

## Tigers renew focus with white-ball camp today

SPORTS REPORTER

The lone Test against Afghanistan ended in emphatic fashion for the hosts on Saturday but a few Bangladesh players have already begun training individually at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium indoor nets yesterday.

While veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim was seen sweating it out and seemingly in search of adding a few new shots to his repertoire, the likes of pacer Hasan Mahmud also underwent a session with the bat at the indoor nets on the eve of official white-ball practice, starting from today.

Hasan's bowling partner, Taskin Ahmed, suggested earlier that the upcoming ODI series against Afghanistan -- scheduled to begin from July 5 -- will "be challenging".

"Everyone had been preparing well [with white ball] even before the Test began. We are hopeful of something good, although it won't be easy [in the ODIs against Afghanistan]," Taskin said following a commercial event on Monday.

Taskin relayed the emphatic 546-run Test win "is in the past now" and that the "next game will begin from the first ball". The Tigers' pace spearhead believes their work will now begin anew to maintain growth of improvement, with two major tournaments in sight.

"The pacers are doing well but everything will start with focus on that match [on July 05]."

"Normally, Chattogram offers sporting, batting-friendly wickets. However, we are all hopeful that if we can maintain our consistency in terms of improvement, everyone will be gradually prepared for the upcoming World Cup and Asia Cup," Taskin concluded.



Mushfiqur Rahim leaves the field as rain forced him to abandon outdoor practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. The Tigers' official training camp begins today but, given the forecast, it remains likely that indoor practice will again be the order of the day. [Inset] New pace sensation Hasan Mahmud finds himself surrounded by fans. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## Mintu named U-23 team's head coach

SPORTS REPORTER

Zulfiker Mahmud Mintu has been made the head coach of Bangladesh U-23 national football team for the upcoming AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers, which is scheduled to be played in Thailand from September 4 to 12.

AFC A licence holder Mintu, who is also the head coach of Bangladesh Premier League club Sheikh Russel KC, had previously worked with the senior national team as assistant to Maruful Haque during SAFF Championship and Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

Masud Parvez Kaiser, the head coach of Fortis FC, has been named as Mintu's assistant. Kaiser had worked in the same position of the senior national team previously.

The decision was made yesterday at the adjourned meeting of the National Teams Committee, headed by BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed.

Bangladesh were drawn in Group H along with hosts Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines. The winners and four best runners-up teams from 11 groups will advance to the finals to be held in Qatar next year.

# New dimension enlivens SAFF Championship

## India take on Pakistan on opening day

SPORTS REPORTER

The 14th edition of SAFF Championship will feature a new dimension of competitiveness as two Middle Eastern nations enter the fray with the curtains set to be raised at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore today.

Defending champions India will start their campaign by taking on cross-border rivals Pakistan in the second game of the opening day after Kuwait play last edition's runners-up Nepal at the same venue.

Since the introduction of the South Asian football extravaganza 30 years ago, the competition was confined to seven sub-continental nations until Afghanistan joined in 2005. After failing to add much spice to proceedings in their first three appearances, Afghanistan started challenging India by reaching all three finals from 2011-2015 and even lifting the trophy once.

But after the Afghans quit SAFF in 2018 and joined the Central Asian Football Association, India became virtually the only contenders, clinching eight titles in 13 editions.

With India climbing up in the FIFA ranking relentlessly and other South Asian nations struggling to match the standards set by their predecessors, India's proposal to invite the stronger teams from beyond the South Asian region to increase the tournament's competitiveness has led

**Sunil Chhetri**  
India captain

**Yousaf Butt**  
Pakistan captain

**“For the first time we have Lebanon and Kuwait participating in SAFF Cup. With due respect to other teams of SAFF region, their [Lebanon and Kuwait] level is better which is a good thing. It will be different than what other SAFF Cups we have played.”**

**“As devoted sportsmen, we understand the power of sports in transcending political boundaries and fostering strong relationships between nations. We will put in a worthy performance despite zero sleep and jetlag -- and off the field will try to win hearts to ease the tension.”**

to the inclusion of 99th-ranked Lebanon and 143rd-ranked Kuwait.

The two are expected to challenge India's stranglehold while two-time champions Maldives, one-time champions Bangladesh and Nepal will also hope to make their presence felt.

Prolific Indian striker Sunil Chhetri felt it would provide a different challenge. "For the first time, we have Lebanon

and Kuwait participating in the SAFF Championship. With due respect to other teams in the SAFF region, their [Lebanon and Kuwait] level is better and that is a good thing. It will be different than the other SAFF Championships. The champions are going to have a different challenge," Chhetri said in an interview with SAFF.

The championship will also mark the

return of five-time semifinalists Pakistan, who missed the last edition of the championship due to a suspension from FIFA. Although the team was set to land early today, the Pakistanis are expected to pose a threat to India and Kuwait in Group A, especially after coming into the tournament on the back of a four-nation tournament in Mauritius and a host of foreign-based players in their ranks.

India and Lebanon are also coming into the tournament in full flow following their participation in a four-nation Intercontinental Cup in Bhubaneswar, where India beat Lebanon 2-0.

Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan have also had good preparations at home and abroad, but the race is expected to be confined to India, Lebanon and Kuwait.

Although Bangladesh were once contenders, they have failed to progress past the group stages in the last five editions. This time around, the men in red and green are targeting the semifinals, hoping to make it out of a group also featuring Lebanon, Maldives and Bhutan.

"I think the competition in this group is going to be very tough because all of us want to progress," Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera said. "For us, it is quite important because it has been five editions without qualifying for the semifinals. We will do our best by following our idea. We expect strong competition and three tough games."

## Basketball team storm into five-nation final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh moved into the final of the Five Nation Basketball Championship in Male, Maldives yesterday, beating Pakistan 79-65 in the first semifinal.

The men in red and green took a 25-17 lead in the first quarter before Pakistan staged a bit of a fightback in the second quarter. Despite seeing their lead decrease, Bangladesh still led 40-36 after the second quarter.

However, Bangladesh raised their game in the third quarter and took a 64-47 lead before adding 15 more points in the fourth quarter against 18 scored by Pakistan.

This was vengeance for Bangladesh, who had lost to Pakistan 84-66 to finish third in the group stage.

Bangladesh will play in the final tomorrow against the winners of the second semifinal between Nepal and Bhutan, which was scheduled to take place later last night.



PHOTO: REUTERS

After Bukayo Saka struck his first senior career hat-trick in England's 7-0 rout of North Macedonia in Euro 2024 qualifying on Monday, his national team manager Gareth Southgate was asked if the 21-year-old is nearing soccer's top echelon. "He's there," Southgate replied matter-of-factly.

## Bangladesh to play India today in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A were reduced to 16 for six in just 3.4 overs in a rain-curtailed game at Mong Kok against their Pakistani counterparts after winning the toss in the semifinal of the Women's Emerging Teams Cup. But despite the setback, the Tigresses held their nerve in a tight match to secure a six-run win against Pakistan in a nine-overs-a-side game and make it through to the final against India, set to be played today.

The semifinal had gone into the reserve day and Pakistan's pace-bowling all-rounder Fatima Sana began with fire, scalping the first three wickets. She sent back Sathi Rani, Sobhana Mostary and skipper Lata Mondal. Dilara Akter then became Anosha Nasir's second victim to leave Bangladesh reeling.

Number seven Rabeya Khatun and number eight Nahida Akter eventually spared the team's blushes with a 37-run partnership as Bangladesh reached 59 for seven in their allotted overs. Rabeya scored 10 while Nahida struck a vital 16-ball 21.

In reply, Pakistan were restricted to 53 for four as Sanjida Akter Meghla defended 13 runs off the final over. Rabeya and Nahida were stars with the ball as well, with Rabeya bagging two for 13 and Nahida producing a wicket for 8 runs.

"We struggled with the bat at the start but our middle-order managed it well. Our bowlers also bowled well which brought the result," captain Lata said.



# ‘Hungry to become a world class bowler’

Ebadot Hossain has been a great example of how hard work can help a cricketer take the next step on the world stage. The 29-year-old has become a key member of the Tigers' pace-bowling unit and once again made his impact felt during Bangladesh's record Test win against Afghanistan on a sporting Mirpur pitch. The Sylhet native was also included in the ODI and T20I squad for the upcoming Afghanistan series and the pacer spoke about his bowling, future plans, work ethic and a few other topics during a candid conversation with **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin**. The excerpts are below:

**The Daily Star (DS): How satisfied were you with your bowling in the Test against Afghanistan?**

**Ebadot Hossain (EH):** The most important thing was that we went on to the field to win. We had that hunger from the beginning. We lost badly to Afghanistan in the previous Test and I was on the bench and felt really bad. My mindset was that I would contribute to such an extent that we could beat them convincingly if I was able to play. I felt the same mindset in all my teammates. We were determined to beat them by a big margin.

Personally, I did not have a very good start to my Test career initially. So the hunger is there to become a world class bowler and I felt I needed to work even harder to reach that level. I am trying to develop my skills and execute the team's plans but I think I still have a long way to go.

**DS: How do you plan to translate your bowling rhythm from Tests to limited-overs formats?**

**EH:** I think fitness plays a very big role if you want to play across formats. I have been consulting with our trainer for the past two years. I was willing to transform into an all-format bowler mentally and

physically after Tamim (Iqbal) bhai took me to the one-day side. I played the last T20 World Cup and have seven wickets in four T20Is. I have been working on my batting for the last two years with Jamie Siddons and now with Nick Pothas. I also realise the importance of being a good fielder in the limited-overs formats since there is no chance to hide.

**DS: How much does having a good bond between the pacers on and off the field help?**

**EH:** I should credit two people for this. One is former Test captain Mominul Haque bhai and the other is Ottis Gibson. The way Mominul bhai backed us was unbelievable. To me he is the best captain. He helped forge the bond between the fast bowlers by taking us to dinner and spending time building that rapport with us. The same goes for Gibson. They made us realise that once we want good for others, we will smile at each other's successes and stick together in bad times. We try to share that love with younger bowlers like Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam and others. If Taskin gets hit for a boundary, I feel the pain. And if you remember, I was the one who ran towards him and hugged him after he picked up

the fifth wicket. I felt like I got that wicket. The same goes for others. This is the type of bond the bowlers share.

**DS: Do you think the positive mentality of providing exposure to pacers will encourage the next generation to become fast bowlers?**

**EH:** Since the team management has started to show faith in us, Taskin and a few others have been phenomenal. (Such as in) The win in the Mount Maunganui Test, where I was fortunately able to perform well, and the win against Afghanistan, where our pacers took 14 wickets, which was the most by our pacers in Tests. I think the entire bowling department, including spinners, are trying to contribute to wins. We want to pave the way so future generations can take things even further.

**DS: Which fast bowler do you follow?**

**EH:** I believe that if I try to become like someone else, then it's a problem. I just want to develop my skills gradually. The more I am able to achieve and help win matches, the more my confidence will grow. When I play ODI cricket, I try to stick to my strengths. In T20s, it is important to develop variations.

