



Opener Mohammad Naim was seen enjoying with his teammates during a practice session of Bangladesh 'A' side in Sylhet on Sunday ahead of the three one-dayers against their New Zealand counterparts, beginning today at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. As stated by the Bangladesh Cricket Board, this series will act as a platform for Naim, who finished as the top run-getter in the two previous T20 tournaments in the country (BPL and NCL), and other players to stake a claim in the national team for the upcoming international white-ball series.

PHOTO: BCB

“New Zealand 'A' side is quite strong. If we give him [Naim] a big opportunity in a 50-over game, then he can fully express his potential. Because in T20s, you have to rush to score runs. Hence, this [50-over match series] will be a great opportunity for him.”

BCB chief selector, Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu

'Bad feeling in the tummy' for Arsenal ahead of PSG trip

REUTERS, London

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta hoped to carry positive momentum into Wednesday's Champions League semifinal second leg at Paris St Germain, but instead, called on his players to harness their rage from Saturday's 2-1 home defeat by Bournemouth. Declan Rice marked his 100th Arsenal appearance with a well-taken goal to give the hosts a lead at the break as they sought to tighten their grip on second place in the Premier League. But a nearly full-strength Gunners side conceded two sloppy goals from Dean Huijzen and Evanilson in eight second-half minutes, dashing Arteta's plans to travel to Paris off the back of a much-needed league victory.

Arsenal trail PSG 1-0 after the first leg at The Emirates.

"A positive result would really help us to build what we wanted towards Wednesday," he told reporters. "So what we have created now is a lot of rage, anger, frustration, and a bad feeling in the tummy."

"So (we must) make sure that we use that for Wednesday to have a massive performance in Paris, win the game and be in the final."

Arteta made two changes from Tuesday's defeat by PSG, one of which was full-back Jurrien Timber after he was withdrawn in the closing stages of the first leg.

Sohan-led Bangladesh 'A' take on NZ 'A' today

SPORTS REPORTER

The first one-day match between Bangladesh 'A' and New Zealand 'A' will take at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today.

Nurul Hasan Sohan was named captain of a 15-man Bangladesh 'A' squad for the first two matches.

Sohan will lead a squad of mostly national team players, with pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja being the only uncapped player.

Anamul Haque Bijoy, who recently made his come back to the Test side in the Chattogram Test against Zimbabwe, has been picked alongside Mosaddek Hossain, who led Abahani Limited to the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) title this season.

Pacer Ebadot Hossain, who has not played for the national team since his lengthy layoff post-injury, has also been picked for the first two games.

The New Zealand 'A' team, led by Nick Kelly, landed in Bangladesh on Thursday to play three one-dayers and two four-day matches against their Bangladeshi counterparts.

The second and third one-dayers are slated for May 7 and 10 at the same venue. The first four-day match, starting on May 14, will take place at the same venue, while the final four-day game will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur from May 21.

A lengthy presser that offered very little clarity

SPORTS REPORTER

Sunday's press conference held by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was the perfect example of a board deflecting the issues instead of acknowledging them.

In a lengthy presser, attended by chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu, selector Abdur Razzak, and BCB cricket operations committee chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, the board announced T20 squads for the upcoming UAE and Pakistan tours, alongside naming Liton Das as the skipper of the shortest format till the 2026 T20 World Cup.

However, from what could be surmised from the statements made, it seemed as if the board was trying to hide the elephant in the room - Bangladesh's struggle in forming a squad with players backed by performances.

Batter Jaker Ali, all-rounder Mahedi Hasan, and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain turned up with noteworthy T20 performances in recent times, but the selectors clearly struggled to form a squad with the rest. Liton has himself struggled for form.

"In Liton's case, experience is crucial," Fahim backed the decision to make Liton the T20 captain.

"We don't have many experienced cricketers at the moment. There have been discussions about his form, but he has the potential. If he can organise his game, he'll be a key asset. Everyone is optimistic about his tactical abilities, and we believe he'll play an important role once he starts performing," Fahim added.

Bangladesh T20 squad for UAE, Pak tours

Liton Das (c), Tanzid Hasan, Parvez Hossain Emon, Soumya Sarkar, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Jaker Ali, Rishad Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Tanvir Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud, Tanzim Sakib, Nahid Rana, Shoriful Islam

The irony is that, Fahim, before being included in his current role at BCB, has often made statements about how it was high time for players like Liton, with more than five years of international experience, to have already established themselves as performers in the side.

The current ODI and Test skipper Shanto, from whom Liton took over the charge of the T20 side, is another player who got a nod in the side for the upcoming series solely based on his experience.

"Shanto has played roughly 50 matches, so he brings in some experience," chief selector Lipu explained.

Shanto's T20 form has been under scrutiny for a while now, and to include him in the squad that already has players of a similar profile like Tanzid Tamim, Soumya Sarkar, and Liton made it clear

that the BCB was banking only on his experience to come through for the side.

Meanwhile, opener Mohammad Naim, who remained the top run-getter in the recent Bangladesh Premier League and the National Cricket League, was named in the Bangladesh 'A' side for their New Zealand series, with hopes of him "expressing his full potential" before being considered for the national side.

The BCB also could not clarify the exact approach with which the Tigers would go ahead in the format in the coming days, with chief selector Lipu mentioning something as generic as: "Whenever the national team plays, the target is always to win. But to achieve that, I think, considering the transformation that is going on in T20 cricket, we need to prepare in the bilateral series for improving our average performances in any global tournament. We have to practice, and that should be reflected in the bilateral series. We can lose by a big margin, but the approach should be the same. This is our message for them."

Meanwhile, Rakibul Hasan was the highest wicket-taker in the just-concluded Dhaka Premier League, yet he was not named in the squad as he was considered a like-for-like option with the included Tanvir Islam and Nasum Ahmed, who was left out.

Considering everything, even after the lengthy presser, the question over the direction that the side wanted to take and what profiles are required remained unclear as always.

SHORT CORNER

Probe committee formed over AHF Cup failure

The National Sports Council (NSC) on Sunday formed a three-member committee to look into Bangladesh hockey team's failure in the recently-concluded AHF Cup in Indonesia. The committee, however, has not been given any timeline to submit its report. Five-time AHF Cup champions Bangladesh finished third in the tournament, failing to qualify for the Asia Cup for the first time.

'Like a dream,' says Sabalenka after third Madrid title

World number one Aryna Sabalenka said her sensational form this year is "like a dream" after defeating Coco Gauff 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) on Saturday to win her third Madrid Open title. Last year's runner-up cruised past the American in the first set before digging deep in the second to triumph in a tie-break. Sabalenka recorded her tour-leading 31st victory this season on the Madrid clay, adding the WTA 1000 trophy to titles in Brisbane and Miami.

Firmino 'proud' after making more Champions League history

Roberto Firmino said he was proud of making history with his Saudi club and becoming an Asian Champions League winner, six years after lifting the prestigious European equivalent with Liverpool. Firmino was named the most valuable player after inspiring Al Ahli to beat Kawasaki Frontale 2-0 on Saturday as the club became Asian champions for the first time. "I'm very happy and very proud of the team," said Firmino.

Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.



Real keep pressure on leaders Barca

REUTERS, Madrid

Kylian Mbappe scored two goals as Real Madrid fought off a late comeback attempt from Celta Vigo to secure a 3-2 win on Sunday and stay within four points of LaLiga leaders Barcelona whom they visit in next weekend's "El Clasico".

Arda Guler broke the deadlock for Real shortly after the half-hour mark with an excellent left-footed shot from a tight angle. Mbappe doubled Real's lead six minutes later with a powerful right-footed finish. Then Guler's through ball set up Mbappe again three minutes after the break.

Seventh-placed Celta made a late charge as Javi Rodriguez scored in the 69th minute and Williot Swedberg also struck seven minutes later, but Real were able to see off the late pressure.

Discipline not an issue for BFF!

ANISUR RAHMAN

The recent physical assault on match commissioner Sujit Banerjee by Saad Uddin during a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) between Bashundhara Kings and Abahani has put focus on Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) reluctance to enforce disciplinary measures in top-tier football.

The high-stakes fixture at the Bashundhara Kings Arena on Friday also saw an Abahani player assaulted by Kings' fans, following altercations involving players and officials both on and off the field. These incidents, though severe, are not isolated.

Throughout the current football season which only has 24 days remaining, matches involving major clubs such as Kings, Abahani, and Mohammedan have been marred by repeated episodes of unsporting behaviour. Despite this, the BFF has not taken significant disciplinary action, prompting concerns among stakeholders about the federation's seriousness in maintaining order.

The ongoing issues began early in the season. During November's one-off Challenge



Cup between Kings and Mohammedan at the Kings Arena, the home fans threw smoke flares onto the pitch, halting play, with the match eventually won by the home side 3-1 loss. The management of Mohammedan, who were leading 1-0 before the smoke flare incident, later wrote to BFF, refusing to play at the Kings' ground until fan security was ensured. However, they were forced to return there for a league fixture last month, during which their supporters again faced hostility from the home fans.

Another high-voltage clash between Mohammedan and Abahani in Cumilla witnessed a scuffle in the gallery, briefly halting the match. A Mohammedan supporter even

chased a Bangladesh Police player after an on-field dispute involving Mohammedan's Nigerian forward Emmanuel Sunday.

Despite multiple reports being submitted by referees and match commissioners after such incidents, the BFF's disciplinary committee has yet to act. This passivity contrasts sharply with past seasons, when players and officials were penalised for even minor infractions, including verbal abuse of referees.

A member of the disciplinary committee, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed they had not received any documentation from the competition department, making it impossible to proceed. Alarmingly, the member admitted to being unaware

of the full composition of the current committee, which was restructured in February to include five members, led by former secretary Mejbahuddin Ahmed.

One senior referee lamented the growing trend of impunity: "After a recent match outside Dhaka, referees were harassed in front of club officials. We reported it, but no action has been taken. This encourages repeat offenses."

However, there may be movement soon. BFF executive member and Professional League Management Committee's deputy chairman Zakir Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star: "Both the referee and the match commissioner had submitted reports on the recent Kings-Abahani incident. He confirmed meeting with the competition department and expects the reports to reach the disciplinary committee by Monday, with a decision likely before the next match day."

Chowdhury also noted that the league committee would meet soon to address the worsening disciplinary climate.

Unless BFF takes swift and firm action, repeated violations risk undermining the integrity of domestic football.



PHOTO: REUTERS