

Tigers dealt harsh reality check before CHAMPIONS TROPHY

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The back-to-back ODI series defeats to West Indies and Afghanistan have come as a big reality check for Bangladesh, who seemed to have lost their way in the 50-over format ahead of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to be held in February-March next year.

There are still dark clouds looming over the tournament, with hosts Pakistan and cricketing powerhouse India at loggerheads, but for Bangladesh, one of the eight participating nations of the meet, the bigger concern right now is whether they are going into the competition with sufficient preparation.

Bangladesh ended a dreadful year in ODIs with another defeat against West Indies on Thursday and even though the Champions Trophy is still two months away, the Tigers have no other 50-over matches lined up before the tournament, adding to the concerns about their outlook in the mega event.

Bangladesh were mostly



Kalam Siddiki, opener of the Bangladesh side that won the ACC U-19 Asia Cup in Dubai last week, poses with the 2025 Champions Trophy at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur yesterday. The trophy, currently on a world tour before the mega event next February, had its final day of a three-day stay in Bangladesh and will next land in South Africa on December 15.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

occupied with T20Is and Tests this year, playing only nine ODIs and out of them winning just three to finish with their worst win percentage (33.33) in a year

in the format since 2017 (28.57).

The Tigers, who started the year with a 2-1 ODI series win over Sri Lanka at home in March, returned to the format after

nearly eight months against Afghanistan in the UAE where they suffered a 2-1 series defeat before getting clean swept by hosts West Indies in the recently-concluded three-match series.

The cricketers will now be busy in the shortest format before leaving for the Champions Trophy, taking part in the ongoing National Cricket League T20 which will run till December 24, a three-match T20I series against West Indies (December 16-20) and then the Bangladesh Premier League T20 (December 30 - February 7).

Minhajul Abedin, former chief selector and current chief coordinator of BCB programmes, feels the necessity of a combined effort to come out of the rut in ODIs.

"It's true that our performance isn't good at all. I think the players should take responsibility. The management and selectors should identify where the players are lacking," Minhajul told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The team is going through a bad patch. The management and

the selection panel have to come together to figure out how to fix the problems," he said, adding that he is optimistic that the team can turn things around before the Champions Trophy.

"I think there are definitely ways to fix this situation. But they need to plan accordingly to solve the problems.

"Yesterday [Thursday] they batted well but didn't bowl well. I think the management and selectors need to sit with the players and do whatever is required. There are still two months left and hopefully, they will find the solutions by this time," he concluded.

Bangladesh are not the only team who had a bad time in ODIs this year, with India and New Zealand ending the year winless after playing three ODIs each and England winning three out of nine ODIs, just like the Tigers.

But unlike these teams, Bangladesh's troubles in the format are more deeply rooted and if they don't rectify their issues soon, another disastrous ICC event could be in store for them next year.

ECB suspends Shakib for illegal action

SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has been slapped with a suspension by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) after his bowling action was found to be illegal at independent testing at Loughborough University earlier this month, ESPNcricinfo reported yesterday.

In accordance to section 11.3 of ICC Regulations for the Review of Bowlers Reported with Suspected Illegal Bowling Action, ICC and other cricket boards may also enforce the suspension.

This suspension came into affect on December 10.

Shakib, who has not played for Bangladesh since the series against India in September-October, will have to pass an independent assessment and prove that his degree of elbow extension is below the 15-degree threshold laid out in the regulations to overturn the ban.

His action had been called into question during his lone appearance for Surrey against Somerset in the County Championship in September. He is currently taking part in the Lanka T10 for Galle Marvels.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's stand-in skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz admitted there is work to be done in the bowling department after it got exposed on the flat tracks in St Kitts against West Indies in the recently-concluded three-match ODI series, which the visitors lost 3-0.

Twice in the series, West Indies pulled off record run chases in ODIs at St Kitts, first chasing down a 295-run target in the series opener, highest successful chase ever at the venue, and then on Thursday they broke their own record by cruising to a 322-run target with 25 balls to spare.

On the batting front, while problems remained with the top-order, the lower-middle order turned up for the Tigers in all three matches, with Mahmudullah Riyad being the standout performer with three consecutive half-centuries.

In the first ODI, Mahmudullah produced a 94-run partnership alongside Jaker Ali to take the score past 290. In the second ODI, the veteran put up a 92-run stand with tail-ender Tanzim Sakib, highest eighth-wicket stand for the Tigers in the 50-over format.

In the series finale, Mahmudullah formed another record partnership, this time a 150-run stand off just 117 deliveries for the sixth wicket with Jaker to take Bangladesh to 321 for 5.

Opener Tanzid Tamim, skipper Miraz and Soumya Sarkar also found runs in



this series.

However, the much talked about pace battery did not live up to the hype in the ODI series. After defeats in the first two matches, Bangladesh went with a spin-heavy eleven in the third ODI but the play backfired as collectively the spinners conceded 211 runs, going at 7.58 runs an over.

Miraz was the most economical, bowling his full quota for 67 runs but remained wicketless. Nasum Ahmed went for eight an over in his seven overs, bagging one wicket, while leg-spinner Rishad Hossain picked up two wickets but conceded at a

shade below eight runs per over.

Part-timer Afif Hossain also rolled his arm over for two overs that cost 19 runs.

Miraz felt that their batting had positives but the bowlers needed to pull their socks up.

"The wicket was good and we batted well. Losing after scoring 321 runs is disappointing. I did not think we would lose the match. We made small mistakes, had we not committed those, we could have done better," Miraz said after the match.

This series was Bangladesh's last ODI assignment before next year's ICC Champions Trophy, where pitches are likely to be batting friendly, which Miraz feels would be a challenge for the bowlers.

"The Champions Trophy is coming up and the wickets there will be good for batting... It will be a challenge for the bowlers since we could not defend after scoring 300 runs," he said.

Miraz, however, also pointed out that Bangladesh were without some regular members in the ODI series against West Indies and hoped the team will compete in the Champions Trophy with a full squad.

"It would have been better if we could win the series as it would have bolstered our confidence ahead of the Champions Trophy. But still we have time in hand... Many players were injured and could not play in the Afghanistan series and in this series. Hopefully before the Champions Trophy we will get the full ODI team."

ENGLAND, SERBIA IN SAME WC QUALIFYING GROUP

The draw for the European qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup was held in Zurich on Friday, with England set to renew rivalry with Serbia, whom they played at Euro 2024. However, many teams remain in the dark over their group opponents. The draw procedure means that eight groups are not yet fully decided, as they will contain either the winners or losers of the Nations League quarterfinals, which take place in March of next year.

Group A:
Winner of Germany v Italy Nations League quarterfinal, Slovakia, Northern Ireland, Luxembourg

Group B:
Switzerland, Sweden, Slovenia, Kosovo

Group C:
Loser of Portugal v Denmark Nations League quarterfinal, Greece, Scotland, Belarus

Group D:
Winner of France v Croatia Nations League quarterfinal, Ukraine, Iceland, Azerbaijan

Group E:
Winner of Spain v Netherlands Nations League quarterfinal, Turkey, Georgia, Bulgaria

Group F:
Winner of Portugal v Denmark Nations League quarterfinal, Hungary, Republic of Ireland, Armenia

Group G: Loser of Spain v Netherlands Nations League quarterfinal, Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Malta

Group H: Austria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, San Marino

Group I: Loser of Germany v Italy Nations League quarterfinal, Norway, Israel, Estonia, Moldova

Group J: Belgium, Wales, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein

Group K: England, Serbia, Albania, Latvia, Andorra

Group L: Loser of France v Croatia Nations League quarterfinal, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Faroe Islands, Gibraltar



Mohammedan, Abahani face off today

SPORTS REPORTER

The ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) will see country's two traditional outfits – Abahani and Mohammedan – face off today for the first time this season in Cumilla, with Mohammedan's 1-0 win over holders Bashundhara Kings earlier this month making it a much more enthralling contest.

Both Mohammedan and Abahani notched up victories in their first two matches and a positive result will give both sides an edge in the title race.

Six-time league champions Abahani, sans the foreign recruits for the first time in professional league, will be on the back foot against their archrivals Mohammedan, who have been in good rhythm after beating Kings in their previous league match at the same venue.

Meanwhile, yesterday, Brothers Union stayed unbeaten in BPL as they handed a 2-0 defeat to Chittagong Abahani at Birshreshtha Flight Lt. Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

Brothers top the table with seven points from three matches, one more than Abahani and Rahmatganj MFS, who, however, played a match less than the Gopibagh-based outfit.

It was the third defeat on the trot for Ctg Abahani, leaving them at the bottom of the 10-team table.

In the other game yesterday, at Shahid Barkat Stadium in Gazipur, Fortis FC tasted their first victory with an emphatic 3-0 win over promoted Fakirpool Young Mens Club, who suffered defeats in all of their three matches.

Bangladesh women rise in FIFA ranking

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team moved seven places up to 132nd position in the latest FIFA ranking, courtesy of their SAFF Women's Championship triumph in October.

FIFA revealed the updated ranking on Friday, following a four-month gap. Bangladesh, who were in 139th position in the last updated ranking in August, gaining 21.34 points and accumulating total 1097.55 points – the highest number of ranking points in the country's history.

Despite a big jump in the FIFA ranking, the women in red and green are still far behind India and Nepal, who are in 69th and 103rd positions respectively. The four other South Asian nations – Pakistan (157), Sri Lanka (158), Maldives (163) and Bhutan (172) – are all behind Bangladesh.



Recipients of Max-BSPA Sports Journalist Award 2023, including The Daily Star's staff photographer Firoz Ahmed, who emerged joint runner-up in sports photography category, pose for a group photograph with chief guest Mohammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser to the interim government, and special guest Golam Mohammad Alamgir, owner of Max Group, at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: BSPA

‘Far from pleased’, Liverpool want more

AGENCIES

After having to sit idle in the previous Premier League game week, Liverpool return to Premier League action when Fulham travel to Anfield on Saturday.

Liverpool have not played a league game since a 3-3 draw with Newcastle on December 4 after Storm Darragh led to their Merseyside derby against Everton last week being postponed.

Even though the Reds are four points clear at the top of the table, with a game in hand, manager Arne Slot demanded more from his side after they ground out a 1-0 victory against Girona to keep alive their perfect record in the Champions League on December 10.

After being held to a draw in their last Premier League outing, Slot wants a return to the intensity his men showed in their recent wins against Real Madrid in the Champions League and a league game against Manchester City at home.

"I'm far from pleased about the performance," said Slot, bemoaning his side's lack of control against Girona in midweek.

Returning to home soil will be an even bigger confidence boost, considering the

defeat to Nottingham Forest in September remains the only time they have not won across their last 13 at Anfield.

Defensive frailty has raised some questions in recent weeks, but they are making up for that by being clinical in attack, having now scored two or more goals in seven straight Premier League games – their best streak in over three years.

They could still break their Premier League goalscoring record for a calendar year with four games left in 2024, sitting 12 short of the record 88 they put up across 2019.

Fulham are a team they enjoyed great success against in front of goal last season too, scoring seven in doing the league double over the Cottagers, extending their run against them to nine wins in 12 in the Premier League.

In-form Chelsea took advantage of Liverpool's inactivity last weekend to move four points behind the leaders.

The Blues boast the most potent attack in the division and will expect to extend Brentford's miserable away record when the sides meet at Stamford Bridge.

Arsenal, who also host Everton tonight, are a further two points back.

