

# Tigresses seek momentum in Asia Cup opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team will take on hosts Sri Lanka in their 2024 T20 Asia Cup Group B opener in Dambulla today, hoping to bounce back after a poor run of form in recent series at home.

Bangladesh head coach Hashan Tillakaratne was optimistic when asked about his side's chances leading up to the tournament, where the 2018 champions are slated to face off with Thailand and Malaysia on July 22 and 24, respectively, in their following group fixtures.

"We are going there to win the tournament. We have the credentials to beat any side. We have to go and play our A game; and the preparation has been spot on," Tillakaratne told The Daily Star in a recent interview.

The Tigresses will be buoyed by the return of two experienced stars in pacer Jahanara Alam and all-rounder Rumana Ahmed. The duo made their way back to the side on the back of impressive performances in the recently concluded Women's Dhaka Premier League, with Jahanara ending the tournament as the highest wicket-taker.

"They are experienced and we know what they have done for Bangladesh. It's good to get them back; and selectors recognised their performances in the domestic league. It's a great eye-opener for others also when someone does really well and gets recognised. Experience counts a



PHOTO: BCB

lot, especially in major tournaments," Tillakaratne remarked.

The completion in the side had increased but, according to the Sri Lankan coach, it also introduced a fear of failure among the players.

The coaching staff had tried to assure the players. "We have to give them courage, and even as we haven't played well in recent

times, we have faith in them. The selectors have not closed the door on anyone," Tillakaratne said ahead of the team's departure for Sri Lanka, hinting that Asia Cup performances could open doors to the World Cup squad.

Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty had been carrying the burden of the side's bad batting patch in recent series. Before the

team's departure, she had relayed the importance of the opening fixture against Sri Lanka which would be Tigresses' first international match in a while since the home series against India.

Bangladesh have also failed to win any of the matches in the last two home series against Australia and India.

"We could not make the semis in the last Asia Cup. So, naturally, our first objective is to play semifinals. That is why our first game is very important since we have not been playing well for a long time. We have seen some individual performances but not as a team. For our momentum, we want to get a good start in the game against Sri Lanka," Joty said about gaining momentum in a press conference.

Joty was hopeful regarding performances from the two veterans in the team.

"Experience is always useful. Both of them played the last two Asia Cup tournaments. Rumana apu returned after a long time along with Jahanara apu. Both of them played tremendously in the last domestic tournament. I think these two experienced stars would have a big effect on the team," Joty had said.

Bangladesh will be hoping to fix their creaky batting line-up and, after a disastrous run with the bat in recent times, they would be hoping Rumana can add solidity while the rest find more T20-esque approach.

## Bangladesh eye top-three finish in U-20 Volleyball Championship

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are eyeing a top three finish in the upcoming Asian Men's Under-20 Volleyball Championship, starting on July 23 in Indonesia, said assistant coach Shafiqul Islam Russel.

On the back of an impressive fifth-place finish in the previous edition in Bahrain in 2022, followed by months of solid preparation under the supervision of local coaches as well as national



team coach Alipour Arozi, Bangladesh have their sights on surpassing their Bahrain show.

"Finishing fifth in Asian Under-20 Volleyball Championship was a big achievement for Bangladesh in their maiden appearance. So, we have set our goal to surpass our previous best," Russel told The Daily Star yesterday.

There is also an extra incentive to end up in the top three as those teams, by virtue of their position, will gain qualification for the FIVB Men's Under-20 World Championship in 2025.

The Bangladesh contingent is scheduled to leave for Indonesia in the early hours of Sunday.

For Bangladesh, drawn in a strong Group C along with reigning runners-up India, strong Japan and Kuwait, coming out of the group-stage seems to be a tough task.

As part of their preparation leading up to the tournament, Bangladesh played against the likes of Nepal and Bhutan – winning the international tournament in BKSP two months ago – and played a total of 10 practice matches against senior sides.

Of the 12-member squad, 10 are from BKSP while five players – Titas Ahmed, Noman Hussain, Shamim Hossain, Al Sayem Rafat, Tatul Ahmed – have experience of playing the same championship two years ago. However, coach Russel remains concerned about the form of his best two players – Noman and Titas – who joined the camp two months late following their official commitments in Bangladesh Air Force.

"If experienced Noman and Titas can perform well and the new players can deliver their best, then we can expect to get out of the group stage, beating either India or Japan," said Russel.



Children from neighbouring areas take to open spaces in the capital's Panthakunja park to play football and cricket yesterday afternoon as widespread violence over quota protests engulfed other parts of the city. The area was relatively spared from the clashes which have induced increased tension among the masses across the country.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## I have worked on my death bowling: Marufa

Young pacer **Marufa Akter** maybe still young in international cricket, but she has already become the leader of Bangladesh's pace attack and the standard-bearer when it comes to fitness and work ethics, according to teammates and coaches. Before departing for Sri Lanka to play in her first Women's T20 Asia Cup, Marufa had a conversation with **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan** where she spoke about her preparation and expectation in the regional meet. Here are the excerpts:

**The Daily Star (DS):** This will be your first Asia Cup and your first tour to Sri Lanka. How excited are you?

**Marufa Akter (MA):** Last year, I couldn't go to Sri Lanka for a bilateral series due to my board exam. It feels great that I'm going this time. We have won the tournament before. So, our target will be the same; winning the tournament.

**DS:** You had a decent Women's Dhaka Premier League (WDPL) campaign for BKSP where you took 13 wickets and then were part of the national team's two-week-long residential camp in BKSP. How do rate your preparation for the Asia Cup?

**MA:** The preparation has been good. The most important thing for me is that I've remained fit. I had a decent Premier League this year. Then, we also had a good camp at the BKSP. We played quite a few practice matches and the camp ended well. So, overall, I can say that all of us are in a good shape.

**DS:** Bangladesh were outplayed in the home series against Australia and India. Your performances were also not up to the mark. What have you done in the months since then to overcome that bad patch?

**MA:** More than anything, I practiced spot bowling during this period. I also worked on adding more variations so that I have more options to deceive the batters.



**DS:** Can you be more specific?

**MA:** I can bowl well with the new ball. But I struggle to control my line and length during the death overs. During this camp, I worked with the old ball. I tried slower deliveries and yorker. Now, I'm feeling very comfortable with my death bowling.

**DS:** Did you work with any particular coach for this?

**MA:** I worked with Shiblu sir [Robiul Islam].

He worked with us during our camp in BKSP. I worked under him for two weeks. He taught me different variations. It was a great experience for me.

**DS:** In a very short time, you have become the leader of Bangladesh's pace attack. What will be yours and the Bangladesh pace attacks' plan in Sri Lanka?

**MA:** The wickets in the sub-continent almost always favour the spinners. We have made a plan to bowl according to the wicket. Our coach [Shiblu sir] has worked with us on bowling variations. We will try to bowl what he taught us.

**DS:** Over the years, batting has almost always been a big issue in big tournaments for Bangladesh. Have the batters done anything specific in the camp to ensure that if they don't let the team down in Sri Lanka?

**MA:** I think all of our batters worked really hard in the camp. I'm very optimistic that our batters will be able to provide decent performances in the tournament.

**DS:** We will be hosting ICC Women's T20 World Cup in couple of months' time. How do you see the team's preparation leading up to the World Cup? Will there be an extra pressure as hosts?

**MA:** If you plan step by step, I think everything becomes easier. I don't think there will be any pressure. The team will get great support from the home fans.

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