

## Unfamiliarity the concern for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were completely outplayed on Saturday and suffered a heavy 59-run defeat against a fierce Indian side in a Women's Asia Cup encounter at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

However, more concerning than the margin of defeat is the Tigresses' inability to go toe to toe with big teams like India, which was apparent by the way Nigar Sultana Joty's side faltered yesterday.

"Most of the time, we play these [big] teams only during World Cups. We do not play frequent series against them. That's a problem," Joty said at the post-match press conference yesterday.

The other game that the defending champions lost in this edition of the Asia Cup was against Pakistan. However, much of the blame for the nine-wicket thrashing in that game was attributed to a slow and un-sporting track at the Sylhet ground 2.

Bangladesh came into this tournament as unbeaten champions in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers, where they convincingly beat the likes of Ireland, Thailand, Scotland, and the USA.

For the Tigresses, as per Joty, the problem lies in their lack of exposure against teams like India throughout the year.

"The teams we play against regularly, we know about their bowlers and their strengths. So, we are doing well against those teams. If we are given the opportunity to play another game against India, we will definitely play better cricket," Joty added.

India posted a big 160-run target and suddenly Bangladesh found themselves in an uncharted territory. Although they did not lose a wicket, the Tigresses could only muster 30 runs in the Powerplay. They played as many as 21 dots during those six overs of initial field restriction.

"When chasing such a big total, the utilisation of the Powerplay remains the most important aspect. If they [the openers] could score 45 runs or around 50 runs in the Powerplay, we would not have lost by such a big margin. We could even have been in with a chance to win the game," Joty realised.

The Tigresses' innings stopped at 100 for seven in 20 overs but they looked to be out of the contest long before that. Bangladesh have two more games to play - against Sri Lanka and the UAE - in the league stage of the tournament and winning any one of them could make the case for seeing the Tigresses progress to the semifinals.

A spot in the semifinals seems all but certain for the hosts but the main headache for this Bangladesh side would be when they might face another unfamiliar opponent at the latter stage of the tournament.



After missing the tournament opener due to delayed arrival, which raised many eyebrows, Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan is all set to lead his side against hosts New Zealand in their second match of the tri-nation T20I series in Christchurch today. Can the ace all-rounder inspire the Tigers in making a turnaround following a dismal display against Pakistan? PHOTO: STAR FILE

## Can Shakib reunite TIGERS?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be hoping for a better outcome after a 21-run defeat to Pakistan in the first game of the tri-nation series as regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan takes over the side in their clash against hosts New Zealand in Christchurch today.

Shakib - who had initially missed the photo session with the other captains on Wednesday after being delayed by two days due to 'complicacies with visa procedure' - was 'rested' by the team management for the tournament opener against Pakistan.

Led by Nurul Hasan Sohan, Bangladesh were able to restrict Pakistan to 167 for five but the Tigers were unable to grab the opportunity. Eventually, Bangladesh reached 146 for eight in 20 overs.

There were questions regarding Shakib's involvement as captain, such as the need to engage with the team more, especially as they hope for a better result in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup in Australia later this month.

"Compared to the preparation we took at home and in the UAE, there is nothing wrong with playing in a franchise league. If three or four of our players had played such leagues, it would have been better for the team. But we expected Shakib to join the team in New Zealand well before the series. He could sit with the team and talk, train together and play matches to try and erase whatever happened in the past and only focus on the coming days," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Maybe he maintained communication

in different ways but obviously his physical presence has a different value. The players feel elevated by his presence. Let's hope he make up for it as a player and a leader. As a leader it is important to keep the morale of the team high and spend more time with the team."

Meanwhile, the Tigers think-tank continued to experiment with makeshift openers Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Sabbir Rahman, but things remain unchanged.

It will be important for Shakib and the team management to ensure better planning with lingering questions over the makeshift opening pair as well as the need to a settled playing eleven ahead of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup later this month in Australia.

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NAZMUL ABEDEEN FAHIM

"From the start of this tournament, I felt we might have given a chance to someone else in the opening position. I feel if you are not a proper batsman, it is always difficult to score consistently against such bowlers in those conditions. And if you observe

closely, you can see that openers play proper cricketing shots. Many feel that T20 cricket is all about playing on the up, but that is wrong.

"Obviously Miraz is very confident and that might help him play his shots but Sabbir is losing confidence. I think Liton can be a good option for the opening position since he plays well in white-ball cricket. He can open the innings with Miraz and Shakib can come in at number three. Afif Hossain can bat at number four, I have observed some changes in his batting and noticed he is trying to anchor the innings," he said.

According to Fahim, the vulnerable opening pair and fragile lower-middle order is putting more pressure on the top and middle order.

"We had two makeshift openers in Miraz and Sabbir and they have been failing. We have seen Taskin Ahmed coming in at number eight, which means we have a fragile opening and the lower order. We might feel that we are playing with seven batters but we technically have only five batters in the team," said Fahim.

With less than a month to go until the T20 World Cup, Fahim opined the Tigers could take a lot from the ongoing tri-nation series. He added that it was too late to experiment.

"We were not totally outplayed in the first game. At one point when Liton and Afif were batting, it seemed we could even win and reach that stage I think that's something positive. I am hoping the team will be more organised because it's too late to experiment," he concluded.

## NCL gets underway tomorrow

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The 24th edition of the National Cricket League is set to begin from tomorrow across four venues in the country.

Eight teams divided into two Tiers are set to feature in the first-class cricket tournament, where defending champion Dhaka Division take on Rangpur in Tier 1 at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, while Sylhet lock horns against hosts Chattogram at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Meanwhile in Tier 2, Khulna encounter Dhaka Metro and Rajshahi clash with Barishal at Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium and Sheikh Kamarauzzaman Stadium, respectively.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has also announced the prize money of the tournament, which involves the champions and runners-up of Tier 1 to receive Tk 30 and 15 lakh, respectively, while Tier 2 champions earn Tk 7 lakh. Moreover, among other cash-rewards, Tk 1 lakh and 50 thousand has been allocated for the player-of-the-tournament from Tier 1 and 2, respectively.

Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal will feature for Chattogram in the first two rounds of the tournament. However, the majority of national team players will be absent in the first few rounds of the NCL since they will be engaged with the Bangladesh T20 side, who are currently playing in New Zealand and are set to take part in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup later this month.

## 19 enlisted Icon players for HCT draft

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19 national team players were named Icon players for the upcoming Hockey Champions Trophy (HCT) when the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) revealed a 172-member list ahead of Monday's draft.

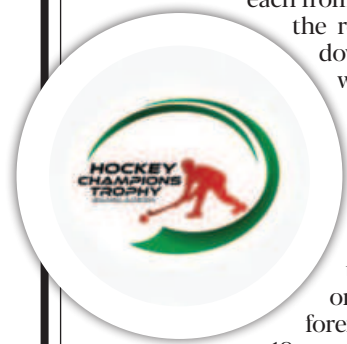
Six franchises can choose only a single player each from the list of icons after which the remaining players will drop down to the A+ category, where 15 players already feature. Unsold players from the A+ category will fall to A and so on.

Teams are allowed to sign a maximum of 13 local players [one icon, two A+, three A, four B and three C], one direct signing and four foreign players to round out an 18-man squad.

"We think all the players of the national hockey team are equal and deserve to be icon players, so we decided to keep all 19 players who last represented Bangladesh on the international stage as icon players," draft committee chairman and BHF vice president Sajed A A Adel said. "We also wanted to avoid any controversy about icon players."

172 local players will participate in the draft, but franchises require only 84 for the first-ever franchise league, which is scheduled to get underway from October 28 at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Federation.

Icon players : Milon Hossain, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Ashraful Islam, Khorshedur Rahman, Farhad Ahmed Shitul, Deen Islam Emon, Fazle Hossain Rabbi, Sarwar Hossain, Roman Sarkar, Nayeem Uddin, Biplob Kujur, Sohanur Rahman Sabuj, Mehdi Hasan, Arshad Hossain, Pushkor Khisha Mimo, Abu Sayeed Nippon, Rezaul Karim Babu, Prince Lal and Rakibul Hasan Rocky.



## 'As a captain, I am very happy'

AGENCIES

Captain Babar Azam's half century inspired Pakistan to their second win in the Twenty20 international tri-series in Christchurch on Saturday, coasting past New Zealand by six wickets.

Pakistan were supreme in all facets as the Black Caps were shut down by tight Pakistani bowling (147-8) and that was never going to be enough runs with Babar Azam (79 off 53) in the middle, where poor fielding allowed him to remain as the tourists eased home with six wickets and 10 balls to spare.

New Zealand were missing as many as four of their first-choice XI, so will hardly be panicking. But they will need to make vast improvements if they wish to go one better at the World Cup after losing last year's final to Australia.

"We played really well. Our bowlers bowled well in the first six and finished well too. As a captain, I am very happy. We assessed the conditions and executed the plans. Shadab played well and Nawaz too. We have done our best. We need to sit together and discuss before next game," said Azam.

He said the rapid 61-run stand with Shadab for the third wicket gave an insight

to a tactic they could employ at the World Cup, with the all-rounder shifted up the order.

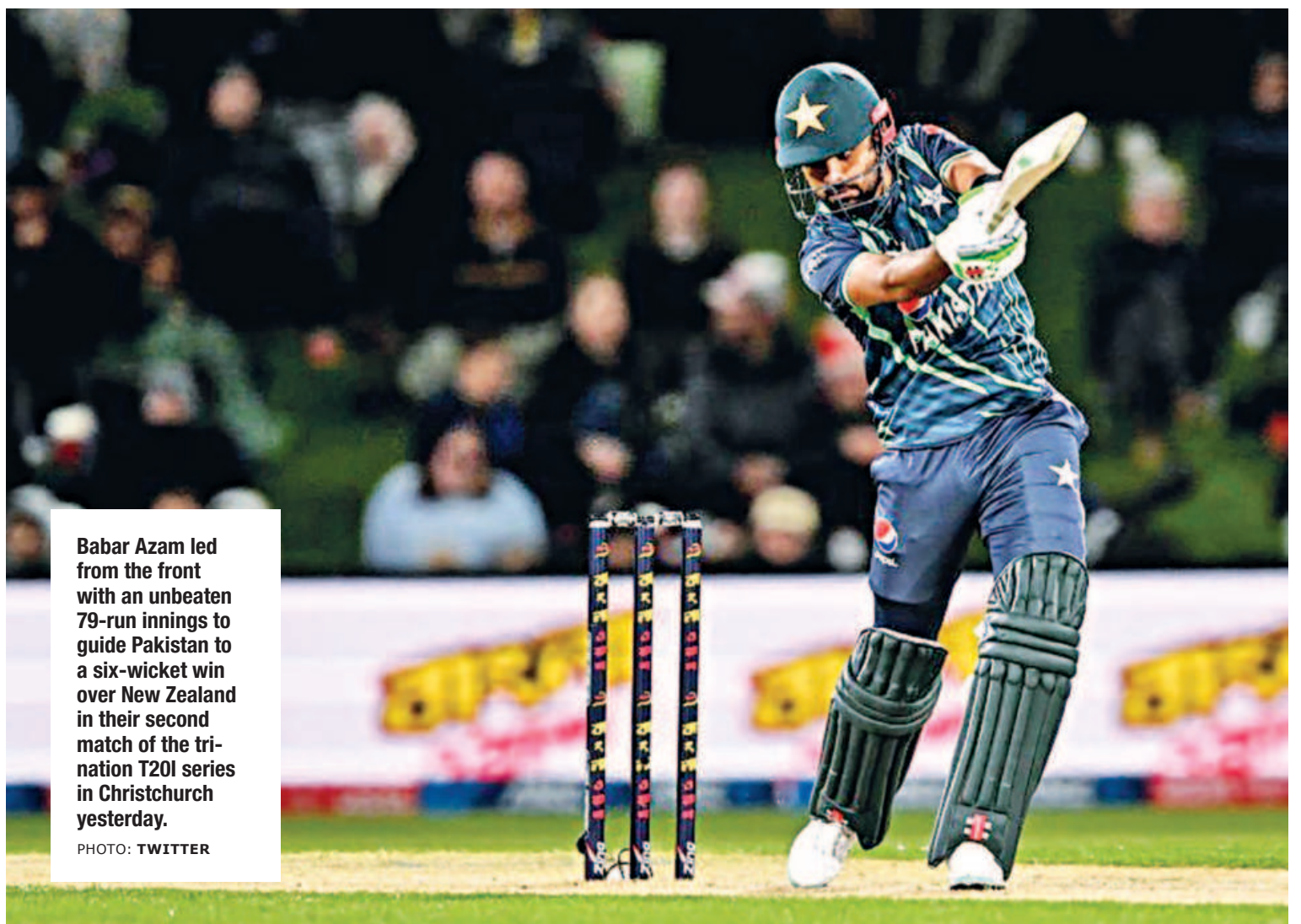
"Definitely, we have a plan to send Shadab up to charge the bowlers, to utilise his skills. He played very well. We planned that I would go all the way and Shadab would take a chance."

"We came up against a quality opposition. Pakistan were clinical and it was hard to get a rhythm. If we got two big overs there, the total would've been competitive. The guys are feeling good, and we know it's a tough match tomorrow (against Bangladesh). Same surface, looking forward to tomorrow," said New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson.

The hosts paid a heavy price for a straightforward dropped catch by Glenn Phillips at point off Tim Southee's bowling when Azam was on 27.

The opener went on to post his 28th T20 international half-century, the equal second most alongside Rohit Sharma, with both sitting behind another Indian, Virat Kohli (33).

"We pride ourselves in that area. Need to just switch on and hopefully a few learnings going into tomorrow night," Williamson said when asked about their uncharacteristic fielding performance.



Babar Azam led from the front with an unbeaten 79-run innings to guide Pakistan to a six-wicket win over New Zealand in their second match of the tri-nation T20I series in Christchurch yesterday.

PHOTO: TWITTER