

# Tigers optimistic despite setbacks

SPORTS REPORTER

The ODI format once again takes precedence for Bangladesh after a gap of over seven months as the Tigers take on Afghanistan in the first of the three ODIs at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in the UAE today.

Following the ODI series against the Afghans, the Tigers will also tour the West Indies later this month for a full series, including three ODIs. Both these series will determine how Bangladesh go about their business in the upcoming Champions Trophy in February 2025.

The Tigers have been able to retain skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's services for the time being but several issues tamper their optimism in terms of finding answers in the UAE where Bangladesh will be taking on a strong Afghanistan side that clinched statement wins in the last ODI World Cup in 2023.

Bangladesh's own campaign took a nose dive due to several off-field incidents in the lead-up to the World Cup -- including the frosty relationship between stalwarts Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan getting out in the open.

Before another major tournament's buildup, the absence of a few stars and prospective players coupled with the fact



PHOTO: ACB

that the Shanto captaincy crisis has not reached a stable solution yet now creates a mini crisis.

Two of the Tigers' players from the 15-member squad, Nasum Ahmed and Nahid Rana, were yet to get UAE visas, making them unavailable for the first ODI.

"Since there is still time till the match begins, I am hoping," Shanto said yesterday in the pre-match presser, trying to sound positive despite facing the predicament of having just 13 players available for the first game.

How the top-order fares is going to be of utmost importance in this series,

especially after shambolic performances in the red-ball format recently.

Shanto talked about trying to sort out the team combination, saying "we would get those ideas [about Champions Trophy combinations] from here".

However, the absence of Liton Das -- missing the series due to illness -- and the unavailability of Shakib Al Hasan surely jeopardise the prospect of sorting the team combination.

"Some of the senior players are not here but we can't think about those who are not here. We can only think about what we have now and I believe we have the players who are able to perform here," Shanto said.

Bangladesh have misfiring openers at the moment. Soumya Sarkar and others might have to play out of their skin to remain in future plans heading to the Champions Trophy.

Shanto, however, relayed that top-order has to be given freedom.

"I don't want the top order to take too much pressure. I want them to enjoy the game and play according to what abilities they have. We have done well in the past [in this format], and of course, Afghanistan are good in these conditions but if we can play to our strengths, we can do very well against them," he concluded.

# Sylhet go top of NCL

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet, Khulna and Rajshahi Divisions won their respective third-round fixtures of the ongoing National Cricket League (NCL) yesterday while the other fixture between Chattogram and Dhaka ended in a draw.

In Bogura, Sylhet, who resumed on 51 for two on the final day, reached 192-6 to clinch a four-wicket win over Rangpur and climbed to the top of the points table with two wins and a draw.

Nightwatchman Rejaur Rahman Raja top-scored with 59 while Pinak Ghosh (42), Amite Hasan (37 not out) and Asadulla Al Galib (23 not out) made valuable contributions to ensure Sylhet's victory.

In Sylhet, Khulna off-spinner Mahedi Hasan (5-88) claimed his second five-for of the contest to trigger a batting collapse for Dhaka Metro, who lost their last six wickets for just 24 runs to get bowled out for 372 runs.

Chasing 207, Imrul Kayes (83 not out), Anamul Haque Bijoy (71) and Amit Majumder (41 not out) guided Khulna to a nine-wicket win in just 35 overs.

Meanwhile in Cox's Bazar, Rajshahi's left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam claimed 6-40 to help his side bowl Barishal out for 137 runs in their second innings. Rajshahi reached the target of 68 losing four wickets.

In Cox's Bazar, Dhaka Division made 401 runs in their first innings to take a 40-run lead against Chattogram Division. Chattogram reached 124-4 before both teams agreed on a stalemate.

The fourth round matches will start on November 9.

# Trying to turn BPL into a brand, again

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

"The more things change, the more they stay the same," a quote from French writer Jean Baptiste Alphonse Karr from the mid-1800s, comes to mind hearing the pre-tournament talks ahead of the 11th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), set to begin on December 30.

This will be the first edition of the BPL following a dramatic change in the country's political landscape, which has ushered in significant changes in almost every sector of the country, including the cricket board.

Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, who along with current Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed joined the board of directors following the fall of the Awami League government, spoke to the media recently about how the current interim government wants to turn BPL into a brand and how Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus is leading the charge in this initiative.

"The Chief Adviser has taken charge out of his own accord. His team is working specifically on how it (BPL) can be developed into an international standard tournament and as a brand... Even Bangladesh will hopefully be recognised as a brand after this BPL," Fahim told reporters on Monday.

Fahim saying that the BCB wants to make BPL a brand for Bangladesh is interesting, as chances are he has no idea that the same idea was expressed by board officials back in January 2012, right before the inaugural edition.

However, after talking about developing BPL as a unique brand for Bangladesh, the board officials back then proceeded to blatantly copy the blueprint of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Much like the IPL, a players' auction took place where teams made bids which they later could not pay up, a glitzy opening ceremony was held where Bollywood stars performed, and even a tournament theme song was made in collaboration with



Indian and Bangladeshi artists.

The board was perhaps hoping to replicate IPL's success but instead, the BPL started looking like a cheap imitation of its Indian counterpart.

By the 10th edition, the scale of BPL had reduced significantly. The board had seemingly given up on the tournament as many more franchise leagues had cropped up since then and had already surpassed BPL in terms of fanfare and sheer quality.

The once extravagant opening ceremony was replaced by a simple balloon release event in the last few seasons and talks about turning BPL into a brand had disappeared completely, until now.

While speaking to the media, Fahim said that the board wants to utilise Professor Yunus's experience of working as an adviser in global sporting events, which included this year's Paris Olympics.

He also hinted that the board plans to

attract international attention by using the CA's global pull to bring in a global sports icon, something he had done in 2006 by inviting and bringing Zinedine Zidane to Bangladesh, or perhaps a Hollywood star for the opening ceremony.

A grand opening ceremony, promoting social causes through the tournament and showcasing the sacrifices made by the student-led people's movement in July-August could very well generate hype for the upcoming edition, but it would all be for naught if the on-field action is lacklustre.

The problems that plagued BPL before are still present. Two brand new teams have joined and one has returned after a long break, franchises are struggling to attract top-quality cricketers from overseas and the tournament is still constrained to the same three venues -- Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.

Sub-par scoring rate is still a big issue

for BPL, as last season the tournament's average runs per over was 7.92, whereas in the IPL it stood at 9.56.

The problems of BPL as a tournament are too many to tackle in such a short time and truthfully, if the current administration could conclude the next edition without any big controversy, that should be considered as a success.

As for turning BPL into a brand, first, it has to establish itself as a competitive tournament with top-quality cricket and, more importantly, come up a viable business model to attract real investors.

If that can't be ensured, it wouldn't matter even if Tom Cruise rode a motorcycle off the roof of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, did multiple 360-degree flips midair and landed smackdab at the centre wicket to hand over the coin for the toss of the opening match, eventually, the enthusiasm would fizzle out.

## SHORT CORNER

### Salahuddin appointed as Tigers' senior assistant coach



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) appointed Mohammad Salahuddin as the senior assistant coach of the national cricket team till March 15, 2025, BCB press release confirmed today. Salahuddin previously served as assistant coach and fielding coach of the Tigers from 2006 to 2010. He also worked as a specialist coach at the BCB National Cricket Academy from 2010 to 2011. In 2014, he was appointed as the head coach of Singapore and led the team in the ICC World Cricket League Division 4.

### Injured Djokovic gives up on ATP Finals title defence

Novak Djokovic said on Tuesday he will not defend his ATP Finals title due to an "ongoing injury" which has ended the 24-time Grand Slam champion's season. Tennis icon Djokovic was one of four players still battling for one of three remaining places at the season-ending event in Turin, which kicks off on Sunday, but said on social media that he wouldn't be making a bid for a third straight Finals title.

### Neymar issues hopeful update on latest injury scare

Al-Hilal's Brazilian star Neymar issued an update on social media after limping off the field during his side's 3-0 win against Esteghlal in the AFC Champions League, saying he is hopeful that the latest injury scare is nothing serious. "Hopefully nothing too much... It's normal that after one year [out] this happens, the doctors had already warned me, so I have to be careful and play more minutes," the 32-year-old, who had to be subbed off after just 30 minutes, wrote on Instagram.

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Arsenal's Kai Havertz was seen having a conversation with their skipper Martin Odegaard, who returned to full training with the squad for the first time since being out of action for the last two months due to an ankle injury. Odegaard will travel to Milan with the squad for their Champions League clash against Inter on Wednesday, but will likely not be risked for the game. At the San Siro, Arsenal, however, will hope for another inspiring performance from Havertz, who has created the joint-most chances (6) for the Gunners in the competition so far. This will only be a third Champions League meeting between Inter and Arsenal, who both have kept three clean sheets in the competition so far.

PHOTO: ARSENAL

## Congratulation



The Pragati Life Insurance Limited family extends its heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Tabith Awal on being elected President of the Bangladesh Football Federation.

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