



Young Bangladesh paceman Hasan Mahmud bowls in the nets during practice yesterday. Meanwhile, New Zealand stand-in skipper Tom Latham was seen speaking to young fans yesterday ahead of tomorrow's first ODI at the University Oval.

PHOTO: BCB/TWITTER

## 'The record shows that we have to do things differently'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The most important facet in all of Bangladesh's major victories in international cricket is that the whole team contributed, no matter the size.

This time, the Tigers have set themselves the target of bucking the trend of losses on Kiwi soil and finally achieving a victory, having failed in 26 previous attempts across all formats. Mindset and togetherness will be definitive, as will hunger and will to win.

From what could be surmised from ODI captain Tamim Iqbal and head coach Russell Domingo's press conferences, their pace arsenal is what the Tigers feel could make the difference as they gear up for the first ODI to be played at Dunedin tomorrow.

Historically, it will be first time that the team think-tank feels the faster bowlers will hold the key in order to win matches on Kiwi soil. But the preparations, the extra time spent in New Zealand this time around, and the vibe the captain has gotten from the players during the tour gives them reasons to be optimistic.

Along with Mustafizur Rahman to spearhead the attack, the Tigers have Rubel Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Al Amin Hossain, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud and Mohammad Saifuddin in the



"This is my first tour to New Zealand with Bangladesh. I have been here with South Africa before. So, I know it's a tough place to tour. There is a World Cup three years away and New Zealand are one of the top sides in the world. So, if we want to be serious contenders for an event like that in India then we have got to put big performances in series like this."

RUSSELL DOMINGO  
BANGLADESH HEAD COACH

squad, with Tamim stating that at least three faster bowlers would feature in the playing eleven.

In the absence of ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the team combination will have to be adjusted.

"Team combination-wise, we're definitely going for three fast bowlers and then all-rounders. I want to go in with five bowlers because it's difficult to play four bowlers here since the grounds tend to be small, which often lead to high-scoring matches," Tamim said during a virtual press conference yesterday.

Both coach and captain felt

excited by the prospect of the fast bowlers and, if anything, it was a good opportunity to blood them ahead of important commitments like the 2023 World Cup.

"It is a great opportunity for us to do something that no Bangladeshi side has done before," Domingo headlined during the

difficult prospect has been the top-order batting in New Zealand. The extra pace and swing on offer for faster bowlers is something they need to work on in order to grind a result.

Playing away from the body and dropping their heads has been prevalent, even among experienced top-order batsmen.

Tamim knows the task is not easy. In fact, he ascertained that the top-order might once more face the music, but the game has to be won through their own strengths and collectiveness.

He consigned 'the first 10-15 overs are the most difficult time to bat' in Kiwi conditions and as such 'wickets falling and struggling a little bit' is normal. However, Tamim was banking on the very 'positive vibe' from his players, one that perhaps has been spreading with the faster bowlers' prospects.

"We have to play fearless and attacking cricket. Our past record here shows that we have to do things differently. For me, the most important is the bowling. I am very excited with the new fast bowlers. They will do well or maybe not but they will learn and not just me, the whole team is excited as they have worked very hard in the nets and in the practice game," he said.

On their last tour, the Tigers scored above 200 in each ODI and perhaps the absence of Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor ushers in hope of denting the Kiwi batting, which was relentless last time.

## BFF-UNICEF U-16 football starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

After a one-year break due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the BFF-UNICEF Under-16 Women's Football Championship will get underway today with 42 districts taking part in the qualifying round across the country.

Participating teams, split into seven groups, will play a knockout games before one team from each advances to the final. Those seven and the hosts of the final round will then compete in the eight-team final round from April 1.

The qualifying round starts in Mymensingh today before 70-minute matches are played in Munshiganj, Brahmanbaria, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Khulna and Patuakhali.

"Although it is a meet for U-16 girls, the championship will feature U-12 girls in order to give them a greater opportunity to play football," BFF Women's Football Committee chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiran said at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

She added that BFF coaches would be deployed in each of the seven venues to scout talented players that will later be given advanced training and groomed for national age-level teams.



Australia opener David Warner hit his first century (108 off 115 balls) in 14 months to help New South Wales maintain their unbeaten record in the domestic Marsh One-Day Cup yesterday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Premier Div Chess begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



Although 11 teams are participating in round-robin league, the title race is expected to be between Bangladesh Police Chess Club, Saif Sporting Club and Biman Bangladesh, who have formed strong squads.

Bangladesh Police, who clinched the title on their debut season in 2019, boast Indian Grandmasters Surya Shekhar Ganguly and Raunak Sadhwani

alongside Bangladeshi GMs Adullah Al Rakib and Ziaur Rahman and local IM Fahad Rahman.

Last edition's runners-up and former champions Saif SC have also roped in strong players like Indian GM B Adhiban, Belarusian GM Valdislav Kovalev and Bangladeshi GM Reefat Bin Sattar while also including FM Mehedi Hasan Parag and Abdul Malek.

15-time champions Biman Bangladesh, who returned to top-flight chess in 2019 after a seven-year hiatus, roped in GM D Gukesh and GM Neelotpal Das from India alongside Bangladeshi GM Enamul Hossain Razib and Bangladeshi FMs Taibur Rahman and Rezaul Haque. A total of 66 players, including 13 GM and nine IM, are taking part in the league.

## Mehedi realises a 'distant dream'

ANISUR RAHMAN



26-year-old centreback Mehedi Hasan, who has not yet completed an entire Bangladesh Premier League campaign, was in wonderland after being named as a surprise inclusion for the national football team before the booters boarded a Nepal-bound flight to take part in a three-nation tournament involving the hosts and Kyrgyzstan's U-23 team.

Injury to centreback Tapu Barman and poor performances from other regular fixture at the back, Yeasin Khan, led to head coach Jamie Day calling up a couple of new faces for the defence. But Mehedi's inclusion came as a surprise to the player himself one, although it is an opportunity that he is eager to grab.

"Nothing could be bigger for my career than being called up for the national team. I never even thought of playing in the Bangladesh Premier League when I started my career in Bangladesh Army in late 2012. Playing for the national team was truly a distant dream for me," Mehedi told The Daily Star on the eve of his departure.

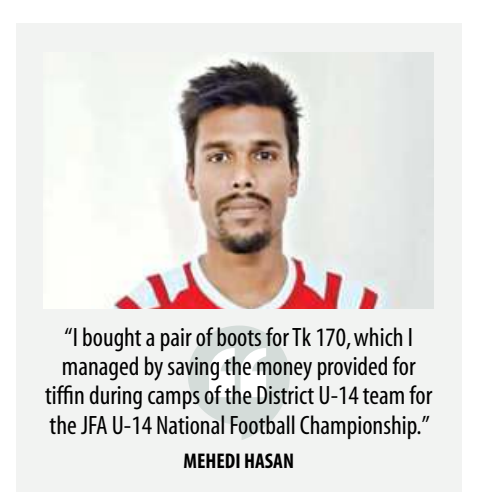
"I did not expect that I would get called up for the national team after playing the Federation Cup and only 11 league matches for Muktijoddha Sangsad," Mehedi said, adding that he would probably be working in another sector had he not secured a job in the Bangladesh Army in 2012.

The said the 5-foot 10-inch defender represented Chattogram Abahani in the 2018-19 season during the second phase of the professional football league. After that stint at the port-city side, he joined Muktijoddha Sangsad ahead of the 2019-20 season, which was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, he seems to have won Day over in practice. "I had a good three-day practice under Jaime Day. I believe that I can do something to secure a place in the squad because if you take

training seriously, it is possible to adapt to Day's style of play.

In his native Kurigram, Mehedi saved the money provided for tiffin in order to save up for his first pair of football boots.

"Football is more popular than cricket in our Bhurungamari upazila but I was inspired to play football after seeing my seniors. They played football with boots but I played against them barefoot. Upazila Krira Shikkha officer Parimal Chandra Saha taught me a lot about football. I bought a pair of boots for Tk 170, which



"I bought a pair of boots for Tk 170, which I managed by saving the money provided for tiffin during camps of the District U-14 team for the JFA U-14 National Football Championship."

MEHEDI HASAN

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Mehedi will be trying to attract Day's attention in the rest of the practice sessions in Nepal ahead of the game against Kyrgyzstan on March 23.

Meanwhile, proven left-back Rahmat Mia will undergo a second Covid-19 test on Sunday after testing positive yesterday. However, it was good news for in-form winger Rakib Hossain, who flew with the team after testing negative in his second Covid-19 test after earlier testing positive.



All Nepal Football Associations (ANFA) officials welcome the Bangladesh team upon their arrival at the Tribhuvan International Airport yesterday. Bangladesh will take part in a three-nation tournament which begins from March 23.

PHOTO: BFF

## RUTHLESS BAYERN, CHELSEA EASE INTO QUARTERFINALS

### 'Bayern play a high-risk game'

REUTERS, Munich

Holders Bayern Munich cruised through to the Champions League quarter-finals for the ninth time in the last 10 seasons after beating Lazio 2-1 at the Allianz Arena on Wednesday to secure a 6-2 aggregate victory.

Leading 4-1 from the first leg in Rome, Robert Lewandowski opened the scoring for Bayern from the penalty spot in the 33rd minute, his 39th goal of the season in all competitions, to virtually end Lazio's hopes.

Bayern joined fellow German side Borussia Dortmund in the last eight and Lazio's exit means no Italian team will compete in the Champions League quarter-finals, with Juventus and Atalanta having also gone out at the last-16 stage.

"It was important for me that we won the game," Bayern coach Hansi Flick said. "Lazio defended well but I think the win was deserved."

"Our attack is so strong and we play

a high-risk game. It's important that we keep playing like this and defend from the front to put our opponents under pressure."

"We did well, the boys were in the game then we conceded a goal from a penalty," Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi said. "We exit with honour after six matches unbeaten in the group."

"We were sorry for the first leg but I think we played a good match here."

### 'No one wants to play against us'

REUTERS

Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel says his side should fear no one in the Champions League after the London club secured a spot in the quarter-



finals for the first time since 2014 with Wednesday's 2-0 win over Atletico Madrid.

Goals from Hakim Ziyech and Emerson Palmieri helped Chelsea complete a 3-0 aggregate win and extended their unbeaten run to 13 games in all competitions since Tuchel replaced Frank Lampard as coach in January.

Holders Bayern Munich and Premier League leaders Manchester City are among the sides left in the competition, with the draw to be made today, but Tuchel said Chelsea deserved their place among Europe's elite.

After a run of four consecutive eliminations when appearing at the last-16 stage in the Champions League, Chelsea have progressed to the competition's quarter-finals for the first time since 2013-14 under Jose Mourinho.

Bayern Munich have qualified for the quarter-finals of the Champions League for the 19th time - the most of any team in the competition's history. They are now unbeaten in their past 19 games in the Champions League, equalling their longest run of consecutive games without defeat in European Cup/Champions League history - previously a run of 19 between 2001 and 2002. Including finals, Bayern Munich's Hans-Dieter Flick is the first manager in Champions League history to win each of his first seven knockout-stage games in the competition.

"The most important thing is we deserve this," Tuchel said. "They play with a special bond and results like this give you a certain edge to achieve special things."

"I'm sure no one wants to play against us. This will be a difficult challenge... But on we go, no need to be afraid. We take what we get."

Tuchel said there was still room for improvement. "We need to improve in counterattacks, we have to be more forward thinking, use our speed and exploit spaces," he said. "We are looking to be more clinical and precise."