

**Bangladesh retain Shakib, Liton for Ireland Test despite IPL plea**



Shakib Al Hasan  
AFP | Dhaka

Bangladesh have included all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and batsman Liton Das in the squad for their one-off Test against Ireland, ignoring their requests to join the Indian Premier League.

Shakib will lead the hosts in the game from April 4 to 8 in Dhaka while Liton will act as his deputy, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said.

Shakib and Liton are both in the Kolkata Knight Riders and had both requested a discharge from their national duties after Friday's conclusion to the three-match T20 series against Ireland.

"We have been told by the board they are both available for the Test match. That's why they have been included in the squad," chief selector Minhajul Abedin told AFP.

# Ahli, Hala triumph in football league

Ahli battle past Budaiya, Hala edge Hidd in week 18 action of 2022/2023 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier League

● **Abdulla Jassim Al Bahraini, Jamal Rashed on target for Ahli**

● **Abdulaziz Khaled Al Mansouri fires in both goals for Hala**

TDT | Manama

**A**hli and Al Hala were both victorious last night in their week 18 games of the 2022/2023 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League.

Ahli battled past Budaiya 2-1 while Hala edged Hidd with a similar 2-1 score line.

Scoring for Ahli in their win were Abdulla Jassim Al Bahraini and Jamal Rashed. Al Bahraini



Abdulla Jassim Al Bahraini, no. 9, celebrates with teammate Hassan Madan after scoring Ahli's first goal

opened their account in the sixth minute with a brilliantly hit volley from inside the box. Al Bahraini was on the receiving end of a cross from the right wing, and he showed his class with his stunning strike.

Budaiya then had a chance to equalise from penalty spot in the 29th minute, but Frederick Ofori Acheampong's spot kick was saved by Ahli goalkeeper Ebrahim Luthfallah, who made a diving stop to his right.

## Standings

	P	W	D	L	+/-	Pts
Manama	16	9	4	3	15	31
Al Khaldiya	17	9	4	4	14	31
Sitra	17	8	7	2	10	31
Muharraq	16	8	6	2	15	30
Riffa	17	7	6	4	7	27
Al Ahli	18	7	6	5	1	27
Al Shabab	17	7	2	8	1	23
Al Hala	18	5	6	7	-5	21
Hidd	18	5	5	8	-11	20
East Riffa	17	4	6	7	-5	18
Bahrain Club	16	3	4	9	-8	13
Budaiya	17	1	2	14	-34	5

After the break, Rashed made it 2-0 in the 54th minute with a spectacular curling free-kick from just outside the area. His left-footed effort flew to the top-right corner of goal, past the outstretched arm of the opposing goalkeeper.

Budaiya were able to get a goal

back six minutes after the hour-mark when Acheampong scored on a one-on-one with Luthfallah in a quick counterattack.

Ahli claimed their seventh win and improved to 27 points on the league table. Budaiya suffered their 14th loss and stayed in last place.

## Verstappen on pole in Australia as Mercedes bounce back

AFP | Melbourne

**D**ouble world champion Max Verstappen claimed pole yesterday for the Australian Grand Prix ahead of Mercedes' George Russell, but his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez had a torrid time and will start last.

In overcast and cool conditions, Lewis Hamilton in the other Mercedes was third ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso in a tight session that went to the wire.

Last year's winner Charles Leclerc came seventh in the Ferrari, with his teammate Carlos Sainz fifth.

It was a huge performance from Mercedes, whose W14 has struggled for speed but is clearly improving as they bettered Ferrari.

Lance Stroll in the other Aston Martin will start sixth ahead of Leclerc with Williams' Alexander Albon a shock eighth.

Alpine's Pierre Gasly was ninth with Nico Hulkenberg in



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts after taking pole position

a Haas rounding out the top 10.

It was a second pole of the year for Dutchman Verstappen, and the 22nd of his career, after the season-opening race in Bahrain, which he went on to win.

He started from 15th in Saudi Arabia a fortnight ago after mechanical problems, but sliced through the field to come second behind Perez.

The 25-year-old knocked out his rivals with a flying lap at the death of one minute 16.732,

0.236 secs ahead of Britain's Russell.

"I think the last run was very good, the whole weekend has been tough to get the tyres in the right window," said Verstappen, who has never won in Australia and will start on pole for the first time at Albert Park.

"Very happy to be on pole, already looking forward to tomorrow. I think we have a good race car but it is tricky on the tyres, so going to be an interest-



ing race for sure."

But Mexico's Perez -- one point behind Verstappen in the championship standings -- had a horror of a day, struggling with grip and balance.

He left the track four times during the third practice and it didn't get any better in qualifying when he locked up and careened into the gravel at Turn 3 on his first lap.

## Mercedes will take 'huge' confidence from Australia: Russell



Mercedes' British driver George Russell in action at the Albert Park Circuit

AFP | Melbourne

**G**eorge Russell said his Mercedes car was the "best" he had raced and the team took "huge" confidence from qualifying at the Australian Grand Prix regardless of what happens in the race.

The Briton will start from the front row in Melbourne on Sunday alongside dominant Red Bull champion Max Verstappen, with his teammate Lewis Hamilton third.

Their efforts, outpacing Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso and both the Ferraris, raised hopes that they could make the podium.

Team boss Toto Wolff said this week Mercedes had made

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GEORGE RUSSELL

"promising" progress since the first two grand prix of the season, and Russell said he couldn't be happier.

"I think we're learning more about this car, I don't think it is where we want it to be, but it's evolved, just for the set up, from Bahrain to Jeddah to here," he said.

"For sure, the tyres played a big part this weekend ... but just to be two-and-half tenths (of a second) off (Verstappen) when we have been a second on other occasions."

The result marked Mercedes' best Saturday this season, with significant upgrades in the upcoming break after Australia set to improve its W14 car further.

Russell said he was excited by the prospect.

"I think the feeling of the car is not the limitation, it feels pretty decent," he said.

## Perez hoping Red Bull solve problem that ruined Australian qualifying

AFP | Melbourne

**A**dejected Sergio Perez said yesterday he was hoping Red Bull can fix the issue that wrecked his Australian Grand Prix qualifying so he can "minimise the damage" in the race.

The Mexican, who won in Saudi Arabia a fortnight ago, had a horror day in Melbourne as he struggled with grip and balance.

He joined the third practice session 20 minutes late as mechanics worked on his car, but left the track four times when he finally got on the circuit.

The problem persisted in qualifying when he locked up and careened into the gravel at Turn 3 on his first lap, beaching the car that had to be removed



Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez looks on as marshals remove his car from the side of the track

by a crane.

It means he will start last on Sunday, with a mountain to

climb to get in the points on a track where overtaking isn't easy.

**I hope we are able to fix the technical issue for tomorrow, otherwise it will be really hard to race like this**

SERGIO PEREZ

He told reporters the issue seemed to be brake balance, which he thought had been sorted out.

"I hope we are able to fix the technical issue for tomorrow, otherwise it will be really hard to race like this," he said.

"We are confident that together as a team we will be able to sort it out because it's very important that we do so.

