DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 18, 2026, KARTIK 2, 1433 BS

SPORT



If it were me in his [Vinicius Jr's] place, probably I wouldn't be here. In this last summer I would have forced an exit to a league, a country, to somewhere there are rival clubs and stadiums that respect him.

Real Madrid manager **JOSE MOURINHO** ahead of his side's LaLiga fixture against Sevilla at home tonight.

Bangladesh Super League on the cards again

SPORTS REPORTER

Ten years after a failed attempt to introduce a franchise-based football league, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has revived the idea of a big-budget tournament, signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh Strategic Partnership at the BFF House yesterday.

The Bangladesh Super League (BSL) was launched amid much fanfare in 2016, with industrialist and sports organiser Tarafder Ruhul Amin playing a key role, but the tournament never materialised despite a logo unveiling, reportedly due to a lack of infrastructure.

With many of the challenges facing Bangladesh football still unresolved, the BFF has now received a fresh proposal to launch the Bangladesh Super League (BDSL) next year. However, the MoU is non-binding, non-exclusive and non-obligatory, and the UK-based company has been asked to submit a concrete, detailed proposal within six months.

The initiative was presented by Nazir Alam, executive chairman of Bangladesh Strategic Partnership, who claimed the company's sports-related portfolio exceeded $20 billion. Speaking after the MoU signing, Nazir said the initiative was backed by diaspora-owned companies with experience in international football and investment.

He acknowledged the challenges involved but said the commercial potential was significant, pointing to Bangladesh's passion for football, particularly the popularity of Argentina and Brazil during World Cups, and research into the domestic football market.

The proposed competition would feature 10 teams in a hybrid model, combining six regional franchise-based sides with four traditional clubs. A double round-robin format is under consideration, while football academies and infrastructure development would form part of the broader plan.

BFF vice-president Fahad Karim said the federation had asked the company to submit a comprehensive proposal detailing the number of teams, investment plans, operational arrangements and those responsible for running the competition.

"They have proposed bringing in five to six regional teams representing districts or divisions like Sylhet, Chattogram and Dhaka. Our president stipulated that the top four or five teams from the existing Bangladesh Football League must also participate," Fahad said.

Both Nazir and Fahad acknowledged the difficulties and the lessons of previous failed initiatives, but expressed optimism about the tournament's prospects.



First goal in 5 years for Jamal but Brothers held

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuyan scored his first goal in Bangladesh's top-tier professional league in five years as Brothers Union held Rahmatganj MFS to a 2-2 draw in the ongoing Bangladesh Football League (BFL) at the Bir Shreshtha Ft Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj on Saturday.

Jamal, the 36-year-old midfielder, scored his fifth top-flight goal with a long-range effort from the edge of the box to give Brothers a ninth-minute lead. Abhishek Limbu equalised from the spot 10 minutes later, before Syed Reza restored Brothers' advantage on the stroke of half-time.

Sazzad Hossain, however, rescued a point for Rahmatganj with an equaliser 13 minutes into the second half. The draw took Rahmatganj to seventh place with three points, while Brothers remained 11th with two.

The other match between Bangladesh Police and Arambagh KS at Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur also ended in a 1-1 draw. Rabby Hossain Rahul gave Police the lead in the 30th minute before Samar Joy Tanchangya equalised on the stroke of half-time.

Despite dropping points, Police retained top spot with 10 points from four matches.

Meanwhile, six-time champions Abahani climbed to fifth place with seven points after beating Chattogram City FC 3-1 at Mymensingh District Stadium.

Michael Babatunde, Anthony Okachi and Mohammad Al Amin scored for Abahani, while Raphael Odoyin netted Chattogram City's consolation goal.



Bangladesh's Saif Hassan celebrates after dismissing Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza, who edged one to wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan Sohan, during the opener of the UAE ODI Tri-Series, also featuring Afghanistan, at the Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. Saif dismissed Raza (4 off 5) in his second over, having earlier removed Brendan Taylor (81 off 101) to break his threatening 150-run fourth-wicket stand with Craig Ervine, who fell just seven runs short of a century. Taylor, meanwhile, surpassed Andy Flower (6,786 runs in 213 ODIs) to become Zimbabwe's all-time leading run-scorer in ODIs with 6,837 runs in his 211th appearance in the format. Saif's breakthroughs helped the Tigers fight back after Zimbabwe recovered from Taskin Ahmed's three early wickets. Zimbabwe, however, still managed to post 271 for eight in 50 overs. PHOTO: **ACB**

Litton's fitness woes refuse to fade

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh's recurring fitness concerns surrounding white-ball captain Litton Das have repeatedly forced the team management to make last-minute changes, ruling the wicketkeeper-batter out of several national assignments in recent months.

The latest setback came yesterday when vice-captain Tawhid Hridoy attended the toss in place of Litton ahead of Bangladesh's tri-series opener against Zimbabwe in Abu Dhabi. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) later confirmed that Litton would miss the entire tournament due to discomfort in his right hip joint.

"Litton Das complained of right hip joint discomfort yesterday, so we had done an MRI. The report shows a slight issue in his right hip joint," national team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan said in a video message. "Litton still attempted a fitness test today [yesterday] to see if he could play, but he could not clear the required benchmark. So, he is unavailable for this series," he added.

Appointed full-time ODI captain in July until the 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Litton had previously led Bangladesh in seven ODIs. The tri-series was meant to mark his first assignment as full-time ODI captain, but his latest injury has delayed that opportunity. Left-handed batter Parvez Hossain Emon, who can also keep wicket, has been drafted as his replacement.

Litton's latest setback follows a series of fitness-related absences. In June, he suffered a Grade 1 tear in his left calf muscle during the final ODI against Australia and missed the subsequent home T20I series, despite attending the official trophy photo session alongside Australia captain Mitchell Marsh on the eve of the series.



The circumstances were similar ahead of the ongoing tri-series, when Litton attended Friday's pre-tournament photo session alongside Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza and Afghanistan skipper Rahmat Shah, only to be ruled out the following day.

Litton also missed Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe in June and July. Initially named in the squad for the one-off Test, he was ruled out due to inadequate match fitness. He then missed the three-match T20I series and, despite travelling to Zimbabwe to join the ODI squad, was not fit enough to feature.

Initially left out of the squad for the first Test against Australia in August, Litton was later declared fit and featured in both Tests. Although his wicketkeeping was impressive, he registered three consecutive ducks. He subsequently led Bangladesh briefly at the 2026 Asian Games before earning the Player of the Match award in last week's drawn Test against Afghanistan.

A member of the national selection panel acknowledged the difficulty of assessing injuries from the outside, saying neither the team nor the physio could be certain of a player's discomfort without the necessary checks.

"Only the person who is injured can truly understand what they are going through," he said. "The note will come from the player, stating that I'm not feeling comfortable or that something doesn't feel right. Then the physio would conduct the necessary checks and assessments.

"When someone says about injuries, you just have to accept the situation. There's nothing you can do about it."

The concern extends beyond Litton's injuries to their timing. Last-minute withdrawals complicate preparations and force changes to team combinations. Having scored a fifty and a hundred against Afghanistan while spending considerable time behind the stumps during the five-day Abu Dhabi Test, Litton may have needed more time to recover before returning to action. His latest setback has renewed questions about his workload management, recovery and long-term fitness.

As Bangladesh prepare for the 2027 ODI World Cup and the 2028 T20 World Cup while seeking to improve their standing in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle, Litton's availability remains crucial. His ability to contribute across all three formats makes his fitness a key factor in the Tigers' ambitions, with the team needing to ensure that recurring setbacks do not continue to disrupt preparations at critical moments.



Haaland brace keeps City perfect

Erling Haaland netted twice to help Manchester City maintain their perfect Premier League record with a 3-2 win over Ipswich Town at the Etihad Stadium yesterday. Haaland, who could have had a hattrick but saw a goal denied due to an offside call, became the fastest player to score 100 non-penalty goals in Premier League history, achieving the feat in 139 games. The victory meant that City, embroiled in controversy since being found guilty of financial breaches, made it seven wins from seven games to stay top of the league.

PHOTO: **AFP**

Rabada 'raring to go' as Proteas hope to level series

AGENCIES

South Africa's pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada is ready to make his Test comeback after 12 months as the hosts look to level the three-match series against Australia in the second Test in Gqeberha, starting today.

Australia took a 1-0 lead with a commanding 214-run win in Durban and will aim to wrap up the series with another win, while South Africa will need a much-improved performance to keep their hopes alive.

Rabada has been cleared to play after recovering from a hamstring injury that kept him out of the series opener. The fast bowler has not played a Test since facing Pakistan in Rawalpindi last year, but is confident heading into his return.

At St George's Park in Gqeberha, Kagiso Rabada boasts a bowling strike rate of 40.8, the best among bowlers at the ground. He also claimed 11 wickets when Australia last toured South Africa in 2018.



"Right now, I feel ready. I feel confident. But it's sport. There's always some mystery," Rabada said ahead of the match.

"I know what it means for me, and that's going there and giving my best and trying to get those Australian batters out."

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma believes Rabada's return will provide a significant boost to the attack, particularly after Australia piled up 390 in their second innings in Durban despite being reduced to 124 for six.

"He is raring to go. The bowlers feed massively off him. He leads the attack in everything that he does, and it brings an extra level of confidence to the unit," Bavuma said.

Rabada's record against Australia offers further encouragement for the hosts. He claimed 23 wickets at an average of 19.26 during South Africa's 2018 home series victory over the visitors. He also took nine wickets in the World Test Championship final at Lord's last year, helping South Africa defeat Australia and lift the mace.

South Africa are expected to make changes after their opening defeat, with Matthew Breetzke in contention to feature and the team reconsidering its two-spinner combination. Australia, meanwhile, could retain their winning combination as they seek to secure the series and strengthen their bid for a third consecutive World Test Championship (WTC) final.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
Pakistan ODI Tri-Series
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
Live from 2:00 pm
World Championship of Legends
Final: England vs West Indies
Live from 9:30 pm
LaLiga
Real Madrid VS Sevilla
Live from 1:00 am (Monday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD 1, RAJDHANI TV
Premier League
Leeds vs man United
Live from 7:00 pm
Nottm Forest vs Arsenal
Live from 9:30 pm