

## Hridoy awaits his 'time' in T20I shake-up

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Gwalior

Bangladesh are going into the T20I series against India with promise of more aggression and intent to win. But when going against international teams of the highest-order, Bangladesh's T20 merits fall short of the standard.

A big reason would be the lack of quality across the board compared to other top international teams but there is also a case for hindering progress of players, those that are capable of making an impact in T20Is, through swaps and changes.

Towhid Hridoy is one such player who has shown courage to take the game on.

Hridoy's batting position in ODIs is of particular interest. In the lead up to the ODI World Cup in 2023, he had batted mostly at number five but chaotic changes in the batting order saw him bat lower in the tournament.

Yesterday, he was hitting the ball pretty well once again during the practice session at the Shrimant Madhavrao Scindia Cricket Stadium. His bat swing and wristy flicks are the main components of his aggressive batting since coming into the national team.

Although he had initially made his name as a top-order player, Hridoy has not been allotted a fixed position in both white-ball formats for the Tigers.

Hridoy was asked whether it would be better for him to get a settled position.

"It's right that I have batted in several positions but that was according to the team's plans and what the team demanded of me, that's what I tried to do," he said, a smile breaking across his face as he answered the question.

Hridoy has batted mostly at number four in T20Is but also appeared in number five. Such differences do not matter in the shortest format. But an aggressive batter can make more of an impact when facing more deliveries.

Hridoy has struck a ton in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), batting at number three in the 2024 season where he scored over 400 runs.

The 23-year-old feels that he has to earn a promotion and a settled position in the Bangladesh team.

"You will find that every player does not get their favoured position in the batting order when they come to the national team. You have to create that space and when I deserve that spot, it will automatically come to me. If I can create that time, it will happen for me," he said.

Every whip of his wrists can offer perspective if Bangladesh are really looking to take the game on. Hridoy feels that time will come.



PHOTO: BCB

## No 'dhamaka' as Tigers venture towards unknowns in first T20I

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM GWALIOR

Bangladesh are dealing with a few unknown factors ahead of the first T20I against India at the Shrimant Madhavrao Scindia Cricket Stadium in Gwalior. The Tigers will be part of history as the venue hosts its first international match today, scheduled to begin at 7:30 Bangladesh time.

The last time Bangladesh played a bilateral series in India, Mushfiqur Rahim's unbeaten 43-ball 60, Soumya Sarkar's 35-ball 39 and Mahmudullah Riyad's 15-run cameo saw the visitors upset India in the first T20I of the tour in Delhi.

Mushfiqur is already retired from T20Is and Soumya has not inspired confidence from selectors in recent times. There are speculations ongoing on whether Mahmudullah, too, is contemplating exit from the shortest format after Shakib Al Hasan announced during the Test series that he had already played his last T20I during the T20 World Cup earlier this year.

Relatively new faces such as spinner Rakibul Hasan, openers Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Parvez Hossain Emon were called up for the three-match series. The new batch of players such as Tanzid and the likes of Towhid Hridoy, Liton Das, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and skipper Najmul Hossain will have to take the bulk of the responsibility while Mahmudullah, too, is there to provide security to the batting order.

These will be the starting blocks of the foundation for the 2026 T20 World Cup side and the Tigers will not only look to fix their approach, an unknown at this point, but also further assess the pieces they would be needing in the World Cup.

Since Scindia stadium is a new venue, the wickets too are unknown to Bangladesh. During the practice session yesterday noon, the pitch was under covers. One official informed The Daily Star that the pitch has

➤ The Shrimant Madhavrao Scindia Cricket Stadium in Gwalior is set for its international debut, the region's first since Sachin Tendulkar's historic ODI double-century in 2010 at the Captain Roop Singh Stadium.

➤ Bangladesh have struggled historically against India in T20Is, managing just one win in 14 encounters. India, on the other hand, are riding an eight-match winning streak since Bangladesh last toppled them by seven wickets in Delhi back in 2019.

➤ Despite their underdog



status, Bangladesh bring a wealth of experience in this series, boasting a combined 644 international appearances compared to India's 389 caps.

➤ Bangladesh's highest T20I total against India stands at 166 for eight,

achieved in Colombo in 2018.

➤ For the Tigers, Mahmudullah Riyad leads the batting charts with 2,394 runs from 127 innings, while Mustafizur Rahman spearheads the bowling attack with 128 wickets in 103 matches.

been kept under cover due to excessive heat. The pitch will be watered around 2pm on the match-day so as to thwart cracks from opening up.

A belter of a pitch is expected with high-scores seen in domestic games. However, Bangladesh star Hridoy felt the pitch will be 'slow and low' in nature.

He said the team is looking to win the series but not keen to take pressure of creating a 'dhamaka' in the first T20I.

"First of all, we have a very good opportunity to perform here. Obviously we want to win here, nothing else. When we take the field, we don't think about who is there or not. We focus on our end and maintain processes," Hridoy said.

"There is no dhamaka in our minds, as I said, we will be looking to win," he added.

An eleven without Shakib is a concern since he used to play both as a batter and a

bowler. Shanto had said at an earlier press conference that Miraz would have to lead the way. Tigers are expected to play three seamers with Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Sakib and either of Shoriful Islam or Taskin Ahmed.

Rishad Hossain and Jaker Ali Anik are also expected for the continuity of the combination that ensures a packed batting unit.

Apart from cricket-related unknowns, there was tight security with 5000 police personnel deployed – 1500 of them in the stadium alone – to ensure the match goes on smoothly.

'Gwalior bandh' was called by the Hindu Mahasabha, demanding cancellation of the match but cordoned by tight security, the Tigers have so far had no issues as prohibitory orders under section 163 remains in place in the city.

## Australia launch title defence with dominance

AGENCIES

Australia kicked off their T20 World Cup title defence with a dominant six-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the sweltering heat of Sharjah yesterday.

The six-time champions briefly stumbled at 35 for three while chasing a modest target of 94, but an unbeaten 43 from opener Beth Mooney – player of the tournament in the 2023 edition – guided them home with 34 balls to spare.

"Mooney (Mooney) has lost about 16 kilos out there (smiles). We have played in hot conditions before. You have to get on with it," said seamer Megan Schutt, who was named player of the match after taking 3 wickets for just 12 runs.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy admitted her side were not at their best, saying, "We were decent without being perfect. Adapted to the conditions quickly with the ball. They threw heat at us early but we took our opportunities later. We are blessed with batting depth and don't really know what to do with it."

Sri Lanka, now staring down a likely group stage exit after back-to-back losses, must win big against India on Wednesday and hope for favourable results elsewhere. "We have to bounce back... and play positive and fearless cricket, and hopefully the conditions will be good for us," said Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu.

Australia, on the other hand, face New Zealand on Monday, a thrilling contest on the horizon after the White Ferns' commanding win over India in their opener.



India and Pakistan lock horns in a marquee contest today. While Pakistan will try to continue their winning run after victory against Sri Lanka, their archrivals will be hoping for a fresh start after a loss to New Zealand in their opening game.

## Near misses for Neer, Fahad

SPORTS REPORTER

International Masters Fahad Rahman and Monon Reza Neer missed out on opportunities to clinch Grandmaster norms in two different rating tournaments in Budapest, Hungary yesterday.

Both chess players from Bangladesh finished top in their tournaments, earning 6.5 points each but falling short by 0.5 points of the required points to earn GM norms after drawing their respective boards in the ninth and final round matches.

Neer (2417 FIDE rating), who made a piece of history on the previous day by becoming the youngest Bangladeshi IM at 14 years of age, drew his last board against Hungarian FM Balazs Pasztor in the SixDays Budapest Two Years 2024 GM A tournament. He won the 10-player event with 6.5 points with four wins and five draws, but fell short of what would have been the first step towards becoming a Grandmaster.

Fahad, who has one GM norm to his name after having spurned a number of chances, wasted another opportunity yesterday as he drew against Chinese FM Yining Chen in the SixDays Budapest Two Years 2024 GM C tournament.

The 21-year-old finished top of his event, earning 6.5 points with five draws and four wins.

## ROOT LOOKING beyond run record

AFP, MULTAN

Star batter Joe Root said Saturday he hopes to blast past Alistair Cook's record career haul of runs for England in the first Test match against Pakistan.

The 33-year-old needs just 71 more to overhaul Cook's 12,472, and if his run spree continues he may become the new record-holder in the match starting on Monday in Multan.

"I'd like to get more than that in this game," he said of Cook's record. "I feel like I'm going to be playing for a good while past it, so it's not really a focus."

Root is a veteran of 146 Tests and already holds the record for hitting the most hundreds for England with 34 – half of them since 2020.

He may now be eyeing the international record of 15,921 held by India's Sachin Tendulkar.

Meanwhile, England captain Ben Stokes will miss the opening Test to continue his recovery from a hamstring injury and batter Ollie Pope, who led England during the home series against Sri Lanka, will lead the tourists in the match.

England announced their playing XI, which

includes Durham seamer Brydon Carse, who will be making his Test debut.

England clean swept Pakistan 3-0 when the teams last faced each other in 2022 – Pakistan's first-ever home whitewash.

"Our last tour here was obviously excellent," said Root. "It's always nice to have that confidence and good memories going into any series."

This time the pitch is being baked by temperatures up to 39 degrees Celsius (102 degrees Fahrenheit).

"We are just getting ready for the heat and how warm it's going to be over the five days," said Root. "We're just trying to prepare ourselves best for the conditions more than anything."

Pakistan vice-captain Saud Shakeel also aired concerns about the effect of high temperatures on the grass cover of the pitch. "Considering the heat, we will take everything into account," he said.

Despite the conditions, Shakeel vowed to pressure England's aggressive style of play.

"England always plays attacking cricket and the more they play like that you get more opportunities to catch them," he said. "So we will try to force more and more mistakes from them."



Liverpool extended their lead at the top of the Premier League to four points thanks to Diogo Jota's winner in a 1-0 victory at Crystal Palace on Saturday. Arne Slot has now won nine of his first 10 games since succeeding Jurgen Klopp.

PHOTOREUTERS