

**Najmul Hossain Shanto, who played the lone battle and was 11 runs short of a hundred in Bangladesh's previous match against Sri Lanka, celebrates hitting his second ODI century by holding his bat in a gesture towards his nine-day-old child after blowing a kiss in his signature style. "This century, I dedicate it to my [newborn] son," said Shanto during the interval after his 105-ball 104 helped Bangladesh post a strong 334 for five against Afghanistan in their must-win Asia Cup match in Lahore yesterday.**



PHOTO: BCB

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Bangladesh's 334 for five against Afghanistan in Lahore yesterday is the highest total for the Tigers in the Asia Cup. It is also the Tigers' highest ODI total away from home. Their previous best was 333 for eight against Australia in Nottingham in the 2019 World Cup.
- It is also Bangladesh's highest total against Afghanistan, surpassing 306 for four in Chattogram in February, 2022.
- Openers Mohammad Naim and Mehedi Hasan Miraz stitched a 60-run stand in Lahore yesterday. The last time Bangladesh saw a fifty-plus opening stand batting first was in August, 2022 when Tamim Iqbal and Anamul Haque Bijoy piled up 71 against Zimbabwe in Harare.
- The unbroken 194-run third-wicket stand between Najmul Hossain Shanto (104 off 105) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (112\* off 119) is the highest stand for any wicket for Bangladesh in the Asia Cup.
- Since Liton Das scored 136 against Afghanistan at home in February, 2022, Bangladesh opening batters could not score a century in the next 26 matches before Mehedi Hasan Miraz ended the drought yesterday.
- The last time two Bangladesh batters scored a century in an ODI fixture was against Zimbabwe in Sylhet in March, 2020, when openers Tamim Iqbal and Liton Das struck 128 and 176, respectively.

## Must-win for India, Nepal as rain looms

SPORTS REPORTER

The Asia Cup Group A game between India and Nepal in Pallekele today is a do-or-die contest for both sides. A win for either of the teams today will see them join Pakistan in the Super Four stage of the six-nation tournament.

However, rain could once again play spoilsport in Kandy today, just like it did two days ago when the blockbuster India-Pakistan clash was washed out after just one innings of play.

With chances of precipitation of up to 80 percent, the India-Nepal game is also at risk of being washed out. If that happens, it will confirm a Super Four place for the Rohit Sharma-led India, who already shared points with Pakistan in their first game.

Meanwhile, Asia Cup debutants Nepal, who received a drubbing by Pakistan in their previous game, will definitely like to take their chances by playing it out on the field despite it being their first encounter against mighty India and only their fifth ODI against a full-member nation.

The Indian top order was rattled by Shaheen Shah Afridi and Co in the first game, and the record seven-time champions of Asia will look to get some runs and boost their confidence ahead of the business end of the tournament.

# MIRAZ

## brings his versatility to opening slot

SPORTS REPORTER

Mehedi Hasan Miraz made it count in just his second appearance as an opener in one-day cricket with an authoritative century against Afghanistan in the Asia Cup in Lahore yesterday.

The Bangladesh team management were all at sea after a disastrous batting display in the first game against Sri Lanka, and as has often recently been the case, Miraz turned up during a crisis. The team management could not keep faith on Tanzid Hasan Tamim after just one game, giving away the frailty of their usual plans but in Miraz they found a saviour. The determination was once again at display.

After an innings that lasted just two minutes short of three hours, Miraz came away, retired hurt on 112 after a hand cramp. During that knock he showed the flexibility he can provide in his roles because his role has transitioned drastically.

Earlier he may have been asked to avert crisis scenarios down the order, as he did against Afghanistan last year during the highest seventh-wicket partnership for Bangladesh with Afif Hossain. This time the crisis was at the top simply because of the lack of stability in the opening slot.

The last time a Bangladesh opener had struck a ton was 27 matches ago when Liton Das dictated proceedings in Chattogram with a 136-run knock. In the last series at home, when Liton's bat did not talk as much, the Tigers fell to a 2-1 loss against Afghanistan. It



was apparent that he was the only option that worked recently in countering Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Rashid Khan's threat while Fazalhaq Farooqi terrorised the top-order.

Without Liton, Bangladesh needed a right-hander to counter Mujeeb's early spells given that the Afghan spinner is a brilliant matchup against lefties. Instead of picking Anamul Haque – a specialist opener – the team management preferred Miraz's all-round capabilities.

The pitch was a flat one, but the Afghan bowlers recently have had an edge over the Bangladesh batters. Miraz played well within

himself, which is one of his key abilities as a batter. He understood the role of being able to see off Mujeeb and stick it out till the 30th over. Miraz never overreached.

He played with the straight face of the bat when required, and as Farooqi sprayed it around during a wayward spell, Miraz punished. Soon the glorious cover drive against Mujeeb showed that he didn't need to force the issue. The glides, the cuts and drives soon came into view as Miraz got in with the acceleration from the Powerplay, already having a telling impact on the team. He came down the crease to hit Mohammad Nabi for a six, then waited for Rashid's delivery to glide one through backward point.

The inside-out drive for six off Mujeeb, having secured his second ODI ton, was probably the best of the lot. Miraz now has his second ODI ton along with as many fifties but most importantly, he gives Bangladesh an option at the top – one they can rely on. Miraz's ability to be that versatile adds a different dimension to the team, and the launchpad he enacted with Najmul Hossain Shanto let Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim play freely. The move also opened up slots for Shamim Hossain and Afif Hossain's inclusion at seven and eight.

More importantly, as Shanto – his partner during a massive unbroken 194-run stand – put it, "Coming into the top of the order wasn't easy but he showed his character."

That character of taking on a challenge was once again on view.



## Streak joins THE ANGELS

REUTERS

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak has died of colon and liver cancer at the age of 49 on Sunday.

Streak was the all-time leading Test wicket-taker for his country, bagging 216 wickets and scoring 1,990 runs in 65 Tests between 1993-2005.

He had been undergoing treatment in Johannesburg.

"In the early hours of this morning, Sunday the 3rd of September 2023, the greatest love of my life and the father of my beautiful children, was carried to be with the Angels from his home where he wished to spend his last days surrounded by his family and closest loved ones," his wife, Nadine, wrote on social media.

Streak was appointed Zimbabwe's bowling coach after his retirement, followed by spells with Bangladesh and twice Indian Premier League champions Kolkata Knight Riders. He returned to coach Zimbabwe in 2016 but resigned after his team failed to qualify for the 2019 World Cup.

In 2021, Streak was given an eight-year ban from cricket after admitting breaches of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption code. He took "full responsibility" for his actions but said he was never involved in any attempts to fix matches.

"This is a very sad day for Zimbabwe and a sad day for cricket as we on the one hand mourn the demise of a true great of our beautiful game and, on the other, celebrate the greatness of what Heath gave us," Zimbabwe Cricket chairman Tavengwa Mukuhani said in a statement.

## Goalless draw at festive Kings Arena

SPORTS REPORTER

An hour after the end of Bangladesh's FIFA Friendly against Afghanistan at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday, a group of supporters formed a large chain, with their hands on each other's shoulders, and continued to scream for Bangladesh even as the match ended in a goalless draw.

They kept the environment a vibrant one throughout the match and backed the men in red and green from the galleries by waving



the national flag, beating drums and dancing in the stands. It was the first international match at the Kings Arena, country's first-ever private stadium, and the festive mood that the spectators created was reciprocated by the men in red and with smiles and wave of hands following the final whistle.



Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera was elated to see the support for the home team.

"Especially in the second half under the lights, the support was very good and hopefully we can get this type of support every time we play at home," said the Spaniard, who saw the performance in a positive light.

In the residential area behind the eastern side of the stadium, there were a few national flags hoisted on the buildings and people from those buildings watched the match from the rooftop as the occasion gripped the entire region.

With the spectators cheering on, the charges of Cabrera continued

their momentum from the SAFF Championship even though they were unfortunate not to register a second ever victory over the central Asian nation since the 1980 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

"Definitely we kept the same spirit after two months following a few training sessions. We competed against a good opponent who have high quality players. They were physically stronger than us. I think this kind of scenario was quite difficult to achieve but today we were able to create chances and defend also," said Cabrera.

The Spaniard fielded the same playing eleven that played against

Kuwait in the semifinal of SAFF Championship in Bengaluru two months ago. The two forwards – Rakib Hossain and Sheikh Morsalin – played with much purpose but also wasted the two easiest chances of the match to deprive Bangladesh from a rare victory against the Afghans.

However, Cabrera felt it was a good performance against Afghanistan, who are 32 places ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA ranking.

"It was a positive performance. We played a strong side today and dominated for almost half of the time as we were able to play in the opposite half," said Cabrera. "Afghanistan did well with defensive blocks but we were able to connect inside the box which we wanted, but they adjusted defending much better in latter parts."

Afghanistan coach Abdullah Al Mutairi, however, was upset with the outcome but was happy with the performance of his side, which saw a number of players making their international debuts.

"Today we did not just play against 11 players but also played against the fans because it is not our home ground," said Almutairi.

"The most important thing was that the two teams were very good, which I expected," added the Kuwaiti.



Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah puts the ball into the net past Aston Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez during their Premier League fixture at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. Salah scored the third goal of the game as the Reds cruised to a 3-0 win. Victory took Liverpool to within two points of Manchester City at the top of the table.

PHOTO: AFP