

## We don't score 300 runs regularly and that's the reality: Shanto

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Rawalpindi

Another meek batting display saw Bangladesh eliminated from the race for the semifinals of the ICC Champions Trophy following a five-wicket defeat against New Zealand in their second Group A fixture at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The defeat also saw hosts as defending champions Pakistan bow out from the group stages as New Zealand and India, who have won both their matches, grabbed the two qualifying spots from this group.

The match was all but over as a contest after the Tigers could only post a well-below-par 236-9 in their stipulated overs after being sent into bat first.

The Tigers' batting effort followed a similar meek display following their six-wicket defeat to India in their opening match in Dubai on February 20.

Poor shot selection, playing far too many dot balls, lack of planning against spinners and untimely dismissals resulted in the chaotic batting display on a rather flat surface dished up in Rawalpindi.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's 77 off 110 balls while batting as an opener after 27 months and Jaker Ali's 55-ball 45 may seem like decent contributions, but



PHOTO: AFP

considering the surface and the demand of the team, their performances didn't deserve that much of credit either.

"It's really disappointing as a captain," Shanto told reporters at the post-match press conference.

"...I think as a batting group and fielding side, we need to improve a lot. I

said a lot of times that we need to improve a lot as a batting unit. But we did the same mistakes over and over again.

"We have to really focus on how to improve our batting. I hope after this tournament, we will make some changes as a batting unit and think about different ways and try to improve our batting," he concluded.

added.

When asked to be more specific about the kind of changes he was talking about, Shanto insisted that there should be change in their thinking and working process, not any change of players.

"I didn't mean that there will be changes in the players. I think we need to make changes in our thinking process. We need to take more responsibility while batting in order to contribute more for the side.

"Actually it's about us to do it. If we make too many changes, it will be difficult for that batsmen as well. So we have to give the opportunities to the resources that we have," said Shanto, admitting that they are not a team who can score 300-plus every day.

Since the 2023 ODI World Cup in India, Bangladesh played 23 matches including yesterday's one and posted 300-plus total on only one occasion.

"We don't score 300 runs regularly. This is the reality and we have to accept that," said the 26-year-old skipper.

"We need to make a habit of scoring 300 runs regularly; not once in a while. So we need to practise and play matches on good wickets regularly, play against big teams and score these runs," he concluded.

## Trailblazer Ayonto draws 'hope' for Mahatos

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU from Pabna

From humble beginnings to the national stage, Ayonto Bala Mahato's journey reads like a script from a feel-good film.

Born into a poverty-stricken indigenous family in Sirajganj's Raiganj upazila, she spent her childhood in a mud-walled hut topped with a tin roof. Her parents, both labourers, worked tirelessly, earning barely enough to put food on the table.

But then, football stepped in and changed everything.

At just 16, left-winger Ayonto is set to represent Bangladesh in two FIFA friendly matches in Dubai on February 26 and March 2, having flown to the UAE with the squad yesterday.

Her selection stems not only from her undeniable talent but also from head coach Peter Butler's decision to opt for a younger squad. Following a player-coach dispute, 18 senior players from the SAFF Women's Championship-winning team last year in Nepal were left out, creating opportunities for fresh faces like Ayonto.

Her inspiring ascent to the top has sent ripples of joy across the village of Grotthita.

The daughter of farmer Monil Mahato,



Ayonto discovered football on the fields of her local primary school. Despite the struggles they faced, her family always encouraged her passion.

"My sister has loved football since childhood, so we enrolled her in an academy in the village three years ago... We found out about her selection a few days ago," her brother, Joy Kumar Mahato, told The Daily Star, with pride evident in his voice.

That academy was Nimgachhi Promila Football Academy, where Ayonto's remarkable potential quickly caught the attention of scouts. While still in the sixth grade, she earned a coveted spot at the prestigious BKSP.

Life, however, was not easy for her family, as they earned only around Tk 600 a day. Witnessing their relentless struggle, Joy took on a job in a local shop to support the family -- after Monil became unable to work due to ill health -- and to contribute to his sister's dreams.

Despite these hardships, Ayonto flourished. After completing her initial training at BKSP and putting up a dazzling show in the BKSP Cup held earlier this year, she became a strong candidate for a spot in the national team, informed BKSP assistant coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu.

"If she stays in the national camp for 3-4 years, her future will be bright," opined Litu.

For Ayonto, this breakthrough is "beyond expectations," and success is not merely a personal triumph; it is a monumental milestone for the Mahato community.

"As a poor farmer, my only dream was to feed my family. But my daughter has given us something greater -- hope," her father Monil expressed.

Uzzal Kumar Mahato, a local social worker, said, "No one from the Mahato community [in North Bengal] has ever played for the national team. She is the first, and we are immensely proud."



South Africa hold a narrow advantage over Australia in overall head-to-head records in ODIs, winning 55 matches against Australia's 51. Three encounters between the sides ended in a tie and one meeting produced no result.

The Proteas have also won four out of the five ODIs against Australia.

Australia and South Africa have never faced each other in the ICC Champions Trophy.

Since 2016, South Africa have batted first 12 times against Australia in ODIs and lost only two of those matches. The most recent of these defeats was the semifinal of the 2023 ODI World Cup.

Australia's Glenn Maxwell is 17 runs away from 4000 ODI runs. South Africa's Lungi Ngidi needs one wicket to complete 100 wickets in the format.

## Aus, SA collide with semifinal spot up for grabs

AGENCIES

Australia will face South Africa on Tuesday in Rawalpindi, where the winner will take an enormous stride towards the semifinals of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

South African captain Temba Bavuma on Monday said his side would not be taking world champions Australia lightly despite a depleted bowling attack.

The two former Trophy champions meet for the first time in the event's history, having each won their first games in Group B.

Australia -- missing their pace trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc -- chased down a stiff 352 run target against England in Lahore -- on Saturday.

It was the highest-ever chase in the event's history started in 1998.

Bavuma hailed Australia's penchant for International Cricket Council (ICC) events.

"I mean any Australian outfit that comes together for an ICC event is always one that you don't take lightly," said Bavuma in a press conference.

"They don't have their mainstay bowling attack but I think their batters may be doing a little bit more than what they're accustomed to," he added.

Bavuma hopes his own batters will take advantage of Australia's inexperienced bowling.

South Africa blunted the famed Afghanistan spin attack, taking 59 runs off world's best Rashid Khan in 10 wicket-less overs.

Alex Carey said Australia are excited by the challenge posed by a formidable South Africa.

Carey made a brilliant 69 alongside man-of-the-match Josh Inglis, who scored his maiden one-day international hundred, to seal a five-wicket win.

"I think South Africa are playing really well in one-day cricket and look like they've got a great balance across their 11 players," the 33-year-old Carey said on Monday.

"So, another exciting opportunity for us coming off the back of a great game against England, play with a lot of freedom, take the game on."

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## Tony promises to return to Bangladesh for adopted daughter

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Rawalpindi

Eight months ago, curator Tony Hemming parted ways with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) while still having a year left on his two-year contract, expressing dissatisfaction at some of the incidents during his short tenure.

The renowned curator was hired by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in the very next week on a two-year contract.

Considering Tony's reputation as a leading curator and the way his previous tenure ended in Bangladesh, it is very unlikely that the Australian will rejoin the BCB any time soon.

Still, during a lengthy discussion with a few Bangladeshi journalists in Rawalpindi, Tony was asked whether he plans to return to Bangladesh anytime soon.

His reply stunned everyone.

"I have to [return to Bangladesh]... I adopted a daughter in Bangladesh," Tony came up with this unexpected reply.

"She is in Sylhet. She is not young, she is 20, she works in a hotel," he continued, detailing how this unique bond was formed.

"I stayed in Sylhet for a period of like three weeks, preparing a Test wicket. We were talking every day at breakfast. She told me she was an orphan and

was raised without parents. Her manager was an orphan also. The orphanage recruits orphans to work at the hotel, to promote them and to give them an opportunity.

"I missed my daughter in Melbourne, because she is grown up and I don't hear much from her... So, I just sort of had this feeling that I want to help her," he said, and also described the many ways he has helped his Bangladeshi daughter.

"I helped her get a passport, helped her financially, and you know, it's literally all I've done. It's just encouragement, you know. It's just to say good morning every day, if you need anything let me know, if you're in trouble let me know, that's all there is to it."

"I don't need to [get documentation]. If they are over 18, legally, there is no problem. It's like an uncle thing, you know. It's just

helping someone. The same in Pakistan, you come across people, you see that they are genuine, you see that they are struggling, I feel blessed about the things that I've been doing now," Tony said, who also has four children from two marriages.

*\*The names of the adopted daughter and the hotel have not been disclosed to respect their privacy*



## Salah seeks 'another title' for Liverpool veterans

AFP, Manchester

Mohamed Salah said Liverpool's veterans need another Premier League title after inspiring a 2-0 win at Manchester City to surge 11 points clear at the top of the table.

The 32-year-old, captain Virgil van Dijk, Alisson Becker, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson were all part of the Liverpool side that ended a 30-year wait to win the title in 2020.

And Salah reiterated his belief that they need another Premier League winner's medal to burnish their legacy.

"Maybe people prefer my first seasons or now but I prefer now because winning the league, helping the young players, it is special," he added.

"We need another title. Me and the big guys in the team, we need another title."

Salah was central to a statement win for the Reds as he opened the scoring and then teed up Dominik Szoboszlai to double Liverpool's lead before half-time.

Arne Slot's men are in a commanding position to secure a record-equalling 20th English top flight title, although second-placed Arsenal have a game in hand.

"Hopefully we keep calm because sometimes the pressure gets to us," said Salah, who took his tally for an incredible season to 30 goals and 21 assists.



➤ Salah is the first player in Premier League history to register 40 plus goal involvements in two different seasons (2017-18 and 2024-25).

➤ Salah has now recorded 41 goal involvements (25 goals and 16 assists) in 2024/25 in just 27 appearances. The Egyptian needs six more to match the Premier League record for most goal involvements, jointly held by Alan Shearer (1994/95) and Andy Cole (1993/94).

➤ The 32-year-old is the first player to score 25+ goals and register 15+ assists in a Premier League season.

➤ Salah has now scored and assisted in 11 Premier League games this season, the most by a player in a single season in one of Europe's big five leagues since Lionel Messi for Barcelona in 2014/15 (11).

➤ Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola has lost more games against Liverpool than any other opponent in his managerial career (10).