

Tigers eye bringing away form in home Tests

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” for Bangladesh in Test cricket last year, as simultaneously they had their best ever year in Tests in abroad and the worse possible one at home. While touring, Bangladesh played six Tests, won three – most ever in a calendar year for them – and lost three. For the first time ever, the Tigers beat Pakistan 2-0 in a Test series, and also ended their 15-year wait to clinch a Test victory against the West Indies in the Caribbean.

“In the match, when Nahid [Rana] bowls and the opponents bat against him, you will see it in their body language, how fast Nahid bowls and how extraordinary he is.”

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto issued a warning to the Zimbabwean batters during a pre-match press conference yesterday.

But at home, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side lost all four Tests they played, getting clean-swept 2-0 by both Sri Lanka and South Africa. Due to the poor returns at home, even after a record-setting year in abroad, Bangladesh finished seventh in the 2023-25 cycle of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) with overall four wins in 12 matches. Even though it was their most successful cycle till date and for the first time they avoided finishing at the bottom since the tournament's inception in 2019, they could've finished even higher had they not performed so poorly at home. As Bangladesh begins the two-match Test series against Zimbabwe in Sylhet today, which isn't part of the next Test WTC cycle, Shanto was questioned about their recent poor record at home and if they have figured out any remedy. “What I felt was that we didn't play good cricket in those Test matches we played at home last year. We definitely had some plans but as players we couldn't execute them,” Shanto said during a pre-match press conference at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. “We are working on overcoming the shortcomings which kept us from getting favourable results in home Tests last year,” said Shanto. Rain threat is looming large over the first day's action and there was some rain at the venue on the eve of the Test as well. Attendance at the venue is also expected to be low as ticket sales have been abysmal even on the day before the first Test.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Bangladesh women's team ended their ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier 2025 campaign with a seven-wicket defeat to Pakistan but qualified for the main event as tournament runners-up after a dramatic end to the West Indies-Thailand match. The Nigar Sultana-led side could only muster 178-9 which hosts and undefeated champions Pakistan chased down with 62 balls in hand, leaving Bangladesh's fate dependent on the West Indies-Thailand tie. Thailand's Natthakan Chantam made 66 as West Indies were set a 167-run target, which they either needed to chase by 10.1 overs or level the scores and then hit a six to reach 172 by 11 overs to trump Bangladesh in net run-rate. West Indies were on track to accomplish the second scenario before Stephanie Taylor hit a six in the penultimate ball of the 11th over, taking the score to 168-4 as West Indies won by six wickets but finished 0.013 behind Bangladesh on net run-rate.

Zimbabwe out to redeem Test record

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

For many years, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe have possessed a great rivalry in cricket. The African side had a big edge over Bangladesh across formats during the early phase of the rivalry. However, in the last 12 years, the scenario has taken a complete U-turn with the rise of Bangladesh on the cricketing world map, along with the downfall of the African side due to various reasons. The glamour of a Bangladesh-Zimbabwe series started to lose its colour since the Tigers began dominating the African side across formats. In the last eight Tests between these two sides, the Tigers have won seven of them, with their last defeat coming nearly seven years ago. Interestingly, Zimbabwe's only Test victory over Bangladesh in more than a decade came at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, which will host the opening Test of a two-match series, starting today. Although Zimbabwe have a relatively inexperienced side compared to Bangladesh, they have some exciting names in Brian Bennett, Ben Curran, Johnathan Campbell, Richard Ngarava and Blessing Muzarabani, with whom their skipper Craig Ervine hopes to turn things around. “There was always rivalry between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. It is slightly tougher for Zimbabwe playing in Bangladesh but we always feel that we have a chance (against Bangladesh). This group of players can pose a decent threat,” Ervine, the most experienced Test campaigner in the side, told reporters in Sylhet yesterday. “I think it is a great opportunity for the young players to stamp their authority in Test



cricket,” said the 39-year-old, adding that they want to play without fear and aim to utilise the seam-friendly surface in Sylhet. “We want to bring a no-fear attitude. The guys are not familiar with Bangladesh conditions but long preparations give you confidence to go out and express yourself. “We can probably expect the wicket to be seamer-friendly. There's grass on the wicket. We trained for a couple of days. We are confident of our preparations, so we are looking forward to it.” Ervine believes that with the growing number of Test matches they will play this year, they can actually end their 10-match winless streak in this format very soon. Zimbabwe, who have not had the chance to play against top-ranked Test sides often in the last decade, will be facing England, South Africa and New Zealand in red-ball cricket in the coming months. “I understand we haven't had a great run in Test cricket. I think it's really exciting with the amount of Test cricket that we will play [this year],” he said.

SHORT CORNER

BCB facing ‘tough time’, says Faruque after media rights go unsold

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed thanked Bangladesh Television (BTV) for stepping in to telecast the first Test in Sylhet, starting today. “I think there is a financial lull in both domestic and international cricket... We are going through a bit of a tough time, it's taking some time after the change in government,” Faruque told reporters at an event in Dhaka yesterday, adding that the board is still trying to telecast the match on a private channel.

Neymar out for 4-6 weeks after latest injury: Reports

Brazilian superstar Neymar will be reportedly out for four to six weeks to recover from the latest injury he suffered while playing for Santos against Atletico Mineiro on Thursday, in a match was set up to be a day of celebration for Neymar as it was his 100th appearance for his boyhood club Santos. Neymar, who has a long history of injuries, had earlier suffered an ACL injury in October 2023 while playing for Al-Hilal in Saudi Arabia.

Ancelotti to discuss Real Madrid future at ‘end of season’

Carlo Ancelotti will discuss his future with Real Madrid at the end of the season, the coach said Saturday, following the Champions League holders' elimination by Arsenal. Ancelotti, whose contract is due to end in 2026, told reporters: “At the end of the season we will speak about (my future) with the club.”

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Liverpool poised for Premier League coronation

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool could seal the Premier League on Sunday should the runaway leaders condemn Leicester to relegation and Arsenal suffer a Champions League hangover by losing at Ipswich. Victory for the Gunners at Portman Road could also see Ipswich mathematically relegated should West Ham and Wolves win. Unlike the battles for the league

title and to avoid the drop, the race for a place in next season's Champions League is set to go down to the wire. Thirteen points clear at the top of the table with six games to go, it is only a question of when not if Liverpool will move level with Manchester United on a record 20 English top-flight titles. Two more wins will finish the job for Arne Slot's men and they could not ask for more obliging fixtures

as a trip to beleaguered Leicester is followed by struggling Tottenham's trip to Anfield. However, the title race may not even go beyond Easter Sunday should Ipswich inflict Arsenal's first league defeat since February. The focus of attention for Mikel Arteta's men has been switched to Champions League glory after an emphatic 5-1 aggregate win over holders Real Madrid in the quarter-finals.



- ➡ Mohamed Salah is on the verge of breaking the record for most away goals in a single Premier League season. He currently shares the mark of 16 with Kevin Phillips (1999–2000) and Harry Kane (2022–23). One more assist on the road would also see him surpass Cesc Fàbregas' record of 11 away assists set in 2014–15.
- ➡ Liverpool are on a four-match winning streak against Leicester in the Premier League. Leicester, meanwhile, have managed just two wins in their last 13 league meetings with Liverpool -- both coming in back-to-back home games in 2021.

“It's good to have some new energy in and around the place with one or two new players, but it isn't really a necessity if you look at the quality we have and the quality of the season we have had.

Liverpool manager Arne Slot

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