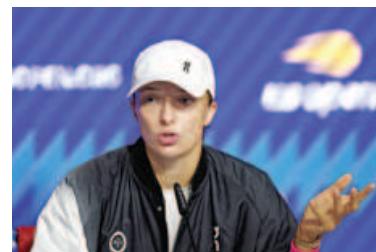


"I get more positive vibes, for sure than before last year's tournament. But being the defending champion is not easy, so I'm kind of taking it easy, trying to do everything step by step."

Defending US Open champions Iga Swiatek



Soma, Mou return to 'controversial' national TT squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Sonam Sultana Soma and Sadia Rahman Mou are set to represent Bangladesh again in international competitions after serving one year of a two-year ban, but there was more controversy surrounding the eight-player Bangladesh table tennis contingent for the upcoming Asian championships.

The paddlers are slated to fly for South Korea on September 1 with the hope of producing better results than the last edition, with the 26th Asian Table Tennis Championship scheduled to be held in Pyeongchang from September 3 to 10.

The Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) formed the men's and women's teams picking top three players each from national men's and women's rankings while including one male and one female player from the Bangladesh Youth Championships, ignoring the fourth-seeded player from the national rankings.

The 2017 national champion Javed Ahmed, fourth-ranked player after Manosh Chowdhury retired from the national team, alleged that BTTF vice-president Khandokar Hasan Munir excluded him from national team intentionally due to his good relation with Manosh, who has a rift with Munir.

Denying the allegation, Munir said, "I have good relation with Javed, whom I took to the Commonwealth Games squad in 2014. I still say that he is one of the talented players of the country."

"It was not my decision, rather the BTTF executive committee's decision to include a youth player, depending



Bangladesh players Najmul Hossain Shanto, Afif Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, and Mehedi Hasan Miraz pose for a photograph during an official photo session in Kandy on Monday ahead of the 16th edition of the Asia Cup, starting on August 30. [Bottom] Earlier in the day, Mushfiqur Rahim and Miraz enjoyed the scenic view of the city.

PHOTO: BCB/FACEBOOK



on the availability of sponsors. As Nafis Iqbal and Khoi Khoi Marma are both BKSP students, BKSP is bearing most of the expenditure for these two players," explained the BTTF official, adding that there was another such instance in 1991.

The BTTF had, in the last edition of the championships, picked four players each in men's and women's section based on their rankings.

Meanwhile, Soma and Mou were handed a two-year suspension for breach of discipline during the Birmingham Commonwealth Games last year when they visited relatives in London, skipping their scheduled matches. But the BTTF, earlier this month, lifted their suspension following an apology letter and considering their performance in last month's national championships.

Soma and Mou, who missed two international tournaments in last one year, still have six months' domestic suspension to serve.

"Asian championships are very challenging for us but we want to see where we stand. We will try our best to produce good results," said Soma.

"Good results mean winning medals but it is not an easy task to win a medal in Asian Championships. If we can improve our ranking playing against China, Japan and other superior teams and can play well against the South Asian nations, it will be a big achievement for us," said Mou, who is supposed to pair up with Soma in women's doubles event apart from playing in singles event.

Munir informed that the Asian championships will also work as qualifiers of the Commonwealth Games. He further stated that they are targeting qualification for the Commonwealth Games and improving their position compared to the 20th-place finish from the last edition.

Tigers enjoy rest day as wait for Liton continues

SPORTS REPORTER

Newly appointed skipper Shakib Al Hasan hurried to the official photoshoot for the Asia Cup in Kandy, Sri Lanka, yesterday, arriving at the event after the other team members.

It was a rest day for the Tigers, with no official training session scheduled. The players had gym sessions amidst the official photoshoot responsibilities while Mushfiqur Rahim was seen enjoying the scenic view of the city, revealed by a picture he shared on his social media page.

The Bangladesh team reached Kandy yesterday and the team management is still waiting on opener Liton Das. The opener was suffering from a fever and could not leave with the team.

Although Liton's fever has subsided, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) opted to wait till the player feels well enough to travel. According to sources, he remains "unlikely" for the Tigers' Asia Cup opener against Sri Lanka on August 31 as the opener would need time to be match-ready even after recuperating from fever.

While talking to the media yesterday afternoon, the team manager Nafees Iqbal also stated that Liton would fly once he recovers.

Meanwhile, Tanzim Sakib, the new inclusion who replaced the

injured Ebadot Hossain, departed for Sri Lanka yesterday and was expected to join the team by yesterday evening.

The Tigers will partake in their first practice session on Tuesday since moving to Sri Lanka.

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