

‘I am keeping my feet on the ground’

After an impressive run of form in the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League for Sylhet Strikers, Towhid Hridoy was rewarded for his performances by being included in the Bangladesh squad for the upcoming white-ball series against England. The 22-year-old opens up and spoke about his game, views and a few other topics during an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star’s Mazhar Uddin**. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Congratulations. You must be over the moon after getting a national call-up.
Towhid Hridoy (TH): It is every cricketer’s dream to represent the country at the senior level to be honest. And yes, I am happy.
DS: Were you expecting a call-up after finishing as the third highest run-getter in the BPL?
TH: I was a bit more confident this time around because, as you mentioned, I scored runs in the BPL so I was hoping for a call from the national team. But my focus remained on my game while I was playing in the BPL. That was never in the back of my mind.



DS: Although you have been scoring runs consistently for the past couple of years, there was a notable change in your body language during the BPL. Did you specifically work on your batting recently?
TH: Many do not realise that I have been scoring runs consistently over the past couple of years across various levels. After the Under-19 World Cup triumph, I played in the High Performance squad alongside the A team and I scored runs. But maybe people didn’t notice that. But yes, I made some slight adjustments to my batting ahead of the BPL such as backlift and it worked well for me.
DS: There have been many instances of players that were rated very highly initially in their careers failing to live up to expectations due to various pressures. Are you aware of that?
TH: I am very much aware of that fact. But despite being young, I have seen both side of the coin so early on in my life. It is very obvious that if you don’t perform you have to make way for others. The same goes for me. I am prepared to give my best whenever I get an opportunity to play for my country. I am not thinking about outcomes; I’m focused on sticking to my process.

DS: Did you chalk out any plans for the England series?
TH: Look, I am the type of player who is prepared to play according to the situation. My strength is my adaptability and I am up for the challenge ahead of me. Obviously, our coach and captain will make their plans but I am personally also doing my homework on how to tackle the English bowlers on home soil.
DS: Did you have a chat over your game with any national players after being selected in the squad?
TH: I spoke to [Najmul Hossain] Shanto bhai and he shared his experiences of international cricket. Top-level cricket is tough and you need to prepare yourself accordingly. I am working on it.
Mushfiqur Rahim bhai also guides me a lot. He has been my idol since childhood. He gifted me his bat in 2017 and since then I have been using his bat because I don’t feel comfortable batting with any other bat now.



A young boy makes a return on the opening day of the Junior World Tennis Series Bangladesh Open Tennis Competition at the Sheikh Jamal National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday. (Inset) Mashfia Afrin, who became the first Bangladeshi female referee to conduct international tennis matches.



PHOTO: BTF

Expectations heightened for Hathurusingha’s return

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Khaled Mahmud had a great working relationship with Chandika Hathurusingha during the Sri Lankan’s previous stint as head coach of Bangladesh. Back then, Mahmud was the man who acted as a go-between for the head coach when it came to dealing with everyday dressing room issues and tactics.
The BCB brought in the Sri Lankan coach for a second stint despite his last tenure ending unceremoniously, but expectations may very well define his return, even before results on the pitch.
Those expectations, key areas of improvement that the BCB earmarked Hathurusingha for, are heavily built around World Cup ambitions, especially given how the team have performed, even away from home, in ODIs. While Mahmud yesterday informed that he would not be returning as team director for the England series, he punctuated the expectations that Chandika brings along with him.
“As far as I know him, my thinking is positive. May be he will take us further than where we are. The Hathurusingha that arrived before did not have an experienced side. But he made them a force and we started winning matches. The dressing room culture changed too. There were many changes. The team has matured and he has matured too so we can hope that we will do better under him and Bangladesh will achieve something



big,” Mahmud said while talking to reporters on Monday.
The question on expectations regarding the ODI World Cup soon followed, and Mahmud did not hold back.
“The ODI World Cup is in our main format. So we want to make it big. We want to do what we haven’t done before. We want to be champions...if I can say that. If I am talking practically, of course we want to make the quarterfinals. You always have a chance in the knockout stages and playing well on a given day can see you progress

to the semis or final. We are strong and playing well in this format, so our aim is to go higher,” Mahmud stated.
Bangladesh made the quarterfinals of the 2015 World Cup and the semifinals of the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017 and, when asked if those expectations could be surpassed, Mahmud said the expectations were not just from the board.
“We want him [Hathurusingha] to eclipse himself. The Shakib-Mahmudullah duo that won the match [in the Champions Trophy game against NZ] are more mature now, right? The youngsters are more defined, so we obviously want to [do better]. I don’t want him to feel like there is a burden on him. But I know that the kind of person he is, he will want to do that himself. Before arriving here, that is what he has been planning in regards to how he will organise Bangladesh,” Mahmud replied.
“It’s important to improve in Tests and T20s with him in charge. He has good idea of our culture and our players,” he added.
Hathurusingha is expected to begin working from Tuesday, according to Mahmud, and the head coach will also hold a co-ordination meeting at some point with Head of Programs David Moore, U-19 head coach Stuart Law and representatives of the HP and other game-development programmes in order to find a settled curriculum for the pipeline of cricketers.

Imrul urges attacking cricket against England

SPORTS REPORTER

Imrul Kayes, who has been out of the national set up for a few years, believes that Bangladesh need to play attacking cricket against England in their upcoming white-ball home series next month.
The Tigers will host England after over six years but Imrul, who scored a hundred during that previous three-match ODI series, added that it would be important for the hosts to play fearless cricket against defending champions.
“I think you can’t be complacent against a team like England, who are in great form. Obviously, they have a great pace-bowling attack and a few spinners in their side. But I think we are capable of beating them on our own soil. I can remember the last time they toured Bangladesh, I scored a hundred and I think my attacking mindset helped me play my natural game. I think our batters need to keep that in mind,” Imrul told The Daily Star during the multimedia show ‘Non Striker’s End’ yesterday.
Imrul, who led Comilla Victorians to a fourth Bangladesh Premier League title recently, also praised the re-appointment of Chandika Hathurusingha.
“I played under him during his first tenure and I must say Hathurusingha is one of the best tactical coaches I have ever worked with. He might have his own way of doing things, but he knows how to get the best out of players,” he added.



Red-hot Napoli take on Europa League winners

AFP, BERLIN

Two months after World Cup final heartbreak with France, Eintracht Frankfurt striker Randal Kolo Muani is driving his club’s shot at a second-successive European crown.
The Europa League winners qualified for the Champions League for the first time in their history and made the Round of 16, thanks in no small part to Kolo Muani’s form.
On Tuesday, Frankfurt host the continent’s form team in Italian side Napoli, who boast a 15-point lead atop the Serie A table.
Napoli are led by 24-year-old Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen, who has chalked up 19 goals in all competitions this season.
For his part, Kolo Muani has 15 goals in 30 games in total in 2022-23. The star striker arrived at Frankfurt on a free transfer from Nantes in summer, just after the German club’s stunning run to the Europa League title – Eintracht’s first European title in 40 years.
The France striker’s knack for important goals – he scored the winner in Frankfurt’s 2-1 group stage victories over Marseille and Sporting Lisbon – belies the criticism he received after France’s loss to Argentina in the World Cup final in December.

Klopp eyes Liverpool revival ahead of Real revenge mission

AFP, LONDON

Jurgen Klopp has urged Liverpool to turn their recent improvement into a season-saving revival as the Reds eye Champions League revenge against Real Madrid.
Klopp’s side are showing signs of finally emerging from a dismal spell that threatened to ruin their entire campaign.
Liverpool have reeled off successive victories over Everton and Newcastle to give them renewed hope of snatching a top four finish in the Premier League.
Saturday’s 2-0 win at Newcastle moved Liverpool to within six points of the fourth placed Magpies with a game in hand.
While it is too early to say Klopp has found remedies for everything that has ailed Liverpool throughout a traumatic



season, they welcome Real to Anfield for Tuesday’s last 16 first leg with morale no longer at rock bottom.
Klopp will take that as a foundation from which to kick-start Liverpool’s bid to win the Champions League for a second time under the German.
Liverpool, six-time winners of Europe’s elite club competition, would already have more Champions League triumphs in the Klopp era if not for pesky Real. The Spanish giants beat Liverpool in the 2018 final, eliminated them in the 2021 quarter-finals and won

last season’s final 1-0 in Paris thanks to Vinicius Junior’s goal.
Liverpool haven’t beaten Real since a Champions League last 16 victory in 2009.
Last year’s loss was especially painful at the end of their failed quadruple chase, a quest that brought just FA and League Cup success and left Klopp’s players struggling mentally and physically this season.
Even greater scars were worn by the Liverpool fans traumatised after police used unnecessary force in ugly scenes outside the Stade de France before kick-off in the Champions League final.
The repercussions from those incidents are still being felt and it would a cathartic moment for Liverpool if they could end Real’s reign as holders.
It hasn’t escaped the attention of Liverpool fans that this year’s

Champions League final is in Istanbul, the scene of their against-all-odds victory over AC Milan in the 2005 showpiece.
A return to the Ataturk Stadium would bring back sweet memories for the Reds, but first they have to get past Carlo Ancelotti’s men.
After a season marred by defensive problems, Klopp takes heart from Liverpool’s second consecutive clean-sheet against Newcastle, a feat they had not managed in the league since October. “Massive, 100 per cent. It explains a little bit the issues we have in the games where we can’t control it better. It’s so long ago we were in a situation like that,” Klopp said.
“It’s unfortunate that football is not like cycling, always exactly on the same level. It’s different. The only way you can get back on track is by winning.