

“As a captain, I never told them that they have to give it their all. All I said was that they [West Indies] are a better side and on their day they can destroy any team at their home ground. What I told them was that we will go and enjoy the cricket and whatever the result is we will take it with a smiling face and we will try to fulfill our responsibilities.”

Stand-in captain  
LITON DAS



ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Years of dedication and hard work has reaped the fruits of performance for Jaker Ali in the just-concluded West Indies tour where the wicketkeeper-batter impressed with the willow in all three formats, playing a key role in Bangladesh completing a 3-0 sweep over the hosts in the T20I series yesterday.

After making a run-a-ball 27 in the first T20I and a 20-ball 21 in the following match, yesterday Jaker showed his T20 capabilities, hitting a career-best 72 not out off 41 balls as Bangladesh's score climbed to 189 for 7.

Jaker is often criticised as a limited player who can only hit big shots through the leg side. But yesterday, his leg-side penchant did not prove to be a handicap as he continuously shuffled a long way across the stumps and went deep into the crease in the final stretch of the innings and took the Caribbean

## Jaker makes his mark in West Indies

bowlers to the cleaners.

He used this stance to great effect in the final over against Alzarri Joseph, which yielded 25 runs.

Jaker hit the third ball, a slower one pitched way outside the off-stump, for a six through the leg side. He followed it up with another maximum over the covers and ended the innings with an exact copy of the first six with this time

in the 15th over.

Very eager to run two, Jaker took off for a double but his partner Shamim Hossain did not share his enthusiasm, as a result both batters were at the striker's end when the bowler dislodged the bails at the other end.

Fuming, Jaker left the field, only to be called back after replays showed that he placed his bat inside the crease

and delivered for the Tigers by hitting five enormous sixes and two fours in the last five overs.

“Fortunately, I scored runs after that [two run outs] and I'm happy. It's all about the mindset and I know the Caribbean boys will come hard, whatever the format. I have played the World Cup here and even though I did not do well, things have been going well for me in this format.”

He ended as the top scorer of the T20I series with 120 runs. In the preceding ODIs, his batting down the order was one of the few positive signs for the Tigers during a bleak series where they lost 3-0.

Jaker's 91-run knock in the second innings of the Jamaica Test, where he grinded at the middle before showcasing his six-hitting capabilities, laid the foundation for Bangladesh's series-levelling win.

Skipper Liton Das heaped praises on Jaker for his contributions throughout the tour. “I have to give a special mention to Jaker. From Tests to T20Is, in all three formats, he held onto his consistency. It's a big achievement for a player,” Liton said.

Jaker Ali's unbeaten 72 off 41 balls in the third T20I in St Vincent was the highest score for a Bangladeshi batter against the West Indies in T20Is held in the Caribbean. The previous highest score belonged to Shakib Al Hasan, who made 68 not out off 52 balls in Dominica on July 3, 2022.

the ball going even further.

“It has been quite a wonderful series for me. Today [yesterday] the wicket was good compared to the last two games. I was looking to take my time and I knew if I take it deep, I could score runs,” Jaker said at the post-match ceremony.

Things, however, had not been easy when he was involved in two run-outs

before Shamim.

Just one ball later, Jaker went for a quick single and even though Mahedi responded quickly, a sharp throw from Rovman Powell saw him short of his ground.

Jaker absorbed the pressure of the two run-outs which threatened to divert the momentum of the innings

## Liton ready to captain on long-term basis if asked

During the West Indies Test series, Liton Das could be heard on stump mic telling captain Mehedi Hasan Miraz when to bowl. His guidance was well appreciated within the team and in the T20I series, under Liton's leadership, Bangladesh won with great adventure and pride in the T20Is. “As far as captaincy is concerned, if the BCB asks me to lead then I am ready to do it and there is no reason to disagree with it and I am enjoying it,” Liton said at the press conference after Bangladesh's 80-run win yesterday in St. Vincent.

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## U-19 women set up final against India

SPORTS REPORTER

Fahomida Choya's all-round brilliance helped Bangladesh secure a nine-wicket win over their Nepali counterparts in their last Super 4 match of the ACC U-19 Women's Asia Cup in Malaysia yesterday, setting up a final clash on Sunday against India.

In a curtailed 11 overs per side contest, Choya finished with 1-14 as Bangladesh restricted Nepal to 54-8 after electing to field first.

Choya then scored an unbeaten 32-ball 26, featuring three fours, while Mosammat Eva made 18 runs as Bangladesh reached the finishing line with seven balls to spare at the Bayuemas Oval in Kuala Lumpur to finish second in Super 4 with six points.

In the day's first Super 4 game, India clinched a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka to reach the final of the inaugural edition of the meet.

Riding on skipper Manudi Nanayakkara's 30-ball 33, Sri Lanka posted 98-9 in 20 overs after being asked to bat first. Gongadi Trisha (32) and G Kamalini (28) played decent knocks to help India chase down the target with 31 balls to spare.

Bangladesh and India had previously met during their opening Super 4 fixture, with India handing an eight-wicket defeat to Bangladesh in that contest.

## Hamza hopes to blaze a trail

STAR SPORTS DESK

Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury has hoped that his decision to switch allegiance from England to Bangladesh will open up avenues for Bangladeshi players to play in European leagues.

The 27-year-old on Thursday announced on his social media handles that he wants to represent Bangladesh at the international stage after getting the final clearance from FIFA's players' status committee.

In an interview with The Athletic, the defensive midfielder opened up about the reason for his switch, his connection with Bangladesh and the country's football fans.

“It's something that's been in the works for a couple of years,” said Hamza, who has represented England in seven matches at the under-21 level.

“I represented England in the youth team, but as my career progressed, it came to fruition that is not an option for me.”

“It's something I've definitely always had in the back of my mind, that I'd like to represent Bangladesh — and the people of Bangladesh more importantly....I also feel like it's something that I wanted to do to have some more exposure for Bangladesh on the footballing stage,” the Leicester City FC Academy product said.

While there are many Bangladeshi-origin footballers playing in various leagues across continents, Hamza will become the most high-profile player to don the red and green jersey. He will also be the latest foreign-based player to represent Bangladesh — a path first travelled by current captain Jamal Bhuiyan 11 years ago — with hopefully many more to follow suit in the coming days.

Bangladesh Football Federation president Tabith Awal, in a press briefing at his Gulshan residence on Friday morning, said that they have



contacted other talented diaspora players to follow the same route.

“We believe Bangladesh has immense talent, both within the country and among the diaspora. I am confident Hamza will inspire others to don the Bangladesh jersey,” Awal told reporters.

Hamza, too, was speaking along the same lines during the interview with The Athletic.

“I know they (Bangladeshis) are absolutely crazy about football. I hope I can open up channels for more Bangladeshis to play in the top five leagues or in Europe, or just have a way of getting themselves into the bigger leagues and giving them some more exposure.”

“Hopefully, in time, I can put into place some sort of structure in the

younger age groups and the younger local teams to be able to do that,” the footballer, born to a Bangladeshi mother and Grenadian father, said.

With Hamza's debut for the Red and Greens expected to come as soon as on March 25 next year when Bangladesh play their first Asian Cup Qualifiers match against India in Kolkata, the Leicestershire-born footballer was confident that his Bangladeshi heritage and culture will help him ease into the Bangladesh dressing room.

“I'm sure that they've got a really good dressing room that hopefully welcomes me with open arms,” Hamza said. “I am sure they speak English, but I also speak enough Bangladeshi to communicate. I'm looking forward to learning their traditions and their culture.”

## Kings' kryptonite Maruful helps end Abahani's drought

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani finally conquered Bashundhara Kings in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) after 10 failed attempts, edging the defending champions 1-0 in Cumilla yesterday.

The result was also a testament to coach Maruful Haque's tactical ingenuity, who outwitted his Romanian counterpart, Valeriu Tita.

Since their rise to prominence in top-flight football in 2018, Kings have established themselves as a near-unbeatable force. However, they have often found themselves undone by Maruful, the country's sole UEFA A-licensed coach. Over Kings, Maruful had previously led teams to three victories — both in the BPL and Federation Cup — during his tenure at Chittagong Abahani in 2019 and 2020.

In recent years, Maruful's impact on the professional league had waned, with an underwhelming 2022 season at Sheikh Jamal DC and a 2023 campaign spent as a technical adviser for Chittagong Abahani. Now back in a head coaching role with six-time champions Abahani, he has proven his value once again — despite the club's decision to field no foreign players this season — steering the Sky Blues to a crucial win which refuelled their title aspirations.

With three wins from four matches, Abahani climbed to second place with nine points, just three behind leaders Mohammedan Sporting Club. Meanwhile, Kings slipped to joint third with six points from as many matches.

“Our plan was to invite Bashundhara Kings into our territory; then we would attack quickly on the



break,” Maruful told The Daily Star over the phone after the game.

“The early lead was not unexpected; rather, it was part of a quick attack,” Maruful said, adding that he has been working separately with the players, position-wise, putting extra emphasis on the attacking players.

“We could have struck three to four more goals. The boys opened the opponents nicely, but unfortunately, they could not take those home. Bashundhara Kings, however, could not open our backline.”

At Shaheed Dharendra Nath Datta Stadium, the game's standout performer was goalkeeper Mitul Marma, whose stellar display earned him the player-of-the-match award. Mitul thwarted several attempts from Kings, including a penalty stop in the 52nd minute against Brazilian forward Miguel Ferreira. Earlier, in the 36th minute, Mitul had frustrated Ferreira with another fine save.

Kings' best opportunity to level the score came in the 33rd minute, when Brazilian Jonathan Fernandes found himself in a promising position, only to send his shot wide of the advancing Mitul.

In the day's other match, Mohammedan extended their perfect start to the season with a 3-1 victory over Bangladesh Police FC. Emmanuel Tony, Emmanuel Sunday, and Souleymane Diabate found the target for the Black and Whites, while Al Amin scored a consolation goal for Police.



(From L-R) Rabeya Khan, Nigar Sultana Joty, Sobhana Mostary and Fahima Khatun — captains of the four participating teams — stand alongside the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League trophy at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday, ahead of the competition which kicks off today. This will be the first-ever three-day women's first-class cricket tournament in the country after the same tournament was first held in two-day format last year.

PHOTO:BCB