

Archers ensure silver in Konya

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Following a string of failures at the 5th Islamic Solidarity Games, the Bangladesh women archers ensured at least a silver medal for their country by finishing second in the compound team event's qualification round in Konya on Monday.

Roksana Akter, Shamoli Roy, Puspita Jaman finished fifth, sixth and eighth, respectively, out of 10 competitors to tally 2034 points altogether for Bangladesh, who stood 34 points behind hosts Türkiye. The final match is on Wednesday.

Roksana and Shamoli, thus, moved into the quarterfinals in women's compound individual events, while Puspita is set to play pre-quarterfinal match against Nur Aina Yasmine of Malaysia tomorrow.

In recurve men's individual events, Hakim Ahmed Rubel, Ruman Sana and Sagor Islam stood 10th, 11th and 16th, respectively, among 49 archers in the qualification round. Consequently, Rubel and Ruman moved into the pre-quarterfinals after getting bye in the first-round match, while Sagor beat Khalid Rashid of Sudan 6-0 to move into the pre-quarterfinals as well.



Tottenham Hotspur coach Antonio Conte (R) and his Chelsea counterpart Thomas Tuchel (L) shake hands before getting into a brawl following their English Premier League match, which ended 2-2, at Stamford Bridge in London on Sunday. Both coaches were both shown red cards.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Pakistan sweat on Afridi's fitness

AFP, Rotterdam

Pakistan will look to collect crucial World Cup qualifying points when they tackle the Netherlands in a three-match ODI series from Tuesday but will have a wary eye on the fitness of star bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi.

The 22-year-old paceman suffered a knee injury on the recent tour of Sri Lanka, a worrying setback with the Asia Cup -- and a meeting with old rivals India -- coming up at the end of the month.

Pakistan team bosses do not want to overload a fast bowler who has already played 97 times across all three formats since his international debut just four years ago.

"We're taking a couple of doctors with us to take care of Shaheen and want him to play a game against Netherlands to see if he's fit and ready for the Asia Cup," said Pakistan skipper Babar Azam.

"But we have 11 trump cards. Each of them can be match winners on their day. I have faith in every one of them, whether batters or bowlers."

The second match is on Thursday and the series ends on Sunday.

'Afif is our future'

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The Bangladesh think-tank is considering changes to the batting order for the Asia Cup, slated to start on August 27, with the intention of changing the Tigers' dwindling fortunes in the shortest format of the game.

Following impressive recent performances with the bat, Afif Hossain is set to get a settled batting position. According to team director Khaled Mahmud, the youngster is being considered at the number four position in place of experienced Mushfiqur Rahim for the upcoming Asia Cup.

Mushfiqur missed the West Indies series as he took leave to perform Hajj before being rested for the Zimbabwe tour, where Afif made his mark. The southpaw scored 50 off just 38 balls in the third T20I in the West Indies and proved instrumental during the three-match T20I series in Zimbabwe despite his batting position continually changing.

"We're thinking of a certain position for Afif. He is a dynamo. He is a confident boy and has been batting brilliantly in T20Is. More importantly, he is an aggressive batter which is what we are looking for. He is our future, we want to give him the opportunity," Mahmud told the media yesterday.

The former Bangladesh captain also

said that the team management had Mushfiqur in mind alongside skipper Shakib Al Hasan and a few other players as back-up options for the opening slots after the selectors picked just two out-and-out openers in the form of Anamul Haque and Parvez Hossain for the Asia Cup.



Selectors had initially named a 17-member squad for the Asia Cup due to injury concerns but it was learned that would eventually be cut down to a 15-member squad.

There has been plenty of talk about the approach and attitude from Bangladeshi batters, especially in the shortest format of the game. The Tigers have won just four of their last 18 T20Is since the last ICC T20I World Cup in 2021.

In a bid to turn things around and inspire the team to play a fearless brand of cricket, the team management opted to inject fresh faces into the team ahead of the Zimbabwe tour and even named Nurul Hasan Sohan as captain in place of regular skipper Mahmudullah Riyad.

But things remain unchanged. The visitors went on to lose the three-match T20I series 2-1, with Bangladesh falling 10 runs short in chase of a modest target of 157 runs in the last game.

According to Mahmud, batters need to play with clarity and a fearless attitude in the upcoming Asia Cup.

"We are unable to create that attacking mindset because there are doubts in the batters' mind. When you are playing T20Is, whether you need to score 180 or you are all out on 100, I am in favour of such an attitude. If you want to win, you need to score big," Mahmud told the media yesterday.

With the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup scheduled for later this year in Australia, Mamud informed that the team management was preparing accordingly.

"When you play the World Cup in Australia, you are not going to win by scoring 120-130. You need to play for 180. Even if we are bundled out for 110, I won't mind if we play with an attacking mindset. But I want the boys to play aggressive cricket," he added.

'A pattern of a very weak cricket board'

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The Shakib Al Hasan issue has been the talk of the town lately. The cricketer signed then rescinded a controversial sponsorship deal with betting-related site Betwinner News.

But, instead of being punished for his misdeeds, Shakib was named skipper of Bangladesh's T20I side.

Talking about Shakib's shenanigans with The Daily Star, Mohammad Isam, Bangladesh's correspondent for ESPNcricinfo, held the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) equally liable for the cricketer's actions.

"It is definitely a pattern," Isam said of Shakib's actions during a video podcast at The Daily Star Centre. "Over the years, he has acted in certain ways [that were questionable]. In the 2011 World Cup, he showed his finger to a fan. There was a huge controversy about that. He followed up with such incidents one after another.

"From the very beginning, he kept on portraying all of his outbursts and anger issues on the field and everyone was like 'wow, he is new'. Yes, he is



new. He is very good on the field. But turning a blind eye to all these incidents led to him kicking down stumps [during a DPL encounter between Mohammedan-Abahani in 2021] and making an issue out of touring South Africa [in March-April]. Actually, all these messes, it is not just Shakib's pattern. It is a pattern of a very weak cricket board," Isam added.

Asked if Shakib gets preferential treatment from the board, Isam replied: "I have never seen anyone else getting away after getting into a fight with the board. Tamim Iqbal has gone through hell for even thinking about signing for a company in 2018. Or maybe someone misquoted Tamim and he got into trouble. Mashrafe has gotten into trouble many times. Mushfiqur showed some guts and talked about payment issue during the 2012 BPL and he was threatened with being left out of tours."

Isam agreed that Shakib is the greatest cricketer that Bangladesh has produced to date, but urged the BCB to have a look into Shakib's manner of conduct.

"Of course, everyone treats the first boy in the class differently and that is understandable. But if that boy has done [questionable] things 10-15 times, then you have to think about that boy's lifestyle and discipline."

BCL clubs left in a quandry by tumultuous BFF

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Clubs that finished in the promotion spots in the second-tier Bangladesh Championship League are hesitant to prepare for next season's the top-tier Bangladesh Premier League as the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), four months into an investigation, is yet to release the report of a probe into match-fixing allegations.

The 12-team BCL concluded nearly eight weeks ago, with Fortis FC and Azampur FC finishing first and second respectively.

But the final BCL standings have not been declared by the BFF due to an ongoing investigation that began in April regarding match-fixing, betting and match manipulation against a few clubs, including Azampur FC.

As the BPL transfer window approaches, clubs that could potentially be promoted are lagging behind existing BPL outfits in terms of confirming players for the upcoming season.

"Most of the BPL outfits have already decked up their squads but we are in a dilemma because the investigation report hasn't been published yet. What is the point if we will be relegated to the lower division after playing one season in the top league?" Azampur FC president Saidur Rahman Manik told The Daily Star.

The top two teams from the BCL gain promotion in the BPL but if Azampur FC are found guilty, third-



placed NoFel SC are likely to get the opportunity to return to the top-tier league. But they are also in quandary.

"We don't know the standings yet. You need some time to assemble players for the BPL. You can't make a good team for the BPL on short notice," NoFel SC general secretary Shakhawat Hossain Bhuiyan Shaheen said, urging the BFF to declare the final standings of the BCL for the sake of preparation.

Swadhinata KS and Uttar Baridhara Club have already relegated to the BCL but the absence of Saif SC, who finished third last season before withdrawing from the BPL, means an additional club from the BCL may be promoted to the BPL.

In the case that the BFF Elite Academy team -- which finished fourth in the BCL -- is not permitted to play in the top-tier league,

Gopalganj FC, who finished fifth in the BCL, want to take the opportunity.

"We still don't know the BCL standings and the BFF's decision about Saif SC. If we are given a chance to play in the BPL, we really want to take it," Gopalganj FC general secretary Nazrul Islam Hira said.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag hopes to deliver all decisions before transfer window opens ahead of the next season.

"We have already sent the probe committee's report to the disciplinary committee. They are expected to sit within this week to take a final decision on the match-fixing," Shohag said. "There are hardly any chances to insert an additional club into the BPL from the BCL although a final decision will be taken at the BFF executive committee meeting."

