

## Don't need to worry much, says Siraj

SPORTS REPORTER

It was a thrilling third days' play on Saturday as Bangladesh bowlers kept the Test match alive by picking up four wickets in the final hour, leaving India needing another 100 runs to win the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Defending a small target of 145 runs, off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz turned the destroyer in chief for the Tigers as he bagged three wickets, including the crucial wicket of Virat Kohli who was seen having a few words with Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan before leaving the field angrily.

Axar Patel, however, looked solid and will resume the fourth day on 26. And with two in-form batters -- Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer -- to follow, Indian seamer Mohammad Siraj was confident of successfully chasing the target.

"I think that we should not worry much as we lost just four wickets and we require another eighty odd runs (100 runs). So, if one batter can stay and as Axar is batting really well, I think we don't need to take extra pressure," Siraj told during a press conference following yesterday's play.

Earlier, Liton Das helped Bangladesh post 231 in their second innings with a brisk 73-run knock off 98 balls, laced with seven fours. Nurul Hasan Sohan played a rapid 31-run cameo while Taskin Ahmed also added valuable 31



Bangladesh players celebrate the dismissal of Cheteshwar Pujara during an intriguing final session of the third of the second Test against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. Chasing a modest target of 145, the visitors were four down for 45 at stumps.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## BPL to begin on Jan 6

SPORTS REPORTER

The ninth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League T20 competition will begin from January 6 as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the schedule of the franchise tournament yesterday.

Chattogram Challengers will take on Sylhet Sixers in the first game on the opening day while defending champion Comilla Victorians will face Rangpur Riders in the days' second fixture.

The final is scheduled for February 16 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, with the organisers keeping a reserve day for the final game. The tournament will take place across three venues -- Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.

Following the first eight games in Dhaka, the tournament will move to Chattogram where the next 12 matches will take place.

After returning to Dhaka for four games, the tournament will move to Sylhet for the next eight matches. The final phase of the seven-team tournament will take place in Dhaka.



not out during a 60-run eighth wicket stand with Liton to frustrate the visitors.

According to Siraj, the hosts scored 30 runs extra in their second innings and the late surge helped Bangladesh to gain momentum.

"Yes, the wicketkeeper (Nurul Hasan) came and started to attack and then Liton also showed some intent so it cost us some extra 30 runs and it shifted the momentum towards them," Siraj added.

Meanwhile, Siraj also denied any growing rivalry with Liton. Siraj also explained his provocative celebration that followed after the seamer had dismissed the right-handed batter yesterday.

"The crowd was yelling. That's why I (did the shush sign). When I went behind [near the crowd] earlier, they were saying something. That's why I did that," he added.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

<b>BANGLADESH VS INDIA</b> End of Day 3	51, Liton 73, Taskin 31; Patel 3-68, Ashwin 2-66
<b>BANGLADESH: 1st Innings</b> -- 227 all out; 2nd innings -- 231 all out (Zakir	<b>INDIA: 1st Innings</b> -- 314 all out; 2nd innings -- 45 for 4 (Patel 26 not out, Kohli 1; Miraz 3-12, Shakib 1-21)

## Right intent with balanced aggression

SPORTS REPORTER

India require a further 100 runs, while Bangladesh six more wickets. The second Test in Mirpur was finely poised at end of the third day yesterday. The home side are now expecting something magical today, egged on by how the latest session had gone for the bowlers, especially the spinners.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan roared in appeal in the very first ball, the arm delivery beating the inside-edge of the bat. Shakib did not wait for a discussion, going for the review as soon as the umpire turned him down. The ball was turning a bit too much and missing leg, as the hawk eye replay showed. But it was a very close call and it set the tone for the Tigers. They needed to attack.

Four India wickets fell in the session, the trajectory of the match changing with each. Needing just 145 runs and just a little more than two days to bat, the pressure created was telling. Shakib got rid of KL Rahul and Mehedi Hasan Miraz then produced three great deliveries to bag three.

Even Nurul Hasan Sohan made amends for first innings misses, with two stumpings and getting one sharp caught behind.

All that signalled the match tilted in Bangladesh's favour. Asked by a visiting journalist if they felt they were ahead, Liton

Das was pretty clear on the Tigers' motive.

"Definitely we are ahead at the moment, and they are under pressure. If tomorrow we come with a good plan, definitely they will break down. That's our goal. We need to win," he said at the press conference yesterday.

India had promoted Axar Patel at number four and after Virat Kohli's dismissal, Jaydev Unadkat was sent in, hoping to preserve the wickets of Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer -- the duo who got runs in the first innings with attacking intent. That appeared to be the mojo on an unpredictable surface.

Liton did not mince words regarding those moves. "No matter how many batters you have left and the number of big names, when you don't have wickets after them, there is not much left to do. If we can pick two wickets early, they then have Rishabh and Iyer. Of course they are good batters but they will be under pressure."

The confidence has soared after the days' final events and there will be some help early in the morning where the ball tends to skid.

"We know the quality of our bowlers and Mirpur wicket is always difficult for batters. At the same time, the target is not very big. If you leak runs trying to attack too aggressively, then there is not

much left to play with," Liton said about the fine balance the Tigers have to maintain to win.

The target might look small but Bangladesh fought back hard after losing four wickets in the morning session. The idea to attack came during that spell of pressure from India.

Liton, lucky to survive a few chances, put on 46 for the seventh-wicket stand with Sohan before adding 60 with Taskin Ahmed with a counter-attacking mindset. It helped Bangladesh get four more runs than their first innings total.

"When Miraz came to bat I told him that it's not the kind of surface where one can defend and stay for long. You have to counter attack. Miraz couldn't do it but I said the same thing to Sohan bhai. The time he spent [at the crease], no matter how long it was, brought vital runs and then I told Taskin the same thing.

"The more you get bogged down here, the more they will dominate. So what I told everyone is that we need runs no matter how they come," Liton said, while adding that aggressive mindset with the bat transmitted to the fielding unit.

"I think we were successful," Liton concluded on the partnerships that set a tone of aggression and hopes of a historic first win against India in Tests.

## Di Maria has WC trophy tattooed on his leg

AGENCIES

Angel Di Maria has commemorated Argentina's World Cup triumph by unveiling a giant tattoo of the trophy on his leg.

The winger played a starring role as La Albiceleste claimed their third world crown on Sunday, beating France on penalties in an epic final.

Argentina's celebrations still have not ceased, and Di Maria now has a permanent reminder of the biggest win of his career.

The 34-year-old shared with his 22.9 million Instagram followers footage from his visit to tattoo artist Ezequiel Viapiano, who produced a huge sketch of the World Cup on his right thigh.

It is not the first time Di Maria has celebrated success by adding to his vast display of personalised ink.

Indeed, a tattoo of the Copa America trophy occupies his left thigh after Argentina's 1-0 victory over Brazil in last year's final, in which his goal ended his nation's 28-year wait for major silverware.



## David Warner defiant ahead of 100th Test

REUTERS

Ahead of his 100th test for Australia in a Boxing Day match against South Africa in Melbourne, David Warner vowed to keep fighting despite having his back "up against the wall" after his recent struggles in the longest format.

Warner has not scored a test century in almost three years, and his declining output has led to speculation he might retire from the format.

However, selectors have said he is part of Australia's plans for the tour of India starting in February.

Playing in his 100th test match "means the world to me", Warner told reporters. "It's the same old cliché but it's obviously a massive occasion.

"I'm living every housing commission boy's dream - I wanted to play cricket for Australia and I'm doing that now," said Warner, who was raised in public housing in an underprivileged neighbourhood of Matraville.

"My back's up against the wall but it's in my DNA to keep being competitive and take on whatever opposition I'm going to face... I couldn't be any more proud of myself, my family for getting me here and my closest friends."

Warner struggled in the recent 2-0 whitewash of West Indies amid off-field distractions brought on by his aborted bid to have his permanent leadership ban lifted. He then scored 0 and 3 runs in Australia's victory over South Africa in the first test.

The 36-year-old said his mental health was not where it "needed to be" ahead of the West Indies series, crediting his team mates and family for helping him through a difficult period.

"It's Christmas time, the festive part of year, I'm in a great headspace now getting ready for this training session and pumped to walk out and play another Boxing Day test, but more importantly with a series on the line," Warner said.

## Djokovic hopes for warm welcome in Australia

AFP, Dubai

Novak Djokovic is hoping he will receive a warm welcome from the public when he returns to the Australian Open next month, now that the drama surrounding his vaccination status and deportation is officially behind him.

A nine-time champion at Melbourne Park, Djokovic was unable to compete in the opening Grand Slam of the season in 2022 after he was deported from Australia over fears he would incite anti-vax sentiment.

As a result of his deportation, Djokovic was banned from entering Australia again but that decision has been reversed and the world number five is pleased he will get the chance to vie for a 10th title in Melbourne and a men's record-equalling 22nd major crown overall.

"I always ask the best from myself so let's see. Over the years I've been really fortunate to start very strong in Australia and I love playing there," Djokovic told reporters at the World Tennis League in Dubai on Friday.

"After obviously what happened earlier this year, hopefully I can have a decent reception there and hopefully that can help me play some good tennis."

Djokovic was unable to compete in two of the four majors this year as his vaccination stance forced him to sit out the US Open. However, he finished his 2022 campaign by winning titles in Tel Aviv, Astana and the ATP Finals in Turin.



On the eve of Christmas and with his 100th Test match coming up on Monday, Australia batter David Warner posted this picture of his family on his social media accounts with the caption: From my family to yours, Happy Christmas, we love you all. We wish you all the joy and happiness for this festive time of the year.

PHOTO: TWITTER