

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

The UAE series beginning Saturday will provide an answer as to how Bangladesh actually see themselves in the shortest format -- a side that goes with a progressive mindset or a side that quivers and goes back to the shell of insecurity.

Much of that conversation centres around Najmul Hossain Shanto, who recently stepped down from captaincy, handing the reins to Liton Das. Yet, despite a dreadful run of form, Shanto has retained his place in the squad for the UAE and the subsequent Pakistan tours, both featuring only T20Is.

During his captaincy stint that ended in January, Shanto amassed 394 runs at an average of 18.76 and a strike-rate of 104.23 in 24 matches, throughout which he only managed a solitary half-century. Interestingly, these numbers are not far off from his career stats, with a career average of 22.85 and strike-rate 108.35.

When Shanto was the skipper, his inclusion in the eleven was inevitable. The irony, however, is that now the shield of captaincy has worn out, Shanto does not even merit a place in the side considering his T20 figures, as well as the



act of balancing out the eleven.

The only way that Shanto might be able to crack the eleven is if the Tigers go in with an extra batter, meaning they would play seven batters, sacrificing a regular bowling option against a side that are six spots below the ninth-ranked Bangladesh in T20Is.

Bangladesh possess Tanzid Tamim, Parvez Emon, Soumya Sarkar and Liton Das who could open the batting. For Shanto to come in, Soumya, given his all-round credentials, would have to start at the top alongside any of the aforementioned four.

With Soumya in, Liton would drop

down to number three -- a position the team management is already pondering with the right-hander in mind.

And that would also mean Bangladesh go with four genuine bowling options -- predictably two pacers, including any one of Mustafizur Rahman, Nahid Rana, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam and Tanzim Sakib -- alongside leg spinner Rishad Hossain and all-rounder Mahedi Hasan, with Soumya and someone like Shamim Hossain having to share the responsibility of a fifth bowler.

It would not be surprising if Bangladesh go down this conservative route of going in with an extra batter even against a low-ranked side, especially given their collapse against UAE back in 2022. But such a strategy may not serve them well in the long run, with 16 T20Is scheduled before this year's Asia Cup.

As it seems, the dilemma for Bangladesh remains: is Shanto worth the tactical compromise? If he fails again, the decision to include him will be under scrutiny. Or, will Bangladesh finally take the bold step of leaving him out and backing a lineup that aligns with the demands of the ever-evolving format?

Mustafizur, Shakib to be granted NOCs for IPL, PSL

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's left-arm paceman, Mustafizur Rahman, could get NOC (No Objection Certificate) for two matches out of the remaining three league-phase matches of the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Delhi Capitals, who confirmed the signing of the pacer on Wednesday.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) could also grant Shakib Al Hasan NOC to play for Lahore Qalandars in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

The IPL is set to resume on May 17 after being suspended due to the recent India-Pakistan conflict. Delhi are scheduled to play Gujarat Titans on May 18, Mumbai Indians on May 21, and Punjab Kings on May 24 in their final three league-phase matches.

Mustafizur, who is now with the Bangladesh team in the UAE, had asked the BCB for NOC for Delhi's last three league matches.

"We [Bangladesh] have matches on May 17 and 19 against the UAE. After the national team assignment, Mustafizur won't have any problem playing the remaining two matches," Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, chairman of BCB's media and communication department, told The Daily Star yesterday. Meanwhile, in Shakib's case, BCB seems to be positive about granting him NOC.

"As far as Shakib is concerned, I'm okay with his participation in the PSL," Mithu said. Lahore Qalandars yesterday confirmed the signing of Shakib, who will replace the injured Daryl Mitchell and is set to join the squad on May 17.

Sohan's quickfire century keeps contest even

SPORTS REPORTER

Nurul Hasan Sohan wafted left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox over deep mid-wicket for six to complete a morale-boosting ton as Bangladesh A gained further ground on day two of the first four-day match against New Zealand A at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

However, a late collapse saw the game hang in the balance, with the hosts finishing the day at 249 for 8, still trailing by seven runs.

Resuming the day with New Zealand A at 254 for 8, pacer Khaled Ahmed polished off the tail to end with figures of six for 63 as the visitors folded for 255. Anamul Haque chipped in with three for 32 while Ebadot Hossain took one, as all 10 wickets went to pace.

Bangladesh A, however, were soon in trouble at 81 for four following a rain interruption, with Zakir Hasan (12), Mahmudul Hasan Joy (18) and Anamul Haque (24) all falling cheaply. When Amite Hasan perished for 25, the hosts looked vulnerable at 97 for five.

That's when skipper Sohan joined Mahidul Islam in a defiant 132-run stand that tilted the momentum back. Sohan was aggressive from



the outset, reaching his century off just 74 deliveries, peppered with 11 boundaries and five sixes.

Once Mahidul departed for a gritty 34, Sohan followed shortly after for 103, and the Tigers stumbled again. Yasir Ali Ankon's 25 off 79 balls brought New Zealand A back into the contest.

Nayem Hasan's 20 and Hasan Murad's unbeaten 13 helped Bangladesh A close in on parity by stumps, setting up an intriguing third day.

TIGERS' TOUR OF PAK BCB gets govt nod, awaits players' consent

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has received initial government clearance for the national team's upcoming tour of Pakistan later this month.

Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, chairman of BCB's media and communication department, confirmed to The Daily Star on Thursday that the government has given the green signal via email.

"Now, we are waiting for an official letter from them," he added. "After receiving the letter, we will ask for players' consent. We are now going step by step in this matter."

The Tigers are scheduled to play five T20Is against Pakistan, with the series now set to begin on May 27 in Faisalabad.

Originally, the opener was scheduled for May 25, but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) revised the itinerary after the Pakistan Super League (PSL) final was rescheduled for May 25 due to the league's recent pause and subsequent resumption on May 17.

Earlier this week, the BCB formally sought government clearance for the tour. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh team is currently in the UAE for a two-match T20I series against the hosts, with matches scheduled on May 17 and 19 in Sharjah.

If the Pakistan series proceeds as planned, the Tigers will depart directly from the UAE. Otherwise, they will return home.

Tigers to bag \$720K

Bangladesh are set to bag \$720,000 for finishing seventh in the 2023-25 World Test Championship (WTC) cycle, as the International Cricket Council (ICC) has confirmed a massive increase in prize money for the competition on Thursday. Bangladesh experienced their best-ever run in the WTC, winning four out of 12 Tests in the latest cycle. Three of those wins came away from home (two in Pakistan and one in West Indies). They also beat New Zealand at home.

WTC PRIZE MONEY

| Position | Team | Prize money (USD) |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Winner | Australia/South Africa | 3,600,000 |
| Runners-up | Australia/South Africa | 2,160,000 |
| Third | India | 1,440,000 |
| Fourth | New Zealand | 1,200,000 |
| Fifth | England | 960,000 |
| Sixth | Sri Lanka | 840,000 |
| Seventh | Bangladesh | 720,000 |
| Eighth | West Indies | 600,000 |
| Ninth | Pakistan | 480,000 |

U-19s face Nepal for place in SAFF final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to book a place in the SAFF U-19 Championship final when they face Nepal in the first semifinal of the regional tournament in Arunachal Pradesh, India, today.

Kick-off is scheduled for 4 pm (Bangladesh time) at the Golden Jubilee Stadium in Yopia.

The men in red and green, champions of last year's SAFF U-20 Championship, are eager to maintain their momentum after a mixed group stage -- a frustrating 2-2 draw against Maldives followed by a commanding 2-0 win over Bhutan secured their place in the last four.

Their opponents, Nepal, are set to present a tricky challenge. The Himalayan nation began with a heavy 4-0 defeat to hosts India but bounced back with a resounding 5-0 win over Sri Lanka.

"We're ready for the semifinal and aiming for nothing less than a win -- though Nepal are tough opponents. The boys are in good shape both physically and mentally," Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton said in yesterday's video message shared by Bangladesh Football Federation.

Bangladesh's attacking trio of Nazmul Huda Faisal, Rifat Kazi and Mursheed Ali have been in fine form, and coach Choton will be counting on them to lead the charge once again. Defensive lapses, however, remain a concern.

"We've analysed Nepal's strengths and weaknesses over the past few days and also worked on our own mistakes," added the Bangladesh coach.

Captain Nazmul said: "We'll give our best in every position and play as a unit to reach the final."

PREMIER LEAGUE

Top 5 hopefuls battle for CL riches

AFP, London

The Premier League race is over and relegation is decided -- but the battle for Champions League qualification remains wide open with just two rounds to go.

Only champions Liverpool are so far guaranteed one of the five places up for grabs in Europe's top club competition next season and second-placed Arsenal look almost certain to join them.

But just four points separate third-placed Newcastle from Nottingham Forest in seventh spot.

Newcastle aim to leapfrog Arsenal

A win for Eddie Howe's Newcastle against Arsenal at the Emirates on Sunday would take the Magpies a point above the Gunners, who have won just one of their past six league games.

"We still have two games to go and lots of twists and turns that could be around the corner," said Howe. "We have to drive forward."

Newcastle's last game, on May 25, is a home match against Everton, while Arsenal travel to bottom club Southampton.

Europa final focus a bonus for Villa, Chelsea

Aston Villa and Chelsea have a chance to steal a march on their top-five rivals, with

| Club | PL | W | D | L | GD | PTS |
|------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| LIV | 36 | 25 | 8 | 3 | 46 | 83 |
| ARS | 36 | 18 | 14 | 4 | 33 | 68 |
| NEW | 36 | 20 | 6 | 10 | 23 | 66 |
| MCI | 36 | 19 | 8 | 9 | 24 | 65 |
| CHE | 36 | 18 | 9 | 9 | 19 | 63 |
| AVL | 36 | 18 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 63 |
| NFO | 36 | 18 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 62 |

both in action on Friday, against Europa League finalists Tottenham and Manchester United.

Villa, who have maintained fine form in the league despite Champions League and FA Cup exits in recent weeks, could finish the day in fourth place with a win at home to Spurs.

But Chelsea, who also have 63 points, would move just behind third-placed Newcastle if they win, thanks to a better

goal difference.

United and Spurs sit just outside the relegation zone after terrible league campaigns and their attention will be fixed on next week's Europa League final in Bilbao, with their managers likely to keep some players wrapped in cotton wool.

Last chance for Forest

Two-time European champions Nottingham Forest have been in the top four for most of the season but have stumbled at the worst possible moment and are now outsiders to secure Champions League football.

Forest boss Nuno Espirito Santo is not giving up hope as he takes his team to lowly West Ham on Sunday, with Chelsea to follow in the final game of the season.

Man City eye end-of-season flourish

Man City, currently fourth in the Premier League, have had to reset their expectations after a poor campaign by their sky-high standards.

Despite their surprise 0-0 draw at Southampton last time out, they remain likely to finish in the top five, with matches to come against Bournemouth and Fulham.

Pep Guardiola's men do not play in the Premier League until Tuesday, three days after they face Crystal Palace in the FA Cup final at Wembley.

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

Bangladesh Emerging vs South Africa Emerging 3rd one-day Live from 9:00 am (Saturday) STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD1

Premier League Chelsea vs Man Utd Live from 1:15 am (Saturday) SELECT HD2

Aston Villa vs Tottenham

Live from 12:30 am (Saturday) SONY SPORTS 5 Italian Open Live from 5:00 pm

Bologna ended a 51-year wait for a major trophy on Wednesday after winning the Italian Cup with a 1-0 victory over AC Milan, who slumped to yet another painful defeat in a horror season. Dan N'Doye scored the goal in the 53rd minute, which gave Bologna a historic victory, their first honour since last winning the cup in 1974.



PHOTO: AFP