

## Pressure got to us, says Stuart Law

An agonising five-run defeat against Pakistan saw Bangladesh bow out of the ongoing ICC Under-19 World Cup from the Super Sixes on Saturday. The reigning Asian Champions had high hopes of winning the title for the second time since 2020, and it seemed as if a semifinal berth was almost in their grasp. *The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin* caught up with Stuart Law, the coach of the Bangladesh Under-19 side, as he reflected on the things that went wrong, takeaways for the young Tigers from the tournament in South Africa among a few other topics. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** It must have been a painful exit for the Bangladesh team from the ICC Under-19 World Cup.

**Stuart Law (SL):** We spoke about not only winning the match but also in the time where we needed to keep that run-rate above Pakistan to qualify and spoke about the best way to do this. Unfortunately, the pressure got a bit too much for us but we feel we should have won the game.

**DS:** How much does it hurt you as a coach?

**SL:** It doesn't hurt me as a coach but it hurts me because the players are so upset. I said to the boys last night (Saturday), 'look pain of this defeat will disappear, it's the memories that we created will last forever. Just think about the memories we are still Asia Cup champions and will remain the Asia Cup champions for the next two years. That's a huge positive and the first time Bangladesh achieved the feat. So there's really good things we have achieved along with the journey and we have numerous series wins and two wins outside of Asia. Hopefully, the hurt of missing out on the semifinal will disappear quickly and we fly out of South Africa today and hopefully starting from tomorrow, it will be a lot easier to forget about it.'

**DS:** Do you think batting was a concern for the team throughout the tournament?

**SL:** I always think we could have been better in all areas but we are talking about kids who are under-19. Every day they are going to make mistakes as a young man learns from making mistakes. Yes, we have made similar mistakes quite often which is probably more concerning than actually making the mistake. It's a development stage in their career; to play at the higher level under extreme pressure is only going to benefit them in the long run. Yes, everyone wants to win, don't get me wrong, this age group shouldn't be all about winning. We should bank on unearthing some of the talents for the Bangladesh senior team in years to come. I think we have achieved that quite well.

**DS:** Who are the players you think can go on to represent the senior team soon?

**SL:** There are a few from the bowling point of view. I mentioned Borson and I will get back to the Asia Cup semifinal against India and in the final against UAE, he was unbelievable. We had a good quality back up in Maruf (Mridha) and (Klqbal Hossain) Emon as well. But the standout fast bowler would be Borson and probably the lesser mentioned spinner would be Jibon. There's another: Ariful (Islam) -- against Ireland, USA and Nepal he scored some quick runs to elevate the run-rate. I think they got to develop in how to get better in their games and there is one thing that Ariful needs to learn is how to rotate the strike when there is pressure. (Ashiqur Rahman) Shibly had a good Asia Cup as well and he is probably on the radar.

**DS:** What is your personal plan from here on?

**SL:** I haven't been spoken to by Bangladesh about continuing. There are a few opportunities in the pipeline for me. I really enjoy my time in Bangladesh and I don't have any bad words to say as it's a great place to work and the players are receptive and responsive and eager to learn and get better. That just gives you a great feeling to continue.

**\*\*Read full interview on The Daily Star Website**



**Bangladesh forward Mosammat Sagorika celebrates after scoring the winning goal for her side in a 1-0 win over India in the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. The victory took the defending champions through to the final of the tournament. It appeared that the game would end in a goalless draw but Sagorika had other plans and kept her wits about her as she pounced on the defender's misjudgement and carried the ball towards goal before placing a neat right-footed finish in the 92nd minute which took her tally to three goals for the tournament.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



**The target is to be very competitive against Palestine. We expect Palestine to be stronger than Lebanon. They had a fantastic Asian Cup, they have achieved positive results against strong teams. But we believe if we have a proper training camp, we can achieve something. We need to target to go to the next step and we know that the same performance we did against Lebanon will not probably be enough against Palestine.**

Javier Cabrera, Bangladesh football team coach on back-to-back World Cup qualifying matches against Palestine in March.

## Sagorika's late strike sends Bangladesh to final

SPORTS REPORTER

A stoppage-time strike from forward Mst Sagorika took hosts Bangladesh to the final of the SAFF Under-17 Women's Championship with a 1-0 win over favourites India at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Sagorika, who had scored a brace against Nepal in their opening match, left it very late, netting the ball with a brilliant finish in the second minute of stoppage time in the second half to take Bangladesh to the final.

With two successive wins, defending champions Bangladesh are now at the top of the four-team table with six points, three more than India and Nepal, who will square off against each other for the right to face Bangladesh in Thursday's final.

Bangladesh, meanwhile, will next play a dead rubber against bottom-placed Bhutan in their last group match on Tuesday.

Earlier, India had the upper hand throughout the first half as the women in red and green looked a bit nervous against the pressing from their cross-border rivals, who came into the match on the back of a 10-0 win over Bhutan.

India's FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup playing captain Nitu Linda controlled the midfield while forwards Sulanjana Raul and Pooja threatened the Bangladesh



**From the beginning, it was difficult to play against India, who have some quality and quicker players upfront than Bangladesh. But the girls recovered well in the second half after substitute Ruma [Aker] came in the holding midfield position, thus putting pressure on India with some direct play and passes behind the backline. The win over India will definitely give the girls some confidence.**

Saiful Bari Titu  
 Bangladesh Under-19 coach

backline time and again through the left flank.

India's left-winger Neha caused a lot of trouble, winning the duel against Bangladesh right-back Eity Khatun a few times.

But goalkeeper Swarna Rani came to the rescue of the home side, most notably when she denied Neha's attempt in the 12nd minute

at the cost of a corner.

Bangladesh also came close to breaking the deadlock in the stoppage time of the first half but Afieda Khandokar's free-kick from the edge of the box went inches over the crossbar.

After resumption, Bangladesh looked more composed and kept India under pressure but could hardly test their solid back-line.

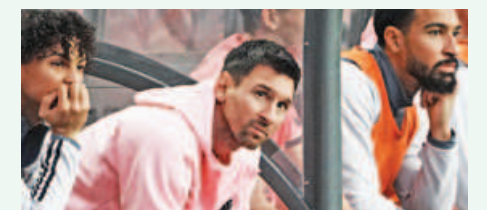
Bangladesh came close to taking the lead twice through corner kicks, but Afieda and Surman Jannat squandered the chances.

Bangladesh got a great opportunity to take the lead came in the 87th minute when unmarked Munki Akhter was in a one-on-one situation against the opposition goalkeeper but the forward struck the ball straight to the onrushing goalkeeper and the chance went begging.

In the next minute, India also went close to breaking the deadlock with Bangladeshi defenders standing still, anticipating an off-side call. Defender Surma Jannat ran back to deny Pooja and bail Bangladesh out of the predicament.

Then came the decisive moment of the match, when Afieda passed a precise long ball towards the opposition goal and Sagorika slipped past three opposition defenders, took the ball inside the box and struck it past the right side of the keeper to send the home crowd into a raucous applause.

### SHORT CORNER



#### Messi, Beckham booed in Hong Kong

Lionel Messi and David Beckham were booed on Sunday after the Argentina superstar sat out Inter Miami's pre-season friendly in Hong Kong. The World Cup-winning captain, who has a hamstring strain, stayed rooted to the bench throughout the 4-1 friendly win against a Hong Kong select XI. It brought a show of anger from the near-capacity crowd of 38,323 who had paid upwards of 1,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$125) to see their hero, and in many cases a lot more.

#### Gill ton keeps India in control as England chase 399

Shubman Gill struck form with a century as India left England a record victory target of 399 on day three of the second Test on Sunday. England, who lead the five-match series 1-0, reached 67-1 at stumps after opener Ben Duckett fell for 28 in Visakhapatnam.

#### Williamson, Ravindra centuries punish depleted South Africa

Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson ground out unbeaten centuries as New Zealand punished a second-string South Africa on the opening day of the first Test at Mount Maunganui on Sunday. A Proteas side featuring six debutants paid heavily for deciding to bowl and spilling chances as the home side reached 258-2 at stumps.

\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website



Having recently been overlooked for top individual awards, including The FIFA Best which was won by Inter Miami's Lionel Messi, Spanish media speculated in recent days that Erling Haaland could turn his back on Manchester City for Real Madrid. However, City coach Pep Guardiola brushed aside those rumours and said that the Norwegian forward would be starting his first game in two months after recovering from a foot injury when his side take on Brentford away from home on Tuesday. Despite missing five league games, Haaland, with 14 goals in 16 games, still remains the joint top-scorer with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah even after playing four games less than the Egyptian forward.

PHOTO: X

## Bangladesh batters not up to snuff in BPL so far

SPORTS REPORTER

The ongoing edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is nearing the halfway point of the group phase, and so far, it has been a difficult tournament for the national team batters.

Three out of the five top scorers in this season so far are from Bangladesh, however, two of them - Fortune Barishal's Mushfiqur Rahim (229 runs) and Tamim Iqbal (149) - have already retired from T20Is.

Meanwhile the other player, Sylhet Striker's Zakir Hassan (193), was not part of the squad that played three T20Is in New Zealand in December last year.

Out of that 15-man squad, which pulled off Bangladesh's maiden T20I win against the Kiwis in New Zealand, Towhid Hridoy has been the most successful batter, scoring 127 runs in five innings for the Comilla Victorians, which positions him at number 13 in the run-getters' list.

Players like Soumya Sarkar (123), Afif Hossain (108), Shamim Hossain (107) have looked out of sorts, while Najmul Hossain Shanto, who led the team in New Zealand in the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, has made just 73 runs in seven innings at an abysmal strike rate of 82.95.

Opener Litton Das has made just 37 runs in five innings for Comilla, nine runs fewer than what Durdanto Dhaka pacer Taskin Ahmed has made in three innings.

To be fair to the batters, this year's BPL has so far been a low-scoring affair, with no team managing to breach the 200-run mark in the first 20 games.

The Sylhet phase of the tournament



came to an end on Saturday where the average innings total was 138.167, the lowest ever in this part of the country, drastically lower than last year's 161.25.

Even in such testing conditions, overseas batters have managed to churn out match-winning knocks unlike the national team batters, something that worries Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud.

"The foreign players don't play here regularly, but they are doing it [scoring runs]. Then why can't the locals do it, this worries me," Mahmud, coach of Durdanto Dhaka, told reporters yesterday.

Shakib, who has scored just made four runs in three innings for Rangpur amidst his struggle with eyesight, however, did not share Mahmud's worry.

"I don't feel there is any reason to be disappointed or worried about it [local batters not doing well]. I'm sure, whoever gets in the [Bangladesh] team, will do well from their respective positions.

"This year's pitches are also not ideal. I feel that last year the pitches and the condition were much better, a lot of runs were scored, it's not happening this time," Shakib told reporters on Saturday.

The low scores in Sylhet, which is usually the most heavy-scoring phase of the BPL, validates Shakib's statements. It also begs the question of how much will playing in such conditions prepare the players for the forthcoming ICC T20 World Cup, something this tournament had supposedly set out to do as per statements from several BCB officials before the tournament.