **Mehidy Hasan Miraz**

**Bangladesh vice-captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz celebrates after scoring a fighting unbeaten century against Cricket Australia XI on the opening day of a three-day practice match in Darwin yesterday. Walking in with the visitors struggling after an early collapse, Miraz anchored the innings with a composed knock of 109 not out, helping Bangladesh recover to 63. The hosts ended the end at 51 for two.**
PHOTO: CRICKET AUSTRALIA

## Mohammedan capitalise on rivals' FIFA woes

SPORTS REPORTER

With reigning champions Bashundhara Kings and runners-up Abahani struggling to lift their FIFA transfer bans, traditional powerhouse Mohammedan Sporting Club are set to unveil their squad on Wednesday after assembling a strong side for the upcoming Bangladesh Football League season.

Mohammedan, who ended a 22-year wait to win the top-flight title in 2024-25, endured a difficult previous campaign, finishing near the bottom of the 10-team table amid financial problems that even led players to boycott training.

The Motijheel-based club, however, turned things around after the new board of directors took charge. They have already signed several national team players from Kings, including defenders Saad Uddin and Rimon Hossain, midfielders Sohel Rana Jr and Mojibur Rahman Jonny, and wingers Faisal Ahmed Fahim and Shahriar Emon, taking advantage of the uncertainty surrounding Kings and Abahani.

With the two heavyweights unable to complete player formalities until their FIFA bans are lifted, Mohammedan are also trying to attract more players, as footballers risk being left without clubs if either Kings or Abahani fail to resolve their issues.

Mohammedan director-in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan said the club raised funds after the new board of directors took charge, initially collecting Tk 2 crore before increasing it to Tk 5.8 crore. The money was used to clear last season's dues and provide token money for new contracts. He also revealed that Mohammedan lifted their own FIFA ban by paying USD 75,000 soon after the new management took charge.



The Black and Whites have retained 18 players, including national players Sujan Hossain, Zahid Hasan Shanto, Shakil Ahad Topu and Rahmat Mia, as well as experienced campaigners Arif Hossain, Sourav Dewan, Mohammad Jewel, Mohammad Rakib, Ananta, Hafizur Babu, Shafi and Raju. They have also recruited Mehedi Hasan Royal, Saiful Islam and goalkeeper Dipu from Rahmatganj MFS and Bangladesh Police FC.

They are also relying on four foreign players -- Soleymane Diabate, Emmanuel Sunday, Emmanuel Tony and Muzaffarov Muzaffar -- who had played key roles in ending Mohammedan's league title drought. Sunday and Tony will join from Kings, while Diabate returns from Abahani.

"We will introduce our squad before the media on Wednesday to create a buzz among our valued supporters because we have formed a strong squad to fight for the title," Bhuiyan told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Mohammedan director-in-charge further informed that they have confirmed 32 players, including four foreigners, but will not use the SAARC quota.

"We think Muzaffar, Diabate, Sunday and Tony have good understanding and combination on the pitch, which they have already shown for Mohammedan SC, so we are going to rope in all four," he said.

"However, we are not going to fill the SAARC quota because I believe our local players are better than the SAARC players."

Bhuiyan added that Mohammedan had initially planned to appoint former Australian coach Shane Lane, but he would not be available for six months.

"We are mulling to appoint an Uzbekistan coach and then a few local coaches who are yet to be finalised," said Bhuiyan, adding that Mohammedan will begin their pre-season preparation at the Dhanmondi Club ground after Wednesday's squad unveiling.

## Bangladesh drawn with Sri Lanka, UAE in Women's Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B alongside reigning champions Sri Lanka, hosts the UAE and Indonesia for the 2026 Women's Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Dubai from August 28 to September 13.

The Asian Cricket Council (ACC) on Thursday announced the fixtures and itinerary for the 10th edition of the tournament, which will be played in the T20 format.

Group A comprises seven-time champions India, Pakistan, Thailand and Hong Kong, China.

Bangladesh, champions of the 2018 edition, will begin their campaign against Indonesia on August 31 before taking on defending champions Sri Lanka on September 6. They will wrap up their group-stage fixtures against hosts the UAE on September 8.

One of the marquee clashes of the group stage will see India take on Pakistan on September 5.

The top two teams from each group will progress to the semi-finals, scheduled for September 10 and 11, before the final on September 13.

All matches will be played under lights at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

## India series prospect 'now 50-50'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) remains hopeful of hosting India in the white-ball series in September, but recent developments have added uncertainty over the tour.

Sources informed that during BCB president Tamim Iqbal's recent visit to India, discussions were held over the series, which was scheduled for August 2025 before being postponed in the aftermath of the change in government in 2024.

"We are still hopeful of the series being played. We can't say that it's confirmed, but we are still trying and working positively towards it," BCB media committee chairman Asif Rabbani told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, a strongly worded Foreign Ministry statement over former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's live interaction with the media in New Delhi on Wednesday has cast further uncertainty over the series.

BCB sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they were very hopeful about the series before Wednesday's developments but now believe the chances have fallen to "fifty-fifty".

"We are still not completely disappointed, but the situation has taken a different turn after yesterday [Wednesday]. The meetings with BCCI had been positive beforehand," a BCB official said.

"Cricket plays a big role in diplomacy, and we felt the series would have a positive role in that regard. But after yesterday's situation, the series is now fifty-fifty in my opinion," the official added.

BCB's itinerary at the start of the year showed that India were scheduled to arrive on August 28 for an ODI series from September 1 to 6, followed by T20Is from September 9 to 12. BCCI, for their part, has kept the window open for the Bangladesh series following the conclusion of their Test series in Sri Lanka on August 27.

## Real right in business

AGENCIES

Real Madrid have already completed the bulk of their summer business during the World Cup, but the Spanish giants are far from finished, with more arrivals and departures on the cards before the transfer window closes.



**RECORD FEE AGREED FOR DIOMANDE**

Real Madrid have reached an agreement with RB Leipzig to sign Ivory Coast winger Yan Diomande for a club-record fee, Spanish media reported on Thursday.

The transfer could be worth up to €125 million, with a further 10-15 million euros in add-ons, according to MARCA.

If the deal is completed on those terms, it would eclipse the fee Real paid for England midfielder Jude Bellingham in 2023, reported to be €103 million plus add-ons.

Diomande, 19, enjoyed a breakthrough season with Leipzig, scoring 12 Bundesliga goals and providing nine assists to help the German side finish third in the Bundesliga and qualify for next season's Champions League.

He joined Leipzig from Spanish club Leganes last year and played for Ivory Coast at the recent World Cup where they reached the last 32.

**IMPROVED CONTRACT OFFERED TO VINICIUS**

Real Madrid have made Vinicius Jr an improved contract offer in a bid to keep the Brazil winger at the Bernabeu amid growing interest from Arsenal.



The 26-year-old has entered the final 12 months of his current deal and has attracted interest from the Premier League champions in recent weeks.

Negotiations over a contract extension had reached an impasse, but Real have now tabled an improved offer, which Vinicius is understood to appreciate.

The Spanish giants are now awaiting the Brazilian's decision, with senior figures at the club, including returning head coach Jose Mourinho, hopeful he will commit his future.

**BARCELONA JOIN REAL IN RACE FOR RODRI**

According to a BBC Sport report, Manchester City midfielder Rodri faces a major decision over his future, with Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona both interested in signing him.

The 30-year-old has entered the final year of his City contract and is yet to agree fresh terms.

Real have long admired the Spain international, but Barcelona have now joined the race for the 2024 Ballon d'Or winner, according to the report.

Rodri endured an injury-hit spell after suffering a serious knee injury during the 2024-25 season, while a hamstring problem also disrupted parts of the following campaign. However, he returned to his best at this summer's World Cup, inspiring Spain to a second title and winning the tournament's Best Player award.

Having previously said his future would be decided after the World Cup, Rodri is currently recovering from back surgery and has yet to join City's pre-season tour in Asia ahead of next Sunday's Community Shield against Arsenal.



Since arriving at City in 2019, Rodri has won four Premier League titles, the Champions League and two FA Cups, establishing himself as one of the world's finest midfielders.

City are also in talks to sign 18-year-old Lille midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi.



PHOTO: STAR

## Rangpur target hexa

DILIP ROY

Fresh from lifting the Notun Kuri Sports title, Rangpur's young female footballers have set their sights on another milestone as they chase a record sixth crown in the JFA Under-14 Youth Development Programme.

A 20-member squad, led by coach Ruma Akter and captained by Anannya Khanam, left Palichhara Stadium in Rangpur on Thursday for Tangail, where one of Bangladesh's premier age-group women's football tournaments begins on Friday.

Jointly organised by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and the Japan Football Association (JFA), the competition has long served as a key platform for developing the country's future female footballers, with several national team players emerging through the tournament.

Five-time champions Rangpur will open their Group A campaign against Jhenaidah on Friday before taking on Chapainawabganj on August 9 and hosts Tangail on August 11. Group B consists of Gaibandha, Rangamati, Magura and Rajbari. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals on August 14, with the final scheduled for August 16.

Coach Ruma Akter, who has guided Rangpur to titles in 2014, 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2025, believes her side is ready for another successful campaign.

"Our target is a sixth title," she said in a programme on Wednesday. "The girls have prepared well, and we are confident of producing our best football."

Captain Anannya echoed that confidence after the team's recent success.

"Winning the Notun Kuri Sports title has given us even more belief," she said. "Everyone is in good form, and we want to continue our winning run by bringing another trophy home."

With a rich tradition of producing talented footballers, Palichhara has established itself as one of Bangladesh's leading nurseries for women's football. Now, Rangpur's rising stars are hoping to add another chapter to that legacy by becoming the first team to win the JFA Under-14 title six times.