

## Tigers thrive on creativity

SPORTS REPORTER

The lone Test against Ireland presented an ideal platform for the Bangladesh team management to try and test new strategies, considering the visitors' lack of experience and strength in the longest format – a format in which the Tigers are yet to become consistent.

There were talks that Shakib Al Hasan and his troops are willing to play with an attacking mindset under head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. It was during Hathurusingha's first stint where Bangladesh adopted to maximise the home advantage, preparing tailor-made surfaces to favour the spinners, and went on to undone teams like England and Australia.

This time, however, the Sri Lankan was willing to play in a sporting track and provide a fair platform for the Bangladesh seamers who have shown great improvement in recent times.

Despite losing the in-form Taskin Ahmed at the last moment, leading to curators shaving the grass off the Mirpur pitch, the team management still showed courage in proceeding with three quicks in the playing eleven with Ebadot Hossain, Khaled Ahmed and Shoriful Islam.

Although the pacers were not able to make an impact significantly since the Mirpur pitch turned out to favour the batters, the positive approach in preparing the seamers for tougher conditions deserves appreciation.

The fact that the Tigers fielded six specialist bowlers in the playing eleven – with three pacers and three spinners in the form of Shakib, Taijul Islam and Mehedi Hasan Miraz – is also something unique from Bangladesh's perspective. Taijul remained the standout bowler, bagging nine wickets in the game after scalping a fiver in the first innings.

Interestingly, Shakib opted not to bowl much against Ireland. It may have raised a few questions but the Tigers skipper said he is not willing to “use all options every time.”

“It's not necessary that one must bowl when you have five-six different weapons in your armoury,” said Shakib, and he added, “We have enough bowlers to pick 20 wickets and I have full faith in them. They have shown that, especially in the type of pitch where we don't play often.”

On the batting front, Liton Das, who normally bats at number seven in Tests, was also part of the tactical flexibility as he opened in the second innings and played an aggressive and impactful cameo during the successful chase that resulted in a seven-wicket victory.

Overall, it demonstrated that the Tigers think tank has managed to utilise the Ireland Test for the upcoming days.



**Skipper Shakib Al Hasan was all smiles after Bangladesh's seven-wicket victory over Ireland in the one-off Test in Mirpur on Friday, but things could have gone awry had Ebadot Hossain not picked up the wicket of Andy McBrine early on Day 4. With just his second delivery of the day, Ebadot broke through McBrine's defences before wrapping it up with the wicket of Graham Hume and setting Bangladesh on course for a victory.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## ‘Mental change the biggest area of improvement’

SPORTS REPORTER

It has been a long stretch of international commitments for the Tigers, starting with the T20 World Cup in Australia last year and culminating with the multi-format series against Ireland.

The period has seen a number of changes to the side, with veterans excluded, especially from T20Is, and young guns blooded in a new way. Another change of



### SCORES IN BRIEF

**Bangladesh vs Ireland Only Test, Day four**  
**Ireland:** First innings- 214 all out in 77.2 overs and second innings- 292 all out in 116 overs (Tucker 108, McBrine 72; Taijul 4-90, Ebadot 3-37)  
**Bangladesh:** First innings 369 all out in 80.3 overs and second innings- 138 for three in 27.1 overs (Mushfiquir 51 not out, Tamim 31; Adair 1-30)  
Result: Bangladesh won by seven wickets  
Player-of-the-match: Mushfiquir Rahim

note in the time has been the progression of the team tactically and approach-wise.

However, Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan said that the biggest area of improvement had been the growth in the mentality of the players.

The T20 World Cup saw Bangladesh produce their best outing statistically, winning two Super 12 games for the first time in their history and falling just one win shy of making it through to the semifinals.

“Mental improvement is where I feel we have made the biggest improvement. When we played the last T20 World Cup match, we discussed that maybe we were thinking of

ourselves as a small side. But in reality, we weren't a small side. If we had carried that belief, we could have made the semis. We were lacking in that particular area,” Shakib said at the post-match presser.

Following the T20 World Cup, Bangladesh clinched an ODI series against India, a T20I series against England and won T20, ODI and Test assignments against Ireland. Shakib said that they had planned to bring on changes after the T20 World Cup.

“From then on [after T20 World Cup] we had been thinking of changing [our mentality]. Especially if you look at those in the T20 side, all of them have this kind of mental change,” Shakib said, alluding to players' ability to keep their nerves and show toughness.

In particular, Shakib was talking about the mentality of being a big side and the team has responded to the credo of having an aggressive mentality that big sides possess.

The England ODIs saw the collective agreement to play on better tracks, instead of taking the usual route of slow and low surfaces. The ODI series was lost 2-1 but Bangladesh were able to gauge their

strengths in their own conditions against a superior team.

More came were rung in after the England ODIs as BPL performances saw the inclusion of Rony Talukdar and Towhid Hridoy. The Tigers then lay down a marker with a 3-0 clean sweep against the T20 world champions with a far more aggressive outlook.

Coming into the Ireland series, Bangladesh found more substance in their attempt to be mentally stronger. Big wins in the ODI series were followed by big scores in T20Is which led Shakib to feel that the year would be a good one.

From Liton Das to Mushfiquir Rahim and Taskin Ahmed to Hasan Mahmud, the Tigers have found better means to be aggressive and Shakib was hoping to continue in that vein as the ODI World Cup nears.

“I had said earlier that 2023 would be a good one for us. It's an important year and there is the World Cup and Asia Cup. Of course we want to play well in the next six months. Four of the first six months have gone very well and we would like to continue. A majority of the games will be one-dayers and it's a format we do well in,” Shakib said.

## BCB expects tax exemption for new stadium

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has requested the National Board of Revenue (NBR) for a tax exemption on the import of materials required to build the Sheikh Hasina International Cricket Stadium, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon said in a press conference yesterday.

The final schematics for the stadium were submitted to the BCB last month and the design will be finalised in about three months' time according to BCB sources.

“Due to the sudden devaluation of the Taka against the US Dollar, what should cost 200 crore is costing 500 crore. A majority of the things will be imported. No board spends their own money to build stadiums but we will be doing it with our own money. We know the government will help us if we ask, but we don't want to put that burden on the government so we will do it ourselves. We can ask for an exemption on the tax of imported products since we are doing it with our own money,” Nazmul said, adding that he expected the request to be granted.

The stadium capacity will be “45k to 50k” and will include a green gallery.



**I think there is something else...I don't know...it's sad. Nothing can be more shameful than this for the country – BCB president Nazmul Hassan slams BFF for not sending women's team to Olympic qualifiers.**



## Sakib costs Kings first dropped points

SPORTS REPORTER

League leaders Bashundhara Kings had their first stumble in the Bangladesh Premier League, playing out a 1-1 draw against newcomers Azampur FC Uttara at the Shaheed Rafiq Uddin Bhuayan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

Sakib Bepari got on the end of an uncharacteristic error in stoppage time to even proceedings after Robson Da Silva had given the visitors a 57th-minute lead to put an end to Kings' 14-match winning streak in the league since a 1-1 draw to Mohammedan in Cumilla last season.

Despite dropping their first points in 11 games this season, Kings remain top of the table with 31 points. But their lead against their nearest rivals was cut to seven after Abahani had yesterday beaten Fortis FC 2-0 at the Muktijoddha Smriti Stadium in Rajshahi.

Kings could have maintained a nine-point gap by notching up a win, but they dropped points against a side they had beaten 3-0 in their first meeting of the season.

Azampur gave Kings a run for their money before conceding from the spot following a foul on Dorielton Gomes.

With the clock running into the last minute of the five minutes of added time, Sakib stunned Kings following an error from Tapu Barman. The defender's pass ricocheted off Sakib and in behind the defence, with the striker running onto the ball and finding an easy finish.

The goal secured Azampur's third point in 11 matches.

## PSG situation NOT ACCEPTABLE

REUTERS, Paris

**Paris St Germain's Ligue 1 situation is “not acceptable”, coach Christophe Galtier said on Friday after their lead at the top of the table shrunk to six points ahead of two key encounters.**

PSG were 10 points ahead in late February but they have now lost their last two games in their worst start to a calendar year in 22 years. On Saturday, they visit Nice, who are on a 12-match unbeaten streak, although they drew their last four games.

Second-placed RC Lens will be next up for PSG, who have already been eliminated from the Champions League and the French Cup.



Lens will provisionally move within three points of PSG later on Friday if they beat Racing Strasbourg at home.

“These are important matches. Nice are on a huge unbeaten run since (coach) Didier Digard took over. Then we will be hosting Lens, but first there is Nice,” Galtier told a news conference on Friday.

“We are all aware that we must do more, including myself. We must

also show more personality and have a lot of pride. Our situation is not acceptable. We must not act, but react.”

Galtier warned that PSG's lead was not a guarantee they would secure the title at the end of the season.

“We obviously have to get out of this spiral. There is an 11th title at stake for Paris St Germain. That's what I told the players, we have a six-point lead. But what do we do with these six points? Do we leave ourselves in a deadlock or do we react?”

Forward Kylian Mbappe, who is suffering from hip pain but will be available for Saturday's game, criticised the club on Thursday after it featured him in a video to promote season ticket sales, without informing him how the interview would be used.

“It's very difficult to comment on, it concerns Kylian and the club. Kylian was in a very good mood this morning, he was smiling, he cut short the training session with hip discomfort, but it will not compromise his participation in the Nice game,” said Galtier.



**After sitting out Manchester City's 4-1 hammering of Liverpool last weekend due to a groin injury, Erling Haaland is set to return to action when Pep Guardiola's men make a trip to bottom-placed Southampton for a Premier League contest on Saturday. “He trained the last two days really good,” said Guardiola.**

PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY