

## Tigresses in tight spot after WI loss

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's impressive run in the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier took a hit as they were handed a three-wicket defeat by the West Indies in Lahore yesterday.

Despite the loss, Bangladesh, remain in contention for qualification but must overcome hosts Pakistan in their final match on Saturday to stay in the race. A loss, however, will put the Tigresses in a pickle as they will have to hope that West Indies and Scotland do not win their respective matches by significant margins.

Chasing a target of 228, the West Indies were in trouble at 147 for 5, but a composed unbeaten 51 off 48 balls from Chinelle Henry guided them to victory with four overs to spare. She was supported by steady contributions from Stafanie Taylor (36) and Hayley Matthews (33), which laid the foundation for the successful chase.

Earlier, Bangladesh, buoyed by the confidence of three consecutive wins, looked poised for a big total after electing to bat first.

A commanding 118-run partnership between Sharmin Akhter (67) and Farzana Hoque (42) took the score to 134 for one by the 28th over. However, Aaliyah Alleyne turned the tide with a devastating spell, removing both set batters in the same over and triggering a collapse.

The Tigresses slumped to 183 for eight in the 44th over, but late contributions from Nahida Akter (25) and Rabeya Khan (23 not out) helped them cross the 200-run mark, eventually finishing on 227-9.

## Bangladesh women target gains in Jordan friendlies

SPORTS REPORTER

As part of their build-up to the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers, Bangladesh will face Jordan and Indonesia in a tri-nation FIFA friendly series in Amman on May 31 and June 3.

"Jordan (74) and Indonesia (94) are ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA ranking. We wanted to face strong opponents before starting the Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign, so that the coach can understand how to better prepare the girls before the Qualifiers," Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron told reporters at the BFF House today.

National team training had begun on April 6 under English head coach Peter Butler, with over 40 players in camp. Meanwhile, nine senior players have temporarily joined various Bhutanese clubs to take part in the Bhutan Women's Football League, prompting questions about the coach's squad selection for the friendlies.

Kiron assured that appropriate action would be taken if the coach wished to include those players.

In the Asian Cup Qualifiers, scheduled for June 29 to July 5, Bangladesh have been drawn in Group C alongside hosts Myanmar, Bahrain and Turkmenistan. Only the group winners will advance to the 12-team final round.

She also addressed questions over the logic behind releasing players for foreign club duty so close to a major international campaign.

"It has been logical because you know they have been going through a matter and they needed a mental recreation and change, so they also wanted to play there for their change and return to better form. That's why they were given permission to play there," Kiron said.

She confirmed that the nine players in Bhutan would rejoin the national team when called up and noted that all of them, along with eight others, would be brought under BFF contracts.



Bangladesh batters Mominul Haque, Mahidul Islam Ankon, and Shadman Islam take a break after a gruelling batting session yesterday, ahead of the first Test against Zimbabwe, which starts Sunday at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

PHOTO: BCB

## 'It will be even contest between Ban-Zim pacers'

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh's pace unit has been their strength in recent times. From historic first-ever Test victory over hosts New Zealand in 2022 to whitewashing Pakistan in a two-Test series on Pakistan soil last year, pacers have delivered the goods for the Tigers in the longest format for a while now.

And, it is no wonder that Bangladesh will once again hope that pacers Hasan Mahmud, Nahid Rana, Khaled Ahmed, and uncapped Tanzim Sakib step up against Zimbabwe in the upcoming two-Test series, especially since the series is set to be played in Sylhet and Chattogram -- venues that favour fast bowlers.

However, Zimbabwe veteran Sean Williams thinks their pace trio of Blessing Muzarabani, Richard Ngarava, and Victor Nyauchi will be able to match the level of the Tigers' quicks.

"I think it will be a like-for-like contest when it comes to the pacers," Williams told The Daily Star yesterday.

Zimbabwe, who had their first training session at Sylhet Outer Stadium yesterday after arriving in Bangladesh on Tuesday, haven't enjoyed much success in red-ball cricket in recent years. Since their 10-wicket win over Afghanistan in March 2021, the African side have failed to win any of their last 10 Tests, losing eight and drawing two.

The team is currently undergoing a transitional phase, with most



players being relatively new to the set-up. Only captain Craig Ervine (23 Tests), Williams (17), and Muzarabani (10) possess experience of 10 or more Tests in the current squad.

However, with some exciting players like Ben Curran, Brian Bennett, Johnathan Campbell, and Ngarava, Zimbabwe hope to play more fearless cricket.

"Yes, it's a young side. Hopefully, they will be a little bit more fearless and clever," said Williams, who returns to the team after missing the one-off Test against Ireland in February due to a back injury.

"Test cricket -- and cricket in general -- is evolving. Players are scoring faster, trying new things, and exploring different dynamics. Tactically, a lot is happening in Test cricket right now. So, it'll be exciting to see what the youngsters can do,"

added the 38-year-old veteran.

Williams also emphasised the importance of starting the series well, expressing optimism about reversing their fortunes against Bangladesh.

Zimbabwe last won a Test series against Bangladesh in 2011, and their most recent Test victory over the Tigers came in 2018.

Interestingly, that win -- by a margin of 151 runs -- was also in Sylhet, where the upcoming Test series will begin on Sunday.

"I think it depends on how the first innings goes," Williams noted.

"Yes, of course. We always play to win. Preparation ahead of these two Tests is crucial," he added.

Zimbabwe may also benefit from the insights of their pace-bowling coach Charl Langeveldt, who briefly served as Bangladesh's bowling coach in 2019.

## Nepal Tests to sharpen women's kabaddi before WC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team will play a five-match Test series against hosts Nepal next week, running from April 20-25, as part of their build-up for the Women's Kabaddi World Cup.

The women in red and green, who have been training since early February in preparation for the 14-team global event, are set to depart for Kathmandu on Saturday. The World Cup is scheduled for June 1-8 in Bihar, India.

Despite past bronze finishes at the Asian Games, they returned empty-handed in 2018 and 2023, falling to an improving Nepal on both occasions.

This upcoming series -- where the visitors will be sponsored by Fortune Barishal, a cricketing franchise from the Bangladesh Premier League T20 -- is also seen as a chance to restore pride ahead of the World Cup.

"Nepal are now a better side than Bangladesh... but I think the current Bangladesh team are also good compared to the previous ones," said former captain-turned-coach Arduzzaman Munshi at a press conference at the BOA conference room yesterday.

Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation (BKF) general secretary Shah Newaz Shohag said "we want to win a medal in the upcoming Women's Kabaddi World Cup."

## AHF CUP Bangladesh eye winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh hockey team will begin their AHF Cup title defence as they take on Kazakhstan in a Group B encounter in Jakarta today (6:00pm Bangladesh time).

Bangladesh are also targeting qualification for the upcoming Asian Cup, with only the top two teams advancing to the main event.

The men in red and green had trained for over a month under coach Mamun Ur Rashid, who expects a strong start against Kazakhstan -- a side Bangladesh beat 8-1 in the 2022 AHF Cup and 6-1 in the 2018 Asian Games.

"It seems all opponents are good this time," captain Pushkor Khisa Mimo told The Daily Star over phone from Jakarta yesterday.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

**Legends of Rupganj left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam celebrates one of his three wickets against Mohammedan Sporting Club during their nine-wicket victory in a Dhaka Premier Division Cricket Super League match in Mirpur yesterday. Abahani and Gulshan Cricket Club also won their respective rain-interrupted matches.**



**Inter captain Lautaro Martinez celebrates after scoring an equaliser in a 2-2 draw in their Champions League second-leg quarterfinal against Bayern Munich at the San Siro yesterday. The ball fell to the Argentinian striker inside the box and he made no mistake unleashing a snapshot to bring Inter level just six minutes after Harry Kane's opener. Martinez, who also scored in the first-leg in Germany, led Inter to a 4-3 aggregate win and into the semifinals where they will face Barcelona.**

PHOTO: AFP

## Arsenal come of age with Real masterclass

AFP, London

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal side came of age as they dethroned Champions League kings Real Madrid with ease to reach the semifinals for the first time since 2009.

A commanding 3-0 first-leg victory last week, lit up by two stunning Declan Rice free-kicks, laid the foundations in London.

But a 2-1 win in the cauldron of the Santiago Bernabeu to complete the job on Wednesday was a significant milestone for Arteta's rising stars.

Arteta's only major trophy in five and a half years in charge remains the 2020 FA Cup, just months into his reign.

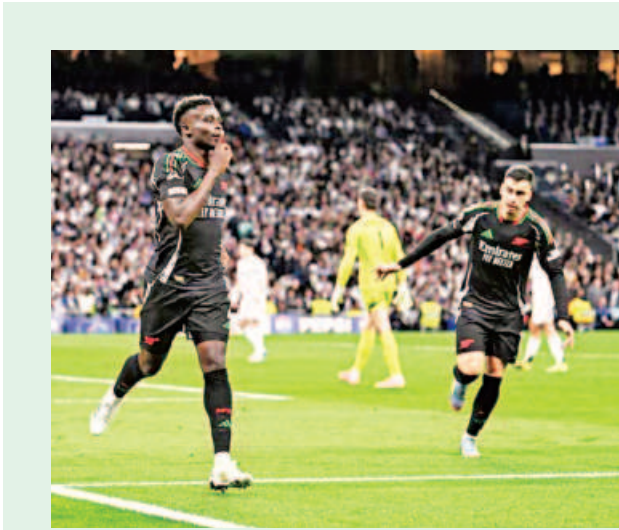
But the Spaniard has transformed a sleeping giant back into serial contenders for major honours.

"I sensed before I signed for the club that we were on an upwards trajectory," said Rice.

"This club is going to do special things in the coming years. We all fully believe in it, we have full trust in this manager -- he's unbelievable."

Arteta rebuilt Arsenal back into a force around a core of promising talent now coming into their prime.

Not for the first time in his



young career, Bukayo Saka did not let a missed penalty on the big stage affect him.

The winger's early spot-kick was saved by Thibaut Courtois, giving Madrid belief that another miraculous Champions League comeback was on for the Spanish giants.

But the England international extinguished that hope with a sumptuous dink over the giant Belgian goalkeeper 25 minutes from time to give Arsenal the lead

on the night.

William Saliba's error that allowed Vinicius Junior to pull Real level tarnished an otherwise flawless display over two legs in which he shut down his French international team-mate Kylian Mbappe.

But even then Arsenal were unflustered and quickly snuffed out any Madrid momentum.

With the Premier League seemingly out of Arsenal's grasp yet again, the Champions League

offers Arteta the chance to deliver the piece of silverware that he is still missing.

"It's such a special night for this club, it's a historic night for this club," said Rice.

"We have an objective in this competition. We want to play the best teams and we want to win this competition."

One of Arteta's former clubs as a player, Paris Saint-Germain, await in the last four of a wide-open competition.

- » Arsenal have qualified for a Champions League semifinal for the third time in their history, after 2005-06 and 2008-09.
- » Arsenal have equalled their longest winning run away from home in the European Cup/UEFA Champions League (4). The only previous time they won four in a row, the fourth game of that run was also a victory against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu (1-0 in February 2006, last 16 first leg).
- » Each of Real Madrid's last four eliminations in the UEFA Champions League have been against English sides (Man City in 2019-20 and 2022-23, Chelsea in 2020-21, and Arsenal in 2024-25)